

Interview: Marek

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Transcriber: Myla Corvidae

Attendance:

Lucia Ruggerone – LR

Charlie Hackett – CH

Marek

Emotions have been added into the transcript as i.e. [*sadness*] and interviewers have been placed in bold and italicised.

PLEASE NOTE: Some words are missing as the audio quality was low and kept clipping out. They are highlighted in red and written as ???.

LR: Ok so shall we just start, Charlie have you got Marek's picture handy?

CH: You've got it haven't you Lucia?

LR: Yeah I do have it but.

CH: Yeah, you're good at sharing haha.

LR: Oh thank you. Hang on I'll get this, I sent it to you so I can get it. I think it's easier to get it on Marek's email.

CH: I can get it if you want, I just get so many emails coming in I had to close down my Outlook.

LR: Oh now you mean? Ok I got it, hold on.

CH: It's a beautiful photograph Marek, it's amazing.

LR: It is, it's really.

M: It's from Grantham Harbour in Edinburgh.

CH: oh-kay.

LR: Okay I got it, just let me get back on zoom and I'll share my screen. Host has disabled participant screen sharing.

CH: Oh yeah, I'll sort that out sorry. Ok there you go.

LR: You're not allowing us Charlie. Right, this one. Share. Okay, can you see it?

M: Yeah that's fine.

CH: Yeah yeah.

LR: It's a beautiful picture really. So where is it you said?

M: It is in Grantham Harbour in Edinburgh, you know where the small lighthouse is. There's a small port and a couple of fishing boats and the lighthouse, by the lighthouse. So this just between the port and the main road where the buses are going.

CH: It's in Newhaven Lucia.

M: Oh you have it, in Newhaven.

LR: Ohkay.

CH: It's very close to where I am.

M: Yeah.

LR: Actually is that, you said it's near the lighthouse.

M: Mhm.

LR: Okay I stayed I remember one year a couple of years ago I came back from Italy on new years eve to Edinburgh and I came back late so I stayed at. Is there a Premier Inn near that lighthouse?

M: Yeah I think so.

LR: That's where I was staying.

CH: Yeah there is.

LR: Yes, it's a beautiful place. Actually, when we were there the next morning which was the new years day, it was a really clear crispy morning.

M: I know it's nice weather.

LR: It was beautiful. Anyways so can I ask did you take this picture specifically for this project or?

M: No it was, I had it maybe a year. I took it at some point last year because I sometimes like taking pictures in the city and it was really thick fog, foggy morning. I had the morning off work so I just grabbed my camera and went because I know this place, it's really like photogenic this Newhaven harbour so I went there just to make a few pictures you know like the morning city, boats and like the fog and I like this composition because there's nobody sitting on the benches and then I saw the chains and the perspective of the railing coming in the distance and there's nothing in the distance so I just liked it you know. *[animated, happy]* When I looked back at the photo I realise how strong it is. How sad the photo is you know. So in reality you see cars you know you see people out of the frame so it didn't look so gloom but if you look at the picture it looks really gloomy so I liked it you know the atmosphere.

LR: Yes. Charlie do you want to?

CH: Yeah I think it's a beautiful photograph. I love the way you composed it and I presume there's lots of metaphors behind it I would think to be honest with you as well.

M: Yeah, *[enthusiastic]* cause when I got the email from you I was just thinking if I draw something or or like within a few minutes probably, maybe less one minute this picture came to my mind because I remember the picture. When I'm taking photos I throw like 90% of them I keep really only the one I like so I know every single picture I took you know. So it immediately popped to my mind this photo and even without looking at the photo at the time I knew there were the chains and empty benches and the fog and black and white because I put it on black and white. There is, you know plenty of

metaphors like the chains you know it can be the ??? you know we can't travel, the lockdown the empty benches you know people are ill or dying you know, the (paler light or pane of white) which is sort of blurry you know the life is gotten gloom you know and not happy all the time. The perspective for the railing is a point for somewhere, you don't actually know where it going so I thought maybe this photo would be good, pick up some of the moods you know and it was taken also not during the lockdown because I couldn't go out but just either before or after. So when the pandemic was quite like strong in Britain.

LR: Yes.

CH: What did you say about Britain sorry?

M: No that it was, it was taken during the pandemics you know so there might be something at the back of my mind even that I didn't realise. You know the atmosphere in the society as it is just maybe ??? making some kind of pictures even if you don't realise it because you maybe look for metaphors. Like you are seeing what we are going through.

CH: Kind of subconsciously yeah.

M: Yeah subconsciously, might be.

CH/LR overtalking.

