# Nicola - Interview 2  - 2018

## C

A year since leaving, on reflection, how do you feel about having left?

## Nicola

yeh I am still happy, I am still happy I left erm obviously not everything is how I expected it to be, but I am really glad I left I just feel like, I just feel so much younger. I feel so much younger yeh I don't know if I said that last time but I just feel so much younger.

## C

you did mention age last tie because you mentioned you felt quite old in the Air Force.

## Nicola

yeh everyone else I was working for was yeh so it is quite nice I feel like I can do anything.  I've got this whole life ahead of me I have got this whole new life.

## C

so, what when you say not everything is quite what you expected what exactly do you mean?

## Nicola

I don't know I suppose it is just like real life so you are so sheltered I don't even know what I said last time I can't remember what I said but you are too sheltered in the military like from real life from real people and real people’s problems and you know I found my neighbour in the street he has got like dementia erm a few weeks ago and I had never come into contact with things like that because yeh everyone in the military is fit and healthy you know are only around other people that are young and fit and healthy yeh and the sector where I work in in care as well the voluntary work that I do it’s a bit I don't know it’s a bit much sometimes wow I know a lot of this stuff you know cause it is like you just don't exposed to it in the military do you but this is real people and rea life.  These are real life. These are the real people you know we just sort of live in some sort of dream world. yeh it’s weird.

## C

yeh so that wasn't something you were expecting that was that has been

## Nicola

Well I didn't even know about it.  You know real life and this other side of society you know so ok yeh strange.  But in a way I kind of feel like oh my god it’s good that I left because you know I wasn't living like a real life I wasn't seeing all of these things but them some days I really wish I could unknow everything go back to being oblivious of real life.

## C

That is really interesting, did you ever live out when you were in the military did you always live on camp?

## Nicola

I had a quarter but that was still on camp and I did have my own house in Lincoln but again I didn't mix in with the community there I was so close to camp everyone around was like in the military anyway so I didn't really see it.  the people I work with what problems they have and things like that it is just I think the military is just so unique in comparison to like normal life, normal society. yeh. Strange.

## C

So, when you say it is unique just to drill down into that I keep saying to people that having served we both share a lot of assumptions but I need to be careful in my research that I don't presume that I understand what you are talking about without really drilling down into it so.  I don't want to linger on the point but it’s basically the people in the military it is not that diverse in terms of who you are mixing with.  I always think cause we live on camp now you never really see old people and you never really see teenagers.

## Nicola

There are so many old people I never really realised how many old people there are there are loads of them and I mean overweight people and people with defects you just don't see it in the military.  Like I was in the military since I was 16 you are just so sheltered it is crazy yeh.  Crazy.

## C

So how does that make you feel how has that affected you?

## Nicola

I find I am actually really sad about it like so in March in one week I had a few things happen.  The old lady that I go and visit for my voluntary she told me a really bad story about how she was abused in hospital, a thing happened I visited a home and saw something not very nice and like the old guy on my street I found him wandering him around outside with no shoes, it was freezing cold and it looked like no one was looking after him or anything like that and I just started feeling like oh my god this is like a horrible world like you know how it is horrible all these things like you just you know like old people who don't get looked after and it’s really horrible and all these issues that I never ever really thought about or noticed in the military are now everywhere and I was just like (big sigh) I just felt really sad about it.  But when you are not used to something it affects you more doesn't it? whereas for everybody else it is just like normal life for them they see stuff like this all the time and they ignore it because they are used to it whereas for me I was like all new all these new situations so it was more shocking for me yeh.  So, I do get bit sad but I am getting used to it now.

## C

That is fascinating.  Going back to leaving the Air Force then and that lead up to it is there anything you would change about that leaving experience is there anything that you would do differently.

## Nicola

I would probably save more money.  Cause like everything costs so much more money really when you leave and you don't realise, I mean you do realise but you don't like you it’s like when you think about it it’s not until you actually are living it you don't, don't really realise so I would probably do that.  But in saying that I probably wouldn't have stopped doing all the things that I did like holidays and everything.  Yeh maybe that but all my training was perfect really, I was really lucky I am really happy with all the training.  Erm and I think it all went well like my house and everything I have got everything I need. yeh I have got a lodger as well now so that is nice obviously it is a little bit more social as well isn't it rather than just living on my own that is since January.

## C

So, you are quite happy with the whole leaving thing went the process of it?

## Nicola

yeh I think though I gave myself two years and I really made the most of whatever opportunities it is all there you know you just everything that you need is there available to you when you are leaving.

## C

What advice would you give to anyone else who is in that position just about, 2 years out really.

