Maria Interview 3 - 2018

C

It is really about what has been the most surprising thing about civilian life and what has been the hardest adjustment to make.

Maria

I don't know if the word is surprising but one of the thing I have found fun and interesting and very different is getting involved with the community.  I know we had a community obviously before and there was always social functions and neighbours and we all understood each other and we all had the same ?@? but the reality is we were connected by work not personal likings if you like anything other and Mark and I have both mentioned this and obviously he left the year before I did and we have been here 3 years now and we are  really massively involved in the community and it’s not necessarily doing good works.  I mean I am involved with I organised the womble and I think I told you I won that community prize and all that stuff is oh was weird as I'd never done it before to me it was just getting things organised cause I can't stand litter on the roads and I guess my natural inclination to take the lead on things is still there.  I've joined, there is a beer and gift festival in September and I am now on the committee.  I helped last year but I am now on the committee this year so that has been good but it has also been going down to the local brewery on Friday night.  Instead of Happy Hour in the Officers Mess there is a brewery and we had some really rubbish pubs here, one of them has just come under new management.  So, actually I am not really a pub person but for some reason the brewery because it was an up and coming business because they are growing the hops at the brewery and because they open their doors from 6-9 on a Friday suddenly the whole community was there and we are a parish and it is quite long and thin and it doesn't really have.02:52 a centre point, it has a church at one point and then way down the road there is a post office and a small little cenotaph thing but other than that there is no centre, there is a school but they are all sort of separate and suddenly I realised how many people lived here because they are all down the brewery and we've actually made friends, and I have lots of friends.  Obviously, I have lots of acquaintances from the Air Force but I have some very special friends both from my times from the ranks, Gill and Mike are still my closest friends from the ranks my other best friend is a complete civvi from school days and I have got lots of good people that I keep in touch with from the Forces but it has been different making friends with proper civilians you know people who have got no connection with the forces. So surprising not necessary you hope that you are going to but it has been gratifying and nice.

C

So, did you find that hard making friends or

Maria

No no not at all.  I think if anything I have found it surprisingly easy.  I guess I have if I did consciously think about it but I know when I moved to this area so many miles you know I wasn't in a quarter any more I wasn't in an area actually I fell in love if anything when I was in the Air Force and living in quarters I found that a lot of wives didn't really make friends with the WAAFs anyway I don't know if it is anything that you ever came across but I mixed people at work, I mixed with their husbands they tended not to want to and I don't know if it’s because they saw you as a WAAF or if they saw you as a challenge because you are female and you are working with their husbands and I particularly noticed it when I got divorced not so much when I got to Northolt because I had grown used to things then and we had a different life on the squadron then my son became part of the squadron then coming to beer calls and everybody joined in but when I was at Wyton and first split up I was new to the area as well and had hoped to make friends with my neighbours. It’s not that they were ever horrible to me they weren't but they never invited me to coffee mornings.  Now I know I wasn't free to go to coffee mornings but there may have been times I could have taken a couple of ours off or there may have been times I could have taken leave and joined in and there was  a very senior officers wife, I don't know some one star at the time and she sent a like a a questionnaire round the quarters and she was doing a good job she was trying to get likeminded people together so say you liked playing badminton or squash and there was another wife there that wanted to play she could pair you up and everything.  And so, the questionnaire came through my door and I was very lonely at the time and obviously a single parent at the time albeit working.  And I remember filling this form out and really honestly saying I would love to meet other working parents other working mothers, they didn't have to be Air Force people or Army people they just had to be career people when I had been at Brize when Lewis was born I was really close friends with a girl who was pregnant at the same time as me like you do make friends at parents’ groups.  She was a school teacher and we are still friends now but the fact is she went back out to work and I found that on quarters the wives were either in a supportive role, well I don't know what it was but anyway the long and short of it was she never even bothered to reply to me.  I'd sort of put my heart onto that paper saying basically yes please I want to make some friends and she didn't even respond so obviously I made friends with other RAF people and they ended up coming to baby sit Lewis and I made a group of friends you know so coming here I suppose I didn't really give it too much thought but I wondered how easy it would be to make friends.  What I do find is I am younger than a lot of them even at my adult age of 53, the sort of area that we now live and the sort of houses around here are quite plush and everything they tend to be retired people that is not to say I haven't made friends with them because there are some absolutely lovely lovely people here really hard working volunteer type people who have had good careers and have now got to 60and retired but we have got a new neighbour moved in just round the corner she is the same age as me she is a judge and I basically knocked on her door and said right you and I are going to be friends. (laughter) You don't know me but I live round the corner, you are my age, we are making friends and she works about 3 days a week she picks and chooses her hours and we have become friends. So, my demographic age wise is very different you know I am in a choir and my best friends in the choir they don't look 60 they look early 50s actually one of them actually looks late 40s but they are just great people it doesn't matter about the age.