LR: Sorry Charlie I just wanted to ask you don't remember whether you took this picture before the Covid came around or while the Covid.

M: It was during Covid.

LR: Ohkay.

M: I just don't remember if it was when there the hard lockdown in Scotland where you couldn't go out so I think it was before the lockdown hit. You could still like going for a walk.

LR: Yes. Ok. You mean the hard lockdown you mean the one we had last winter?

M: Yes where you couldn't go out at all just for shopping you know. So I think it was just before when everything was going up and no one knew what's happening and then. So it was shortly before the lockdown.

LR: Yes, yes. Sorry Charlie you were...

CH: Yeah, I'm interested in the relationship between the benches and the chains and what you see is that kind of relationship, the sort of empty benches. You know like all these chains kind of chained to the railings. Looking back with hindsight now, what are your feelings about that?

M: Yes I think the chains definitely it is like a strong symbol of the. During the pandemic you know we couldn't go where we wanted so people were chained to their flat, home, garden, work you know and it also has a meaning for the Brexit you know. Maybe even stronger during Brexit. It was felt like you were being detached from the rest of the Europe. Really you stayed on the Island and you didn't want to travel you know for many family members you didn't know whether they'll be able to come, whether they'll be needing a visa to come to Britain so you just felt chained actually to Great Britain because there is the common place between you and Britain just stopped existing you know so felt much more detached. So I think the chains is partly to Brexit, partly also to pandemic

when all travelling was banned you know between countries. I think both, you can see both in it actually. Both these experiences.

LR: Yes. Yeah the chains are chained to your flat or your home because of lockdown but also the chains. Did you feel like Brexit was like trapping you into Britain.

M: Also at some point, well we have British citizenship now, we have passports so it's easier. I could see how you know, you didn't know whether you travel freely as before or whether you would need some visa or some permit so it also just you know made some kind of break between EU and UK. So I think to some reason you know, of course you could always come back, to work to Europe but you were not so sure how easy it would become to return to Britain for work you know. So some kind, it trapped also people in places in their work because if they thought about if I go back to Europe will I be able to return because no body knew what would happen. *[sounding sad and worried]*

LR: Yes absolutely. So is it, does this also mean you know there are chains that are chaining you to Britain and I think it's quite interesting that you produced such a gloomy picture like you defined it. Can you elaborate a little bit on this gloom.

M: I thought because, probably the main point is the pandemic because we didn't see our parents for two years because of the travel between you know UK and abroad was, specially during all the quarantines and the high *???* *???* until October you know. It was virtually impossible for us as a family to come back and see our families you know in Prague, in Czech Republic because the, you wouldn't be able to pay for the tests also me my wife we cannot work from home. We work like I work in care so if you know people who work from home to spend ten days, fourteen days *[sounding frustrated]* in quarantine it's not such an issue because they could work from home. I couldn't so for me it would be, when I go on holiday to Prague and when I return spend weeks in quarantine it's unpaid. Like annual leave unpaid time so I'd have over a month less money. So it was particularly difficult for us, we couldn't actually see our parents and our kids couldn't see their grandparents. *[sounding upset]* Also we live in flat. We don't live in a house with a garden so the lockdown was more difficult we couldn't just you know if it was nice weather we, you know you were confined in your flat most of the time. So it was quite hard and also I work in care, until last year I work as a manager of a care home. So it was really difficult the beginnings of the pandemic because we didn't have any facemasks, any sanitisers you know because everything was shifted to NHS and you know the *???* was left without any support originally. So it was really difficult for us because we didn't know where the pandemics were going. We saw, we were lucky that no one was seriously ill or no one died in our care home but over the street there's a care home for older people and there were third of client passed away you know. So it was tough and it was just a hundred meters from us and we could see it you know so it was really difficult and then the Brexit on top. *[upset and sad]* The feelings like being detached from Europe. The atmosphere within the society was not the warmest. I think I was getting, after Brexit the atmosphere toward people from European Union was not the best you know. So all combined together, the last two years were pretty hard *[sounding very upset]* you know and this is maybe why I pulled this picture.

CH: Why do you feel people's views towards you weren't great Marek? Why do you think that?