## Nicola

I suppose try to be a realistic as possible but not be and that is the other thing so many people were trying to put you down when you are in the military and say to you oh it’s really hard out there, there are so many people that say that there are lots of reservists who have left and then joined back up as full-time reservists.  And they had all had bad experiences of working in civvi street so I would say just don't listen to other people I found that stressed me out a lot more than I needed to have been stressed out because you know you are wrong you can do whatever you want you can make it how you want.  So, it’s up to you.  There aren't the hardships that people say there are really.

## C

Ok, and is there anything you specific that you feel that you miss about military life?

12:08

## Nicola

yeh I miss like having the structure like in the work environment like I miss just knowing, knowing the options and knowing where you can go you know it is really structured isn't it.  In a way that is limiting and it is part of the reason I left as well but at the same time it is nice just knowing how things work and what your options are.  While in a civilian company you know it’s you might get promoted you know if someone leaves and you interview well or somebody likes you or you know you keep having to apply for jobs in different organisations and move around to work your way up and that is less of a sure thing and I know it is not a sure thing in the military but it is just the structure basically you know it is that side of it it’s that feeling of knowing and then now it’s kind of like you don't know so it’s you know and it’s kind of exciting because you could do anything but at the same time there is something that you kind of know what you need to do and then it’s more variable I suppose.

## C

In what ways then do you think that your military experience helps you in your current job?  Does it at all?

## Nicola

Oh loads. Like I am way more confident than everyone else and it must be the military.  I am like why are these people they are good at their jobs and everything, they come up with ideas and they have <@><>@ they must have ideas they can't just be sitting there and not have ideas but I just and general confidence as well, so I will say come on let’s do this you know like they will talk about things but they are not actually doing it.  So, I am always the one like ok let’s do it then you know go do it go and get everyone together to do things and I think that is definitely well I don't know cause I never had a job before the military so I don't know if I like would have been like this if I wasn't in the military14:23

but there just seems to be a massive difference about yeh the way that I work and my confidence and I just think that I can do things and yeh I suppose it’s probably the military.

## C

Have you got an example of that?

## Nicola

yeh well so just in meetings and maybe just the confidence in my thoughts and opinions and in the RAF probably not in the Army you could talk you could say more couldn't you, you could you can say your opinions on things and so like in the office when people are talking about doing things I am the person that says right let’s get on and do this even and in particular practical things as well you know if something needs to be done in the office I will just start doing it and say come on let’s do it and then everyone else just follows and that is the way it works so that must be a military thing.  But yeh or I'm just bossy.

## C

Natural leadership qualities it’s called.

## Nicola

But that is what you get trained to death in the military that sort of thing so it probably is that.

## C

So, is there anything that you have found within your work and professional life that you have thought oh I can't behave like I would in the military I need to adapt or change my approach or something. Or have you felt ..

## Nicola

We had this I went on the Professional Boundaries course oh my god no one in the military would have this course it’s like no yeh it was horrendous.  But you know it makes  you have to be more cautious in the things that you say and the things that you talk about because you can't be really like open and give opinions I mean obviously you’re not supposed to talk about politics and religion and things like that but people are way more sensitive in general I haven't dealt with that many people but I have noticed it you need to be more cautious about what kind of things that you say because you know military banter and not even banter just the way that you can be open with people in the military because in the military it’s more like they are your family you are used to spending lots of time with them and you can send 4-6 months away together so you naturally have that relationship with your military counterparts whereas I have got a work friend I think there is one person I can tell everything too that is ok but before that I was like owwwhhhh.

## C

So, a Professional Boundaries Course, so that was a course that was to almost giving you rules of social behaviour?

## Nicola

yeh yeh that is exactly what it was so everyone has to do that when they join the organisation and they just give you loads of examples of what you can do and you can't do what you can say and what you can’t say. How that can make other people feel and it was just so weird you really couldn't do anything you couldn't say anything about your personal life. You know you are spending 9 hours a day with these people in the office but yeh that is what they wanted you to behave like and obviously when you are actually working in the office it is not that strict but you kind of learn from other people a bit more what you can and what you can't.  Whereas in the military it’s not like anything goes but it’s just a lot more relaxed in that way.

## C

That is interesting because you would think that the military is stricter perhaps but you are finding it the other way but you have got somebody you can have that friendship with and talk to in the office environment.

## Nicola

18:47

yeh that makes it easier.

## C

And it’s HR isn't it within the voluntary sector and do you think was that course specific to that department?

## Nicola

No that is for all people.  There were aspects of it that weren't applicable to me because some of it was how you behave with the service users.  Obviously but then they still wanted you to carry on with those behaviours in the office environment. So you know I did ask the question is that applicable to the office environment and they said yes. I mean there are a few in the HR department who when you do go out after work it’s fine but just in the office they are more professional than in the military somehow.