C

I remember when I was serving I never made any real friends on a patch it is very odd and but now coming back to Wittering and nobody knowing I was ex-military and doing the school run just all of a sudden within a week there is coffee mornings and meeting people.

Maria

I think because obviously I had the child but I wasn't going to the coffee mornings and the play groups and all of that and I think with me being a divorcee they just saw me as maybe danger.  I don't know what they thought I was going to do I do know it made me feel pretty shabby at times I felt very low you know you get over it and you have to make a life for yourself and I did I've got nothing but on the whole really good happy memories but that bit of it hurt me a little bit because I wasn't about to start with anybody's husband I  wasn’t interest in any relationship at that point anyway I just wanted other female company, I'm actually.  Women are weird people you know in big groups they can be really catty and bitchy and I don't like big clumps of girls I was never one at school for big clumps of girls and I have always mixed with blokes because I have always found them easier but that said I do like women I am not an anti-type women and if you find nice women I am very happy to be good friends with nice women and I like to have female company but I think being in the service was  harder from that point of view. 10:48

C

What happening with the business?

Maria

Yeh it is all going on 11:10 (discusses boat business) 18:15 I think I have not got to have rose tinted glasses that the business is going to be easy and of course I have just had a year off from work doing my garden. I've got another year off I am busy, but I am busy doing nothing.  I am really busy I am busy doing community works and I am busy doing the garden and Marks father has just moved to the area and I did everything to do with him moving into his house and finding a property I still go and visit my mum every Thursday because of her illness and help with Julia so life wise, of course next year Monday's and Friday's will be change over days and Tuesdays and Wednesdays I'll be taking all the kit back with me washing it and ironing it, well I am hoping my ironing lady will take the ironing bit but, I've got to get things repaired and ready for the next hand over but it doesn't bother me hard work has never frightened me it will be just readjusting again.

C

It’s very exciting

Maria

yeh I mean we were in London at the weekend we met up with friends who were down there to see the Foo Fighters so we had breakfast with them on Sunday, we have been friends, Gill and I shared a room together when we were in Germany so we have been friends for a very long time and her husband he is always the one, he is not a doubting Thomas, but he is always the one that says well have you thought about this or have you thought about that always looking at the bleaker side.  And everything he had said we had thought about but it got me worried a bit I mean can we afford to lose the money if it goes wrong.  Well the answer to that is no because we can’t afford to lose £150,000 which is what I think my input will be and there will be more in the future as I make money I will have to reinvest but I have got this a £150 I think it is a £155,000 between selling the house and the end of my pension and my lump sum and savings of course I don't want to use it but if I had to answer and say would it see us destitute well no it won’t, if I lost it all we wouldn't have enough money to pay off this mortgage but this is a big house and there is lots of lovely little cottages around here and I said to Mark, if he hated his job which he doesn't really like and I said if you really desperately leave we could afford to down size, have no mortgage and still live a very pleasant and lovely life.  You don't need the big house I mean I love this house, but it is not a necessity.  And it is not what makes up so, yeh, I guess the risk is I won’t make enough money to pay off, because if I spending the money on the boats I am not spending the money paying off the mortgage, which I could do, it would finish it but I like the idea of investing and trying to make a bit more money.

C

I know you have had a year off and you effectively have another year off but you are still thinking on your mental activity is still geared to setting up this business.