M: I think probably because of the narrative during the Brexit referendum and shortly after. It is the people from EU who are coming to Britain to steal the jobs, claim the benefits, put the wages down. So you could sometimes feel it that you were regarded as someone who makes situations of native British people worse. I think it's better now because people are thinking of the Covid as well more than Brexit but pre Covid I felt it quite, you know could feel it. That the atmosphere was not the

most welcoming. I knew this Scotland I think was not much better place to live at like for someone from European Union than England so instance. I think in England it was heightened much more, Scotland still you could see, you could hear from politician you know that we want you to stay you know even got a letter from SNP stay we need you. So I don't think you would get anything like that from England you know from the politicians but still you could see, I couldn't hear it or feel it on a daily basis but sometimes I could feel at work you know or when I spoke to someone on the street sometimes that the mood is slightly shifting and then you know all the Brexit debate. It just didn't feel always welcome as maybe it was before like five years ago, ten years ago.

LR: Yes and why are you saying now it's different as in you feel it improved.

M: I think it's maybe because everything's focused on Covid so this is main worry of people. So I think this is because many are difficult situation like Brexit and then somebody more serious comes people are focusing more on the serious stuff.

LR: So do you feel when. It doesn't look very much like that in Britain but when the Covid scare passes, when it's gone, like we all hope it will be soon. Already now I think it's, it's not, I mean I have the feeling that it's not as bad as when you took the picture the covid situation because true there have been a lot of cases but we've got vaccinations, we see it. So do you think when that is gone, is passed how will the Breixt situation. Will it still be heavier or not?

M: I think probably it will get better because I think it was the atmosphere in the society was not very welcoming I think mainly during the debate and just shortly after the referendum also there's a big shock for everybody and the society was pretty much divided because, especially in Scotland you know majority didn't want Brexit. Like 60%, in England it was vice versa but it was, like almost half half so the people were very much entrenched in their positions and also I think the longer we are from the referendum hopefully more and more issues will be sorted so I think it will hopefully allow people also to look at the more positive sides maybe of it. Just after Brexit you know what would happen, what would happen with the goods you know the border in Northern Ireland, you know how it would affect the ??? and everything. So the longer we are from the referendum I hope you know more and more issues will be somehow settled in the UK and Europe because it will not be a new reality anymore it will be like this is it we now. We have to be one with it, we have to, there's no point in accusing each other of why this decision let's you know we need each other. Europe needs UK and UK needs European Union so hopefully I think it must be it will get easier also. So this picture was taken definitely before vaccines you know so it also shows, you didn't know how far the Covid will go. If it will go even worse and worse or when it will change. I hope even with the Brexit you know the situation will get better and the atmosphere in the society will get better. Hopefully you know. Even if I think it was a bad decision, hope this is the reality and both sides EU and UK will work together, make it as easy as possible for both parts you know.

CH: Marek do you know people who left the UK or Scotland during Covid. Europeans or? Did many people leave that you know?

M: Yeah I know a few people who left. It was partly because of the Brexit and then some people left just before the pandemic hit full because they were afraid of where it was going you know in Britain. So these are both factors Brexit and Covid so I know a few people who left personally and I know a lot of people, friends of my friends for instance, who left you know.

LR: Did you ever think about leaving?

M: Yeah we were thinking you know at the time but just as we have kids, kids were just going to school here so we were just considering all options so all the time. Obviously we decided to stay you know. I applied for a few jobs in Prague you know it didn't go so well so for the time being it's better for the family to be here than to move kids you know and to go back when we. It will be difficult to start a new job and everything, so would be to start school in the different school system, they would have to find friends you know so. We were considering moving, we decided obvious to stay here.

LR: Uh-huh. Can I ask you going back to the picture, you talked a lot about the chains and the benches are empty I guess because people are not around and what does the gate suggest. How is it related to any kind of emotion or feeling or does it ever present anything special.

M: You mean like the picture in general?

LR: No the gate. Probably not the right word you know the, it's not a gate, it's this kind of a fence.

M: Oh yeah the railings umm.

LR: The railings yes sorry.

M: Yeah, I know what you mean. I think it also can represent you know the fence between the United Kingdom and the European Union you can see there is a clear barrier between and you can't go through you can just sit on the bench and watch maybe. You know watch across the channel you know, watch the news what's going on there but actually you cannot go there because of the Covid. Because we are chained actually to where you are. So I think it can play a role as well in the picture.

LR: I would say so, it's very suggestive because you can see through it but you cannot really get through it.

M: Yeah so you can get only news, you know what's happening there even the benches are you know, hmm, it's two words the fence you know. So it's like sitting there watching what's happening there but you cannot go there so.

LR: Yes.

CH/LR overtalking

LR: There's a bit of a feel of this wait and see in this picture.

M: I think so because the Covid situation definitely because you know we booked our tickets for next April which four times it's been cancelled so we hope finally next springtime we'll be able to go so we have the date.

LR: You're not going for Christmas?

