# Interview 1 - Lisa - 14 June 2016

(officer, 19 years, married, yes, -1)

## C

Thank you for taking part

## L

It’s my pleasure

## C

We are just going to do a bit of a chat about your experiences in leaving the military, it’s all a bit informal all very chilled out I’ve only got 8 questions now but we shall just see how we go.

Why you joined the RAF?

## L

Initially I joined the Royal Air Force, a friend of mine had joined a little while before and had seduced me with the tales of travel and adventure and the kind of getting away from NI and it wasn’t that just necessarily I wanted to get away from NI but I had grown up in the Troubles and so therefore wanted to expand my horizons and initially I had actually applied for the Metropolitan police in London and so was in the process of going through their section process when this friend of mine said have you ever considered the RAF. And so initially it was just a just to kind of dip my toe in and see, and then miraculously they offered me a place it seemed to be fate really that was what I was meant to go and do and so I joined because I had finished uni and I had grew up in and studied in NI and wanted to see more of what the world had to offer. And I was the first and only of my cousins and my sisters to do that, they all stayed in NI. So I felt a bit brave and a bit courageous so it was really just to join an organisation that was kind of very disciplined that had a very strong patriotic vibe to it. Cause most of my family are police officers as well. So it was kind of akin to that and gave me the opportunity, or I hoped at that stage, to see the world and do interesting and unusual things, but to be honest I probably didn’t given it as much thought as I had done about joining the police. Because I went from my initial registration of interest to actually joining the RAF and starting IOT was about 8 months so while the Met process was much longer because you had to fly to England to London for every stage. So I think I just got carried away with the whole momentum of it. I don’t think have anything more profound about why I joined the RAF. I just stumbled in to it.

## C

**When did you start thinking about leaving the Air Force?**

I think initially I had done about 8 years in my first specialisation, which in hindsight was probably a bit of a mistake. So I joined the Air Force and was having a wonderful time but didn’t actually enjoy my job. So I enjoyed being in the RAF and I enjoyed the fast paced life style I enjoyed the moving around, I enjoyed the deployments but the actual job I didn’t really because I wasn’t a flight commander I was in charge of civil servants. So I was a line manager, all of the military things who a lot of my peers who were in different trades or branches logistics, or police or whatever, were very much commanders and I was looking after a selection of individuals whose motivations were very different to mine and so after about 8 years I tried to change specialisations and they wouldn’t let me, so I had actually put in my papers to leave but wasn’t ready but didn’t really feel like I was ready to leave and that I was doing it because I didn’t like I had much option, I didn’t want to continue on doing the jobs I was doing and then eventually I got my branch changed and was continuing quite happily until I started having children and I think to be honest and

It sounds like a cliché but the moment I started to *have children* my focus in life very much moved away from me and what I wanted and to the kind of bigger picture and so the first seeds were planted I think on my first maternity leave and the thought of going back to work distressed me greatly and then I got back to work and everything was ok and then the second time I went on maternity leave I kind of felt more comfortable about it and

By the time I had my third child it was evident that I was now massively behind the drag curve in respect of my peers in terms of advancement and promotion and I very much felt like I was being given all the responsibility and challenges of the next rank up but you are not quite good enough. And that frustrated me and I understand that for some people, women who take maternity leave shouldn’t have their cake and eat it, but I was no less of a service person and I was no less effective or competent than to be honest my male counterparts who were also parents who were also having to juggle family with work.

And then the crux came when they wanted to post me and I thought I can’t do this anymore. There is no real benefit to me anymore, there is nothing I am getting out of this apart from a job and I am stagnating I am not progressing I am now limited to what jobs I can do because I am stuck at the same rank and but at the same time I am a regular and I am expected to deploy I am expected to move and that is a great upheaval for my family and I think initially I was quite happy to come back to work after my third child but when my son was about 4 months old and they wanted to post me to Oxfordshire that is when I thought I am finding this too stressful now I can’t do everything. And I basically said I am taking my option point and I need to leave.

So actually from flash to bang, although the seed had been sewn in terms of I had started to divorce myself from the RAF over a period of time the actual ejection button was pressed as a reaction to an event as opposed to gradually coming to that conclusion on my own it was very much a reaction to something that had happened.