## C

So, you mentioned at the beginning how different the diversity of people is outside the military is there anything else that struck you about civilian life that you weren't expecting?

## Nicola

I think not really, I do keep finding I'm wondering what I am going to do next because @?@?@? but all of my studying is going really well so I have just finished @@?@ all of my assignments I got really really good grades which has given me it’s of confidence. I've started the A' Level which is going really well @?@?@/@?@

## C

you broke up a bit there.  the science A’ level yeh?

## Nicola

yeh ?@?@? I've got a really god plan with that @>?@ May and I am getting a tutor as well, I've just fired the cleaner and I am getting a tutor instead.  ?@?@?@? cause I am doing biology and chemistry.  So hopefully I will when I spoke to you last time did I tell you about university?

## C

yeh and going to Cardiff

## Nicola

yeh so I still want to go to Cardiff university but I have decided I want to do medicine.

## C

Right but it is still within that medicinal, so medical as in a doctor or GP

## Nicola

So, my brother is a doctor and I like saw him go for it so yeh Cardiff it’s still going to be a little bit of time cause I've got to get my results but I will know by August and apply in October. So it is still a little while away so it will be 2020 and then by the time I am fully qualified a GP for example I will be 42 but it is so young now and I am like 31 then when you are 42 you still have got 23 years of working left haven't ?@?@?: And the NHS it feels like an institution you can work your way up you know that kind of appeals to me.  ?@?@ yeh it’s given me the confidence yeh I can do anything. I think as well I was feeling quite deeply about elderly people and and how they are seen in society all of those kind of things as well made me want to go for that instead.  So, it’s going to be a bit of a long slog but I've got a lodger, the Welsh government are really really generous with their grants and there is bursaries and all sorts so I will probably be fine financially not that bad and Cardiff is not that far away I can still live at home.  And this job is really good at how flexibly I can work so I can work from home a lot so on some days when I had an assignment due in I would have like my work lap top on my desk and then I'd have my assignment and e-mails came in I would answer that and just managed it and it was fine.  Naughty in a way but …

## C

Well.

## Nicola

24:18

?@?@?@? desk

## C

Exactly as long as you are still getting the work done

## Nicola

exactly yeh, I suppose I just kind of know I see different things to do ?@?@ A' levels coming up and next year so it’s shorter than if you were at school but /'?@?@? you can be a bit more focused.  So, it’s a plan 40 sounds really old  ?@?@?@ but 31 sounds old.  There are still ?@?@?@?@?

## C

So, do I, so what would you say has been your biggest professional challenge then over the last 12 months?

## Nicola

I suppose just being at work you are a team but it is not the same exactly so ?@?@ I don't know like all of the work is on you.  It is like ?@?@? load and load and loads of work on so Jan, Feb, Mar I was so busy and I was I said to my boss my head is on fire but I was trying to say look ok I've got too much work, like literally I was working all the hours you know to get it all done ?@?@?@? because I am not somebody who can sit with 100s of e-mails in my in box and be ok with that. I need to get them all done, I can't leave them some of my colleagues they are fine they can go home and they can sleep at night, I can't do that, they need to be gone. So I have had to like and I don't know I have just think although it’s not like I didn't have busy jobs in the military but it was the work could always be shared out to others you would always it was easier like that whereas I have really had to sort of force it and really push it to get that done there wasn't any solution my boss came up with it was like I had to say to him @?@?@? to him and then ?@?@?@? try and get like sorted ?@?@??@?@?@ it was super busy but I think so that I just think maybe some people don't work so well as a team work ?@?@? you can have those people in the military as well I don't know.  I don't think there is anything I have really struggled with exactly, I miss having pool cars.  I have to use my own car own the time I miss having MT cars.

## C

What about on a personal front what is the biggest change, challenge something that you just weren't expecting.

## Nicola

I don't know I thought I would stay more in touch with all the surf team cause I used to do everything with them and I just didn't.  And I think me as well just because like when you first leave it is like a really big deal and then I just feel like me and I just feel normal and I don't feel that different really. I feel like I have got more options yeh I am still going to my old bosses leaving do in the Oxford AVCO next month so so I am still doing things like that I am still meeting up with other friends who have left the military which is god actually that really helps I think cause you have that one thing in common with them that you don't have in common with anybody else your friends that are still in the military it is not the same and your friends who have never been in the military they don't really know so my friends who have left the military I the last few years they are the people I have the most in common with right now.  I don't know I don't speak to them all the time  ?@?@? it is nice to have those.

## C

So, what is it about is it because you have got a common understanding?