M: No because now the situation in Czech Republic is really bad you know and it will not get better in Christmas. Like in all like central Europe is really badly hit so it's just difficult you know because I also don't have much holiday so at work you know because I can take my annual leave only when it's my boss allows me to. So we were thinking of Christmas but then you know the infection will be high. Might get, you know the flights might be cancelled again between you know Europe and UK. So we will just let it till spring time because hopefully the springtime is much better you know.

LR: Yes. So is it worse than in Britain the situation with Covid in the Czech Republic?

M: No it is. The problem was either really bad in Britain, like Britain was in red colour and Czech Republic was in green and was really working well in Czech Republic or vice versa that the Czech Republic was red and full of infection and Britain was doing well. Never it was like these two countries were never being both green. It means every situation we would need to quarantine either in Czech Republic or in Britain. So now the infection in Czech Republic is just skyrocketing so even we would like to go, [*pause sounding tired*] put our parents at risk because they're in their seventies. Yeah they are vaccinated but you still don't know because we would be going you know see some friends, we would like to visit some places we wouldn't be you know. If we come to Prague after two years we wouldn't be sitting in the flat you know. If there's no lockdown we would like to see these and meet people and then would like to meet our parents so you're thinking also you don't want to pass any infection on them you know. So it's difficult, difficult choices.

CH: How long have you been in the UK Marek? I'm just interested when you came.

M: It's been now eleven years.

CH: Okay. Did you come as a student or a?

M: My wife was a student.

CH: Ohkay.

M: So she was studying Sterling University.

CH: Ohkay and you came to Sterling or?

M: Yeah we lived in Stirling in the Campus the first year and then for a year we lived in Dunblane which is over the hill.

CH: Ohkay.

M: Then we went to France because it was (..) Erasmus in France so we moved to France for almost a year and then from France we moved to Edinburgh because my work was in Edinburgh and we are in Edinburgh since.

CH: How did you find it in France?

M: It was nice yeah, we love France because we both, me and (...) we both speak French. So we are really missing to go there because before Covid we went to France at least once a year for either a long weekend or you know for summer for two weeks so it was always a special time. We love the French you know, the food and the way of life you know for holiday it's great. Difficult to live there, once you live there it's difficult because the service isn't, admin is really much more difficult than in Britain you know. Things don't work so smoothly. If you go for a holiday it's beautiful. [*chuckles*]

CH: Yeah.

LR: Yeah I was curious to ask you, why did you pick Britain? I mean you have travelled a lot and you have been in different places in Europe and is there a special reason why you settled in Britain?

M: So we came because (...) got offer at the Sterling Uni so she was admitted to Sterling Uni. So just said you want to go? Our daughter was two and a half years then and so we thought also for her if she's in Britain she can learn English naturally. ??? Prague after 4, 5 years of studies. Then our son was born, you know the last year after (...) finished Uni so they'll be about four and we didn't have a

place to come back in Prague so we just said well wait you know and we'll see how things are and then all of a sudden you realise you're daughter is ??? and your son is one so [chuckles] moves so quickly. It was originally for us to gain you know for (...) to study to gain some experience you know third language. We didn't plan actually to move forever or we didn't definitely decide to move to get more money you know it was just for experience.

LR: Mmhm and then you decided to stay.

M: Yeah, we was always planning maybe you know we will move back to Prague but we been out here all the time [laughs] always.

LR: Yeah, ohkay.

CH: Is there quite a good community of people from the Czech Republic in Edinburgh?

M: There is not many [thoughtful] like there is much more, like there's all the Polish people, especially in Leith you know you can hear Polish almost as much as English. It's quite a lot of Slovak people as well? But there's not many Czech people but there is a community, we know them quite well because they are organising a Czech school which is like a weekend school which is every second week.

CH: Okay.

M: And my daughter she was following the school for I think two years probably and they organised different events like celebrations and Czech Christmas and Easter. So we are in touch with them sometimes so it's quite, I wouldn't say it's a big community but we know about each other you know, so it works well.

CH: Is that important to you that you have that kind of culture?

M: I think I would say.

CH: Your children are learning the language.

M: Yeah we are not in touch with them on a weekly basis for instance. I think it's great to stay in touch with the culture because they organise the special traditional events which is good for them. I mean it's just nice. I wouldn't say it's overly important that I couldn't live without a community here but it's nice of course when you can speak to somebody in your mother tongue and you can just discuss things you know what's going on at home. So it's nice definitely. You know you can have this kind of social activity.

LR: I am curious about, sorry Charlie.

CH: No no go on that's fine.