Although they tried very much to accommodate me the writing was on the wall I wasn’t going to be promoted I was very much seen as you know, “She would be a very good officer if it wasn’t for the fact she didn’t keep on having children” I felt that unspoken and In fact it was sometimes spoken if I am really honest my boss actually said “You know you would have been a Squadron Leader by now if it wasn’t for the fact you had had children”

Which he doesn’t have children and I think he felt he was being honest but it just cemented the fact that there is a, and I am sure it is in every walk of life, but there is very much a view point that if you have the audacity to have children and go off on maternity leave then .. I know it is not the same for everybody and there are plenty of examples of women who have excelled in their careers having had children but that is not, I think, the greater experience. So that is really why I left it was as a result of an event but I had already started to divorce myself from the organisation.

## C

**And how did you do that? How did you divorce yourself from?**

## L

I think it was gradual I think the comments that were made when I came back from maternity certainly on the second and third occasion had very much, I mean mothers guilt comes with having a child, but I can remember after having my daughter and coming back off maternity leave they wanted to post me away from my husband to our school, now there are no childcare facilities down near the school at all, there is no crèche there is no nursery and its weekend work and evening work and I explained to them that I had a small child and that I would have to go there on my own because my husband was at High Wycombe and my desk officer said at that point

“You are really going to have to decide what you really want from the RAF and who is going to take the lead between you and your husband” and it was that kind of comment and attitude that had started to chip away at my unwavering loyalty to the RAF. And when

I mean when I came back the job that I was offered was obviously colocation but it was almost like you can’t have your cake and eat it you are now a mum and the pigeon hole you are being put into regardless of what you do or what you achieve and I felt like very much overlooked and I think that was when I started to and actually it was like realising a relationship you are in is very much one sided and you try and you know to overcompensate so I would volunteer for all the crappy yobs that no one else wanted to do I really tried to juggle it not letting anyone down and then slowly the realisation that it was very much one sided and that the expectation was on me to pull it out of the bag that it became a bit easier actually to walk away because it was becoming a bit toxic.

Cause I was starting to get quite resentful people that I thought were less competent having been given jobs or opportunities that I wasn’t offered that I could have done or

even just being given the opportunity to turn it down but it was almost like I was dismissed before the thought was raised in their head. I think when you have spent a long time in an organisation and you have been selfless, and I felt I had been selfless, I’ve gone where they want me to go, I have done what they want me to do that actually it felt a bit, I felt a bit cheated I think. And so actually once that penny started to drop it became increasingly easier to and so therefore I had, we had already started making plans for when I would eventually leave we just didn’t know when that would happen. So we bought a house my husband made sure that in his career he was embedded in the area he wanted to be in etc etc and so it was a gradual as opposed to a .. you know so the actual decision to leave was easy if I am being very honest. It also helped that I had a service complaint on going at the time for discrimination so that kind of focused my mind slightly when I met with the Station Commander and senior officers in manning who compared having a baby to having a hip replacement and who told me that I couldn’t expect, as anybody who took extended leave from the RAF, couldn’t expect to pick up where they left off in their career. So then, yeh, it became pretty easy to tell them to stick their job.

## C

**You said cheated, but what else did you feel when you made that decision?**

## L

I think unlike other jobs, although it was a long time ago I have had other jobs your level of investment into that job because you give 4 weeks or 2 weeks notice or whatever and there is an expectation that your loyalties only go so far, and companies want to retain their best candidates have incentives whether that be financial or training or whatever the case may be and I felt disappointed, in that the expectations that I had when I joined although I have had a fantastic time and I think that the Air Force is a fantastic organisation to join as long as you are realistic as to what it is you are joining for and what it is you are going to get out of it. I went into recruiting for the RAF and one of the things that we sold was if you do your job well if you are a good service person, put service before self, then you will get promoted we will manage your career for you. There is opportunities for everybody and I think I felt disappointed that I had accepted to leave at a higher rank or at least one rank up than what I joined as but also that all of the flannel basically that I had been peddling in the careers office and that I believed myself when in my case, and I can only talk for myself, was actually untrue. And I have had more than one person say to me, “you know you have got to fight for these things”, I am too busy doing my job I am too busy serving the RAF I shouldn’t have to fight for the scraps that they might throw my way. So I think I felt cheated because I put a lot of into my relationship in the Air Force.