Maria

oh, yeh it takes up a lot of research.  There has been a huge amount of research involved I mean I have got to build a website I am not going to be able to build it I haven't got the skills but I know what I want on the website I have got to do all the communications with that pretty soon I am going to be starting up, I'm not into twitter, I like Facebook, although the adverts bore the life out of me, I just like to see what people are doing I am not interested in all the other garbage.  But Facebook, Instagram, Twitter all these forums I am going to be setting up a new Facebook and start to build a following watching the boats being built.  You know start to garner some interest in people.  I will have to do a Sally Anne and send out my link to all my friends and say can you pass this on.  But I don't want to bug people either so there is a balance to be made here.  I don't know if you ever knew John, he and I were friends …. he was chatting the other day and he said let me know when the boat is ready cause I really fancy a holiday.  And I said Oh don't you worry I will be sending you links for you to send out to everybody at the company to get onto the military bases.  So, I will be using what networking I can so it isn't a matter of sitting for a year and waiting there is a lot of work to bring a business up to a state where you can go ahead with it.

C

But if you didn't have this could you see yourself, do you think you are ready to do no work?

Maria

You know (laughing) I am really liking life.  It’s a hard one that because I worked from the age of 14 I had a job in a Fish and Chip shop I worked every weekend obviously I was at school, I joined the Air Force worked hard there didn't think about the hours and even when I had my son you know and being a single parent I have just always worked and worked and I honestly thought I would never not be able to work and what I find I do is this house is immaculate.  No cleaner ever kept the house as clean as I keep it because I go much deeper.  I never stop I am not sitting around doing nothing and Mark said to me I am finding it so hard to sit down and read a book, to learn my music for choir because I used to have a long journey to and from work where I would put it on the iPod now trying to find the time to sit and actually learn my music is difficult and I look back and I think well what have I done but the garden is looking glorious I know where all my money is going but I think if I didn't have the business plan coming up I would be getting more and more involved with the community again erm there is lots of things I can see openers for, I mean I have been asked to join the parish council when the opening comes I think it is early next year I am like that about it I love the chairman but I think the rest of them are a bit fire guards really sit there and say nothing and Mark keeps saying that is why we need you on it we need somebody that is actually going to do something whereas I actually liked organising the womble and doing it rather than just sitting there and talking about it.  But the magistrates has just opened up again and Mark is a magistrate and I could really see myself doing that and I thought about putting my name forward but I don't think I am eligible because I have had too many speeding fines, I can't believe it.

C

No! How many is too many?

Maria

Well I mean I have got none at the moment but at one stage I did have 9 points.  I've been to naughty school twice, there have been a lot, there has been a least, I never had any before I met Mark.  There must have been about 8, they have all been really naff ones as well. They have been like one was on the way to Peterborough when I was on my way to meet my mother and I was doing, I think I was in a 40 but I was doing 35 in a 30 but it wasn't a built-up area and it wasn’t obvious.  Another one was on a motor way where they put some restrictions on and I didn't spot the restriction in time.  And then they have all been minute amounts they have not been for doing 90 in a stupid area, nothing really life threatening or dangerous but at the end of the day I was wrong.  Mark has been a bloody nightmare with it with him being a magistrate I daren't for love or money speed anymore and I can't afford the fines. But apparently, I've peaked, Mark is looking into it but he said I don't think you are going to be eligible I think you are allowed two speeding fines in your life.

C

In your life.