LR: It's when you said that you settled in Britain and, I mean I'm not clear whether it was a choice or you know it's just the way things panned out and then you spoke about the different atmosphere that was around just after the referendum or before it and now getting a more positive. I'm curious about whether you feel more positive about, how do you feel about Britain now. The Brexit Britain now that Britain is not part of Europe anymore. As a European citizen how do you feel about Britain. Cause we heard a lot during the referendum campaign and the referendum about how British people feel about us. Ohh you know, you're coming here to get our jobs and stuff like that. So I want to reverse the question and ask you as a European citizen how do you feel about Britain through the referendum campaign and after the referendum.

M: Umm... I know Britain always was a country that was welcoming for everybody from the world. They just you know, all the brightest people came to Britain. This is why you know Britain had the best science and innovations and technology because it just always sucked you know, people who wanted to gain something. So it was always a strong sense of you know everybody from the world is welcome here almost. You know everybody who has something to contribute. I think the Brexit debate was maybe the first time when this was put into question that actually maybe people from abroad are not welcome here. I think it was really, the worst time was during the debate, shortly after when you heard petitions like Boris and Farage and you know sometimes saying things that were not nice to listen. You know these are the positions of the country. We didn't come to steal any jobs we didn't come to steal any benefits you know. You try your best, you work, you spend all the money here you know so it was quite difficult but I think the further we are from the Brexit, like the big debate is not so heated also. Cause I think the politician realised we actually need workers from abroad from EU because I think they realised there are no drivers no butchers, so they realised we need them somehow. So I think also the language about softened. Many people I think who voted for Brexit now realise well maybe it was not such a good idea and they see that many things you know that's bothering them you know in supply problems and no deliveries and no items in the shops. Even if you can see it all over the world, in Britain I think, because of Brexit it just was magnified because plenty of workers just left because of Brexit. So I think plenty of people actually realised well we need these people from EU from you know eastern Europe so I think also it helped to create a more welcoming atmosphere probably. So I think this is the one thing I feel the debate is different and also I think more internally I'm trying to find a positive side from Brexit because I know that I am still here and there is no point being like it's just happened, there's no point being depressed about that.

LR: That's a very healthy attitude actually.

M: You have to, it's not always easy but you just have to think of maybe in some ways Britain will be better off in the long term you know there may be some good reasons for that or just accept it, well this is the reality it's not the end of the world still EU and UK will mostly co-operate together because they need each other and they just will be out of the EU which is like political group, political like settlement and they will just take a side but it doesn't mean such a deep divide than seemed maybe before. Because of the talks of the politicians and because of what sometimes you could feel when you are talking to people. So I think also that time heals that you know. So after Brexit I felt I can't stay in this country anymore you know but then the longer you live here you say maybe I can because it won't all so bad you know.

CH: I'm interested in something you just said as well Marek like you said the brightest people come here. Do you feel that in Britain they don't realise that the people who come here are perhaps some of the brightest people?

M: Ohkay can you repeat it please?

CH: You talked about the brightest people.

M: Oh yeah yeah.

CH: So do you know feel maybe that, I'm not trying to put words into your mouth in any way but do you not feel that maybe British people realise that people coming from Europe have got something really special to bring here to the UK?

M: I don't know I meant just in general when I looked at like industrial revolution so you know Britain was unique in that it just attracted people who were top in their domain you know top scientist, top engineers because I think they felt when I go to Britain, this is the hub of the world so then I can put my experiments everything you know into just practice. So this is why it attracted all the bright people, not only them, of course because on the other hand Britain needs the seasonal workers you know, fruit pickers, butchers and these are the professions that often give people more to do because they think the wages are actually not great and it's a hard work. So on the other hand they need a lot of people who are in hospitality and who like so called not high skilled perhaps but they need it as well because you can see what happens when these people leave or do something else. I think they realised now that we need these manual workers from European Union that previously they thought well these are only stealing our jobs but then they realised well those people left who from the UK has actually stepped in so we will need them back probably. [laughs]

LR: If I can say something that is only my own opinion. It's just a shame that they needed Brexit to realise all of it.

M: Yeah it is almost like the harsh lesson they go you know literally.

LR: I mean I'm still you know unable to get my head round it to be honest. It's just... did they really need Brexit to have the proof of the pudding like my husband says. That they needed these people you know it sounds a bit, I don't know, daft. That they needed to go to that extend you know but possibly. I don't know it will be interesting to see what happens in the next few months and...

M: I think it's just a shame because I think without Johnson and Farage, maybe without these two men I think the Brexit wouldn't happen. They just managed to brainwash people with such lies and people believe it without them too I think, this would be totally different.