## Nicola

yeh, like they know both sides of it they know me before and they know both sides of it and they understand like what it is like.  yeh

## C

So, would you say would do you say to people you are ex-military when you meet them?

## Nicola

not I don't go and say straight away or anything but yeh if they ask me what did you do before. I will tell them but I don't really like telling people because they just think make so many assumptions about it like, cause they don't know anything.  I don't really like telling people so much.

## C

What kind of assumptions do people make?

## Nicola

Well, I don't know some people said to me "what do you do" and I said I was in HR, so there are some people who assume you have never held a rifle or anything like that or that you would never ever do military, military stuff.  Or they will say I watched 'our girl' the other day and thought of you or something like that.

## C

you know I've not watched it I can't watch it.  I can't bring myself to watch it I don't know how I feel.

## Nicola

I've never watched it., I've seen the adverts.

## C

it’s put you off.  It’s funny.  I read a paper that had been written a couple of years ago about how civilians think about the military basically and the end result of the paper was that civilians have an intuitive understanding of that it means to be in the military but it didn't really delve into that it didn't say what they meant.  And to me everything is very Army for a start but also it is kind of based on WWII and no real understanding of the cotemporary military within wider society.

## Nicola

I feel like no one knows, no one knows.  And I think and in a way that is an isolating factor in a way, you are surrounded by people and they don't understand half of your life so or they can't comprehend any of your previous experiences because they will never experience that and they have never yeh I suppose that is why I do talk to my ex-military friends because they understand better and it is such a different thing.

## C

Would you say you still see yourself as part of the military family?

## Nicola

No, it does move on really quickly so like so many things have already changed like ?@?@?@?@?@?@?@?@?@? so and then I don't feel like I have, I don't feel like it is the same towards the people in the military now, it doesn't feel the same but then I feel like the bond I have with people who have left then that is my military family. yeh.

## C

Why do you think that is, why do you think that is not the same with people who are still in?

## Nicola

Erm because you have left perhaps and they feel differently towards you so they don't maybe didn't understand like ?@?@? leave and it’s such a big thing they think understand why you did or … they don't understand what you are doing @?@? I suppose.

## C

So, what is your driving motivation now?

## Nicola

For what?

## C

For your professional future I suppose.

## Nicola

I think money is definitely a factor and being in a profession where so when I was in the RAF people when people ask you what you do and then when you did say you were in the RAF you always saw a reaction and my parents used to love like telling people I was in the RAF and now it’s like what do you do now and it’s like oh I work in a ?@?@? it’s not like it’s not the same is it, you don't get that reaction.  I do miss that a little bit.  But you get with a doctor which is probably why I am aiming to have a job where you have good money and also like a wowness factor like a profession but you do have to work so hard to get it but I think something where I can still be creative and whenever I feel like I am making a difference and giving back I think those are the things that I want in the future so money and a good reason for doing something yeh.

## C

I was doing a presentation about doctors without borders you know medicine sans frontier.

## Nicola

yeh and you can do things like that as well and mountain rescue.

## C

*Go onto describe presentation.* I used to always check the news to see if world war III hadn't broken out.

## Nicola

that is true you have a different sort of fear.  like oh my God what has Trump done now.

## C

So where do you see yourself in 5 years tie, do you see yourself at Cardiff university year 3 of your medical degree.

## Nicola

Yeh, that is where I am going to be.

## C

What about family?

## Nicola

yes, that has been brilliant actually.  I have really made the most of being here and my mum and my brother or my brothers that has been really, really go.  I have spent so much more time with them and it has been really good for my mum as well.

## C

I know that was one of the drivers of you obviously choosing to go back to Wales wasn't it. that is really good.

## Nicola

yeh although now she is moving to Portugal in September.

## C

What your mam?

## Nicola

yeh I've moved here so she is going there.

## C

That is just rude!

## Nicola

That is what I said.  *discusses mams move38:28*

## C

just going back to the actual leaving process then on reflection did you find it I know you found it quite stressful the leading up to making the decision but once you had embarked on that decision to go how did that feel as you went through that process?

Nicola

well my hair fell out but I think it was ok because I had a plan I am always better with a plan, because I had a plan and sort of knew what I wanted to do I had the courses to keep me going then and I think because I was in the AVCO it helps I wasn't on a base I was already detached so I think it was fine yeh.

## C

so, the best advice is just to plan that process.

## Nicola

yeh and not listen to other people who have got their own agenda to their own reasons for saying such negative things of leaving that fit’s their own fear of leaving the military and they kind of put that fear onto you and say it to you and that is just not very nice as they try to put you off leaving so it can make you a lot more stressed.  Just stop listening to other people just do what you want.

## C

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

## Nicola

No

## C

*wind up interview*.42:02