Maria

But he is going to double check.  He is going to check because apparently they are quite short of females, demographics here again, and Mark you can apparently you can specialise so you can go and be a magistrate on a family court which doesn't strike Mark at all but I would probably be quite interested in apart from the fact that I am quite an emotional person as you know so if I was to have this hang dong father their crying cause his children can't visit him and then the mothers screaming you know I will probably burst into tears so.  But yeh there are things, if I wasn't planning the business I wouldn't be taking about finding out I would be doing the magistrate I would I would have there is a number of projects that need extra help and support and I am helping on the periphery but I could get a lot more involved and I am having to stop myself.  I nearly volunteered for something last night and it was Mark who said stop it stop it you know what you are like I get involved and feeding into and before you know it you’re really busy but there are some women round here they happen to be churchy people and I am not churchy but I have masses of respect for them because they one is a retired doctor the other I think she was a social worker but I think she is an ex-oxford graduate these are really bright women also both lovely and they never have a spare moment and it’s all voluntary work.  One of them sells fair trade stuff a t stalls and they are always just doing so much all the time You know twinning toilets and getting involved and helping to raise money for the reorganisation of the church and I just my hat off to them so I think, I never give you a short answer do I, but basically if I wasn't planning the business I would be getting involve with more charity work.  My brother in law, Marks brother, was the deputy commissionaire of London City Police so he was really up there got a massive pension when he retired, lives about 20 minutes from us has been retired now for getting on for 5 years and the only thing he does, he does go to the gym but I don't know what he does because he is still very over weight because I think he drinks a lot of beer he mows the garden.  They have a beautiful house with a lot of land and instead of renting it out to have sheep or horses on it he mows it.  It’s a field and he mows the field. And he complains of being board he still has a social life down in London where he lived he does absolutely sod all and he said to Mark, Mark is chairman of the county priory group for St Johns ambulance and I am the secretary and Mark is headed for being a Deputy Lord Lieutenant soon as well he has got really really involved on top of working full time and his brother does nothing and his brother muted to him, his bother said oh Mark said there is a position coming up but it is in Herefordshire but it is only 20 minutes away for the St Johns ambulance you would be ideal and he said no, no, no I don't fancy that maybe if a magistrate comes up I would do something like that especially being an ex-policeman.  Mark told him that the place had opened up for applications and he went oh no no I don't think they will want ex-policeman.  And he is actually doing nothing and I actually think when you do nothing it becomes harder and harder to do something and I found that in the Air Force if you were in a boring job of which I was a few times I found it really hard to motivate myself to do anything but when I was in a busy interesting job you could just give me more and more and more ad I would have taken it and I don't know why that was but when I was in JHC and I  actually loathed that job because it was a non-job I found it a pain to have any work.  It’s a weird thing because you would think that you could just do your bare minimum and get through and be happy but I was one or the other so keeping busy is my mantle think whereas his brother I think it has almost become he is lazy, he is just lazy he does nothing.  He doesn't even know how to change a plug he is really really non-practical.  So, he does the lawn he reads the paper he goes to the gym and probably pretends to do a good run but doesn't and that is his life and he is board and you can tell in his whole persona he is board but he won’t get up off his backside to do anything else.  Well I am never board. 33:09

C

That has been really good to catch up and see where your heads at, but to sum up it seems like leaving the Air Force, I know you have had your ups and downs but on the whole, it sounds like it has been a positive experience in respect of where you are at with your family and your home and what the future holds.

Maria

Agreed, agreed. I think I think I left at the right time even though I left for the company and that didn't work out the way I would have hoped I still had reached the end of my cause I wasn't going to get promoted, I was board, I was board and there was so much comfort there and peace because people always left me alone.  Because of my reputation and I was hard working and the people I worked for knew that people would say to me well we can just leave you to it Maria and that was it and that was great nobody told me to do anything nobody put me under pressure I was working hard I was taking the money home and I was given I was lucky with the people I worked for and that is the thing Caroline.  I never worked for some young up start who thought he was God’s gift or female gift that was going to look down on me because I had only reached Squadron Leader.  It was never like that I worked for people who would say you should have made it it’s a shame you didn’t so they would treat me with the same level of respect.  There was a lot of luck on my part, luck comes from earning it granted but I could have had it a lot harder but that didn't stop me from feeling bad or aggravated especially when they went on leave and I was standing in for them and they were saying blimey it’s the first time I've come back and had nothing to do and I’ve had nothing to catch up on and problems happened while they were away and they would and they'd say you handled that brilliantly and I thought yes  well why can't I be a bloody Wing Commander then and get the money you know.  But I could also see the faults I had in the Air Force you know I think I have mentioned before my deep-down lack of confidence that I wouldn't speak out when I know other people would.  And then I was in a you know I would be thinking exactly that but I didn't have that confidence level to speak out load in case I looked like a fool.  That was my problem and I think in actual fact I probably reached the right level.  You know you have to be honest with yourself in life I can see where Mark got to and how he got there and I have never begrudged anybody in the Air Force who made it either because they have got there for a reason.  Very few people make if higher and don't deserve it I think, you might not like them.  They might not be your cup of tea you might not want to work with them but it doesn't necessarily mean they don't deserve it.  I would say, I don't know 98% I've never looked at it.  So, if I was truly honest with myself I've always tried to be an honest person, I would say I did myself a disservice and being a hard worked yes that is a good thing to be and it is something to be proud of and being nice with people but at the end of the day I could have made a bigger mark had I had a bit more guts and you know as Mark said sometimes its luck.  I think one of the bad luck things I had is that I never worked for a supplier as a Squadron Leader and therefore I was not in that inner sanctum and I worked for aircrew and ops and I looked round and you see the report and you get all these wonderful words but when there are people sitting on the board and they know the I don't know one of the senior ranks in the branch knows you it’s different.  And I think if I had been a cleverer person, some of those junior officers that worked for me particularly in Air Command the ones that worked for me they were they used to get on my nerves they were real go getters they were the ones telling me ma'am I must have this in my assessment whether I had decided they deserved it or not but it annoyed me but what I had to partly respect and blimey I was never that way inclined they had mapped out their future, Caroline.  They knew who they wanted to work for where they wanted to be in certain jobs at certain points to get from A to B and to get to Wing Commander and above but particularly to Wing Commander and Group Captain.38:30