CH: Was that Farage and who else did you say sorry?

M: I think it's Farage and Boris Johnson.

CH: Oh yeah. How do people you know, Europeans you know in Edinburgh feel about Farage and Johnson?

LR: Oh my god.

M: I think with Johnson now they think of him mainly because of the Covid. Before Covid I think, because these two were I think most prominent people who were trying to scare ordinary people in Britain of the immigration you know and it was mainly Farage you know. He was actually you know, he was using posters of the migrants, not coming to Europe they were from somewhere you know ??? countries probably but they use it in the posters. So he was really making people scared of all the immigration and also I think he was telling the lies about the extra money Britain will get from the EU, eh money will go to NHS and of course they both are very ??? you know. They know how to speak to people they know exactly what to say so that people believe it. So I think they two make the mood shifted towards the Brexit unfortunately even if it was not true what they were saying but the job was done you know so it was too late. So I think they are regarded you know, I speak to my friends in Prague, in Czech Republic, it's quite well known you know these figures where pushing Brexit at all costs.

LR: Mhmm. Which says a lot about parts of Britain anyway you know listen to people like Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson. It's quite revealing. To me Brexit has been quite revealing about parts of Britain that maybe I didn't see very well before. Parts of Britain that have been hidden and now

all of a sudden because of a Brexit campaign it's come to the fore, it's emerged from the murky death of Little England or whatever. I'm sorry I can't really be impartial about it so I really, it really makes me furious. I was going to ask you, you've now got British passports for you and your family. So how do you feel about your British citizenship?

M: Actually it was never something I would like to have. Some people would think well I would like to this citizenship because it will bring me all the convenience and benefits. We did actually like, because we knew the Brexit was likely to happen or could happen so with the citizenships we know that whatever happens after Brexit will not regard us so much. It will still affect our families maybe if they would like to come see us or not but you know it means when we are in Britain, British law will apply to us as British citizens. When we are in Czech Republic we'll still be Czech citizens because Czech Republic fortunately still allows double citizenship. We definitely wouldn't swap British citizenship for Czech one but if there was a chance to have that no one can take from you whatever happens politically. So it was quite expensive but we said even for our children because whether they will be living here or Czech Republic or in France or somewhere totally different so we just decided to invest the money in it and we all have passports.

LR: Did you get it a while ago or did you just get it recently?

M: I would say some two, three years ago, it's quite recent. It was already during the Brexit debate and it was a possibility that Brexit happens.

LR: After the referendum yeah. I know people who did the same. When the referendum came I couldn't have asked for it because I hadn't been for five years yet. I could now but I don't know. I just side lined the issue, I just don't want to think about it.

CH: I'm looking back at your photograph again Marek. Were you taking photographs when you were younger? I'm sure you must have been going to Art Galleries and stuff like that.

LR: Yes, beautiful picture.

M: No I just, it's my hobby you know. I never studied anything photography it's my hobby. [chuckles]

CH: Okay, I mean I keep on looking at these chairs and thinking in relation to you know. Because these chairs kind of look like people to me. I also noticed there's a wee drain as well, going under the chairs as well.

M: I wonder the concrete surface is very gloom. It's like a hard concrete you know. [chuckles]

LR/CH: yeah.

LR: And also the background. It looks like a warehouse or an industrial building there in the background but it's faded because it's blurred because of the fog. It's really nice.

M: The photo was originally taken in colour but then I saw it and I thought what about if I tried to make it black and white and it was much stronger. It was like places of grass, green. The black and white it just everything like in shades of grey you know so it was much stronger.

LR: Yeah that's true. Very very true.

CH: It makes me feel you were kind of. It looks very lonely in a way as well.

M: I felt probably that way you know, when the pandemic started. Even at work I always had plenty of people around me at work. My inner feeling was probably this loneliness, because I couldn't see

my family you know my wife's family they were like a thousand miles away. We didn't know whether they will survive or not you know. Whether we would be able to see them ever again. So yeah these feelings were you know present.

LR: Yes.

CH: I think I had those kind of feelings at that time too. Kind of concern and worry about what was going to happen. Yeah.

M: It's much better now but at that time it was yeah.

CH: Do you feel, I mean looking at the chairs and that made me think well could these represent your family in the Czech Republic or your children or other things or?