And I think I don't know if it was just  because I came from the ranks so I was just happy to be an officer and then I was just happy to get promoted because I was just 3 and a half 4 years in to get to Squadron Leader and then of course my marriage broke down and I was a single parent and my mother was ill and all these things come on in life and I was just I think because it all happened so easily to start with I think I just assumed it would come to me that way, you know that I would continue to work hard and I would continue to try hard and do the right courses and I would get picked up.  I hadn't banked on the competitiveness to the degree I hadn't banked on not being a specialist which was a big down fall you know as we know because the way the Air Force went with the wars the specialists became the all-important pieces not basic like me and ok I know I got the specialist job but we all know how people felt about that, and we know it worked fine and it got me my next job but it was all a bit too late so I think you have to be honest with yourself and think well you could have done better and a bit of bad luck as well but if I had been more thoughtful I wouldn't have put myself in that position and if I had my time over I would do it differently.  But without regret, without regret, look at me.  I met my husband I have a beautiful son, I have got 2 gorgeous step daughters I have got lots of friends, I had a perfectly nice respectable career I've got a pension I am setting up my own business.  Life is not crap.  So, you don't live with regret you learn from things and you move on and I think working for myself in the future that will be cool.  You know I can live with that not having to worry about anybody else except for those that will come and work for me then I think I am fine with that anyway, as you can attest to young lady with your hair.

C

I can you are a nice boss to work for.  But do you think that is part of the driver to have your own business40:47 do you think that although you say fine yeh Squadron Leader there is nothing wrong with being a Squadron Leader obviously but to know you could have done the job at a higher rank, to be capable of it but not being recognised for it do you think that, that drives part of this business that idea of working for yourself and

Maria

Yeh you are very astute I don't think I thought that to start with but again being really honest with myself I think to be able to be, hopefully, successful, and I see no reason why it shouldn't be but if it is successful I reckon I should definitely be earning what I was on as I left the company which was more than I was on as a Squadron Leader.  And I have got plans afoot for another couple which would take me way above what Mark is earning now.  to the point that we are thinking in about 4 or 5 years that Mark would give up work and we would end up working together to run it ourselves now that might be a pipe dream but I do think there is a level of realism there if I enjoy it.  And yes there will be quite a bit of pride in there to say yes I am managing director of my own company that is pulling in, even if it is only a couple of hundred thousand that is a lot more than I was on before and that would be turnover not necessarily net but actually no those figures are already worked out on already having taken on all my outgoings as well as my tax I don't think it will be quite as busy as that because I need more money, I am actually now looking at investors.  There is a chap Mark knows who has said I'd love a narrow boat but I would want someone to run it for me and rent it out and get some income and it has made me start thinking and we are in talks with him just starting with the idea of using some of his money to invest in the company. So yeh there is no doubt that for those on Facebook they'll can see and go oh blimey she did have it in her she can do this and she can run a big company or a medium sized little thing why not.  Same as you, you will be a doctor one day.

C

It is quite a doubt one of my motivations.  Because I am still in a position where I meet people constantly who are still serving and it is they just it is almost like because you left you gave up.