M: Yeah it could be I think, you could look at it different ways. Either it could be like chairs we are sitting and just watching across the fence you know, you're down you can't go there almost like when you sit and watch TV, you are watching news what's going on at home. You'd like to be there, cannot be there. It can also be the chairs because you know it was at the time when it was really difficult at work and I know people were dying you know in the care sector very much and you know people are dying across the street in the care home. So the death was actually part of our work so I think it was, when I saw the chairs at the time I thought rather of the victims of the Covid at the time but you know the other picture is chairs and the fence so you can see you are locked somewhere you can't travel, you can't be with your family. So I would say both probably.

CH: How did you deal with that problem with. I mean you were a front line worker. What was interesting about Covid as well was people who worked in shops and you in the care home became front line workers like mega important to society. Like hugely important and now as well the clapping for the NHS things like that. What did you think about all of that?

M: No it was something new, something you hadn't experienced before so I think it was so difficult to go with the work you know to make sure we do maximum we can. Didn't have much time to reflect on it probably because you know we got from the head office every week there's update of the disease. I worked for (name of care home) which is care homes across UK. So they were sending every Friday day the update for the disease. Some policy was the same for all of UK, some policies were for England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and of course as the pandemic developed and the official guidance changed so it was very difficult sometimes to navigate through. Make sure we do everything right. So I didn't have much time to just you know just reflect on the situation as a whole because I was so busy. It just came after you know. When the worst went over and then I changed the job as of last year I work with elder now so it's different care setting. So now I realise how difficult it was, how much responsibility that we had.

CH: Yeah you were like a manager of a care home.

M: Yeah a manager. So we had eleven and forty members of staff and sometimes you know the staff members are frightened because they didn't know what would happen if they got covid. So it was really difficult yeah a real hard time.

CH: It sounds like it's been really stressful.

M: Yeah and you know now there are lateral flow tests you know when you visit a care home, put on face masks, sanitisers. Before we were just you know emailing you know HS Team to give us some face masks so we were like forty for a week so very little and there was different guidance on how to use it you know if it was disposable, if it's not. We had to found a stock of sanitisers because you

know there was very little hand sanitiser so it was difficult, really difficult you know. [*sounding more upset and frustrated*] You knew that if you do something wrong, just people can die so it was really difficult. It was not like you go you know some publisher error and you know something the meeting will be missed or something. It was really if something goes wrong people can die and we saw people dying in the nearby care home so it was difficult yeah.

CH: Yeah.

LR: Is that why you decided to change your job? Sorry I didn't get, are you still working in the care home?

M: No no I changed the job last year. It was one of the reasons as well I just felt exhausted you know. So still working in care, I work with children now but it's not in the like managerial post because the ??? were difficult. So what was tough for me that in the first wave, covid wave. Czech Republic was doing really well. It just, there was a lockdown very early, everybody had to wear facemasks and there was very little infection, very little death and you know it took British government really long time to start doing something. They saw when you. I saw the situation back home and when I tried to implement something to my work my manager said no what we are in Britain we need to follow the government guidelines. We will still allow visitors to our care home, the simple things to stop the visitors coming in. I totally understood they didn't have any equipment or you know a colleague ordered a huge back of facemasks and it was declined by the management that it was too expensive and they don't need it you know. So these things made me frustrated also.

LR: I can imagine.

CH: Yeah that's being terrible.

M: Probably more than someone who is British so they wouldn't have this connection you know to other country. Part of things are going better at that time you know so it was not easy.

LR: I actually feel like that now. I know that infections are going up in Europe in general including Italy. Italy had very high infections the whole summer and now they are around ten thousand cases a day which is still about a quarter of what we have here but they are going up. So at some point during the pandemic I had this feeling of why is it taking so long for the British government to take measures and to implement policies that they know are going to be effective you know. Sometimes I felt like oh I would like to be back in Italy because the way they handle it is better than here. So I was wondering whether you felt that way sometimes.

M: Like I did feel this way definitely at the beginning. Now you can see after two years you can see you know lockdown always slows the infection. As soon as you release the lockdown the infection comes back so whatever you know no country in the world that actually managed the situation well. Because every single government is under pressure from people so I think it's almost impossible to do it right all the time you know. It's like in Britain it's gone up and down up and down and Czech Republic it was as well. So up infection then down. On the other hand I wouldn't like to be in the position of people who make the decision because it's [*chuckles*] almost no win situation you know.

CH: That must be frustrating for you though Marek. Having that inside knowledge of what was going on in the Czech Republic and how to deal with it and then you were told by someone in the UK in England how you should be doing it rather than your inside knowledge and that you know you could save lives when.

M: Because when I tried, just to introduce facemask at work you know when everybody in Czech Republic you know they had to wear it. Which I think it was first country in Europe it was like law. You know people at work they were laughing. What do you have on your face you know, so it was frustrating.