Maria

yeh

C

And for me yeh I can say I gave up but I am doing a PhD now so.

Maria

Exactly, I can completely comprehend that and it would be disingenuous for me to say that there is not a little bit of me in there that will be very happy to send out my quotes to everybody and see what I've done I would love to them to come on and see what I have produced and done I am very positive this is going to work and even if it is only 2 boats and it brings in what I was doing at the company well that is pretty cool that would be good because it would be all that I have done myself don't get me wrong with all the support from Mark, he is an amazingly supportive husband.  As Steve must be to you. You took years to get picked up to Squadron Leader because your face didn't fit, you opened your mouth and all the things that people said about you but I could spot you straight away I knew you were a good a good egg and a hard worker who said it as it was.  The trouble was you said it all on your face as well didn't you.  But then I have always liked people who are open and honest and I work better with people like that.  It is the little goody too shoo type that sit there and say all the right things but are stirring it behind the back that I never had time for and sometimes faces don't fit.  Do you know Marks face often doesn't fit em I watched him in his Army career and that last stage obviously I have only known him 10 years and he was not your typical senior officer going to cocktail parties and smoozing and knowing all the right people and he didn't sit comfortably at social functions he didn't know how to small talk he still doesn't really and he was almost like a different person and I thought bloody hell how has he done it?  He is bright and he is a bloody hard worker and he will be the first to admit that there was a fair modicum of luck but as I said yeh but as I said to him you did get some lucky breaks but you took the opportunity of those lucky breaks and you made them into something.  He reckons he was nearly stuck at Major or was in Col I can't remember now where he had been like an ADC or something like that there was a couple of them in the office working for different starred officers and then this even higher rank officer had rung in to talk to the other ADC and that ADC was out of the room and it was a question completely outside of Marks knowledge base and all the rest of it however he knew there was an urgency to get the answer. Anyway, whatever he went away and he did some talking around and he found the answer and he rank this man back this man was a 2\* then and by sheer luck was on the promotion board that following year, saw Marks name and said he will be promoted.  It didn't matter what else was on that thing you will promote him.  And it is because obviously had he not been on that board, Mark might have missed that date and the Army they are if you have missed it by certain dates then there is no coming back from it.  There is a lot of old majors isn't and he said that was luck and I said yes it was but at the same time if you had not done that work that impressed him that made him remember your name there wouldn't have been the opportunity for the luck, but sometimes you hit lucky and sometimes you don't.47:19 It is fascinating because lives can take on completely different routes can't they and they do as a result.  And I actually used to admire people who left the Air Force earlier ok they got to Squadron Leader or Wing Commander maybe and then they left and people said they must be mad they are definitely one star material and but they had the balls to leave because  they knew they wanted to go on and do something else and make it in business and I should imagine that most are successful I know that there are a few that have don't it that haven't been successful but on the hole I think if you have got it in you you are going to find a way round ?@?'.  And you will make a great lecturer

C

*Conversation about my work as a lecturer*. 48:40

Maria

When I was at Coningsby as a Flight Lieutenant I was at lunch one day and I happened to sit with the education officer and I was talking to another person and this education officer.  And my friends Rose and Gordon, he left as a flight sergeant but at this stage he was a sergeant he was a techie, actually he has just completed his second masters he is in civvi street now but he is a very very determined man but never ever wanted to be commissioned didn't like Cranwell didn't like all the pomp and circumstance didn't like all the crap that went with it you know he has got his views and I don't necessarily agree with hi but that didn't stop him from being extremely bright, interesting and a lovely person.  And doing very well at his job and this education officer I don't know how we got on to the subject but I mentioned Gordon and how I think he had just completed his first degree and I didn't have mine then and this education officer said what, you mean somebody in the ranks has a degree? I thought you are an education officer and you are asking me that question and I said what you think all the people in the ranks are brainless idiots and he said why isn’t he an officer and I said cause he doesn't want to be an officer, he likes being on the shop floor and getting his hands dirty, and he likes physically fixing things not being an engineering officer telling them to fix the things. But he could not get over it.  I mean I know who I had no respect for and it was not my friend.

Continue to talk about PhD and narrow boat business.52:16