LR: Yes and what is frustrating for me is that sometimes they project some of very British problems as global issues like I was phoning somebody to get some blood tests for my son and I spoke to this place and I said can you give my son this blood test and she says oh we have to postpone that because well the global shortage of vials you know the things they put the glass thing and I just couldn't stop myself and I said I'm sorry this is not a global shortage it's a British shortage because of Brexit. You know and I can't stand this way that, the way they project you know issues that are much, okay they might be in general but they are much more expatiated in Britain because of Brexit and they project them as a global issue. This is a fabrication you know, this is how I feel when I hear this debates about global issues like you know the petrol crisis. Nowhere in Europe people were queuing for petrol actually it was just here and it's just like what global issue. Anyway this is my own feelings but I think you're attitude, I can definitely take a leaf out of your book about trying to be more positive about the Brexit situation.

M: You'll have to you know. I even, because I was working as a journalist before in like a TV journalist years ago and I just decided to write some articles you know about some aspects of British life in a positive way because I knew that all media coverage in Czech Republic, media coverage is so negative everything is wrong and then when people are calling to me oh would you come back it has to be as horrible, it has to be worse than in Africa in the UK. So I started to write a few articles about nice, like interesting inventions or something like to put some positive light on British reality because it's really, the way it's portrayed in the Czech Republic it's always negative [chuckles] negative negative you know so. I just felt you know no I need to focus on the positive side, it's not all gloom you know. There are bright sides as well.

LR: Yes. So maybe if you had to take a picture now, it wouldn't be such a gloomy picture.

M: I don't think it would be so, yeah. It wouldn't be you know and most of my pictures I like to take it in colour you know and I like taking photos of people in the streets or like landscape photographic but I think it probably reflected my mood that morning because it was foggy and then I just decided lets go and take some pictures. I don't feel this way you know now. I have to say I feel much more positive you know.

LR: Your mood has changed.

M: Yeah. It's not easy all the time because we still suffer, we can't see our parents you know. Our children can't see their grandparents so we will manage to go and see them in springtime.

LR: I think I was going to say you know but a big thing is you have your ticket booked and you've got something to look forward to in the near future. So I think that has got quite an impact on your mood I suppose because in the first lockdown or the first few months of Covid like your picture reflects very well. We didn't know what we were looking at, everything was blurry and it was all a big question mark about what was going to happen and I said I suddenly got in one of those catastrophe films that you know the Hollywood films where everything's a risk and nobody knows what's going to happen and everybody is in lethal danger and you don't know you know if you're going to survive or die. Yeah.

M: Of course now you know there's a wave number four or five so you know how big the wave is, it will go down and then it will appear again but it will go down the infection but during the first one we didn't know if it will still increase until you know almost everybody have it you know so.

LR: I don't know if you knew, if you saw that but you know the very beginning of February, March 2020 when they were showing on the television even here in Britain. There were things that were happening in the North of Italy where I am from this kind of coughing that were taken by the army directly. It was awful.

M: I remember these pictures yeah.

LR: It was horrible and the level of uncertainty and of gloom of course that it brought to everyone I think so there was really a sense of we don't know where we're going, we don't know what's going to happen you know it was pretty horrible. Yep, anyway I don't know Charlie if you've got other questions I'm quite happy.

CH: No no, I just love your photograph. I love the detail of the chains. The chains are just beautiful they're like snakes or animals or something else.

M: I like cobbles, taking photos of cobbles and chains for some reason I like it because of the different shapes you know it can remind you of different things.

CH: Mmhmm.

LR: I was going to say this is not, this is just an option if you want. It would be nice and interesting and I'm not going put another task on you or anything but if you fancy it and you take a picture that maybe reflects your mood now and you want to send it to us that would be great because even in our study we can maybe show that people's moods changed you know.

M: Yeah I'll think of it. It's likely I'll get some pictures and send it to you so you could use it if you like.

LR: No pressure, if you take a picture because of your hobby and then suddenly you think oh this reflects my mood now and I'll send it to them just to show how my mood has changed that would be great.

M: I might, what would be nice if I go to the same place on a nice sunny day and take a picture from the same angle, people are sitting on the benches, there's green maybe some grass. You know the chains will be away maybe because the boats will be on the other side. I'll see what I can do.
[sounding excited]

LR: If you fancy it, there's absolutely no pressure but it's just that you know such a great picture this one and I mean so, I don't know in life what we're trying to get at in the study. It's like yeah.

M: Yeah it's fine I'll send you something.

LR: Ok that's great.

CH: Thankyou.

End of transcript