My father died and I went out on deployment three months later, they did give me the opportunity to delay it but I actually I didn’t want to let either the Air Force or anyone else down so I got on with it. There has been times when the Air Force needs have interfered with my own personal life but that is what you join for but the realisation that loyalty is very much a one way street probably disappointment is not the right word for that I felt I probably was starting to feel quite bitter so it was a good time for me to go because there is nothing worse than staying and it is more than just a job it is a relationship, it has to be I think, I know there are people out there who can do the job and can detach themselves completely from I couldn’t I was never of that make where the Air Force was very much a massive part of my life I couldn’t just detach myself from it, it was very much that and so I had identified myself as a member of the Armed Forces and then to be in a relationship where you find out you are the one who is putting all the effort in. I think I felt quite bitter about that. You know I did everything they asked of me, except having children they didn’t ask me to do that *(humour*).

But I done everything, you know, but the minute that I asked for something, just a little bit for me that’s when and I know, and I keep going back to this, I know there are women out there who make it work and do the juggling and everything but I don’t feel that they are the norm.

The Wing Commanders and above that I know are all childless females, they may be married or in a relationship but they don’t have children. In my specialisation alone, in the last 18 months to 2 years we have lost 6 mums There are now 2 mums in the whole of the specialisation officer corps, and I think there is a difference and I know we know have shared parental leave I was having a chat with the employment policy guys and there has been literally nobody, There have been a handful, there has been very very few men who have taken on that opportunity because I think there is an understanding that it has an impact on your career. So yes disappointment is the overwhelming, that it didn’t work out better. You know I have a great time and I don’t regret having my children but I think that If I am really honest I am a bit disappointed that it didn’t progress any further than it did.

## C

**So how would you, before you went on maternity how would you describe you job, what your job was like.**

## L

So my job was a watch keeper in NI, it was a very reactionary job so it was on call it was also your shift could be from 7 at night to7 in the morning weekends it was whenever they needed you. Because we were quite a small team it meant you could be recalled from leave that if something was occurring you could be called in as additional support so your life was never your own and even when you were not on duty or you were on leave you always had to have your mobile phone with you. It was a very reactionary role and I really enjoyed that I enjoyed that aspect of it I did find at times it was very intrusive and that was the start of, I got engaged whilst I was there, I also started to plan a wedding and so there was times where it was bloody inconvenient for then to phone up and ask can you come in because I was either in the middle of meeting with the vicar or that type of thing and my fiancée was in England at the time so I was only ever seeing him on the weekends and so it did feel at times very claustrophobic but it was one of the reasons I had gone into that particular role. But even my jobs, once I had branch changed It meant you were all ways on call pretty much all the time, because of the jobs that I did you were never really off duty if you see what I mean and I know it is the same for an awful lot of branches and trades in the Air Force I was no different but you know it was a very reactionary role and then I fell pregnant and that is really when because I had an Army Colonel at the time who was my boss who sat me down and said “you can’t have your cake and eat it you are going to have to decide” which I found very offensive, very very offensive but dismissed it as a grumpy old colonel who had been in the Army, I am in the Air Force we do things differently in the RAF. And that’s just your opinion mate kind of attitude.

But then fell pregnant well then, you know, it became quite evident the fact that I couldn’t do some of the on calls and they were maybe working alone or the H&S for the Army out there if you get pregnant once you get to a certain stage then you can’t do x, y and z and they found it an inconvenience and it was very evident that they found it an inconvenience.

So even though when I was there I was doing everything I was doing before and in some cases more that fact that I wasn’t at their beck and call was evidently a bone of contention. So that was the job I was doing before I started having children.

## C

**So what sort of things kept you awake at night?**

## L

Not an awful lot before I had children, I think before I had children it was very much is my career going in the right course, so and so has got this course or this job what did they just not think of me or is it just not the right time

To be really honest with you it was all to do with work related issues or if especially as with my job if there was an issue ongoing it was all to do with work.

Since having children my focus has shifted with more so how long have I got in this job, what am I going to do next, are my children going to be moved around and if so how regularly how long how will the disruption affect them and there was a little bit of how is this effecting my career, but probably not as much as it should have done, but by this stage I thought I had proved myself on more than one occasion and that I was getting really good reports everyone was saying all the right things by I never seemed to be able to get that next step and no one seemed to be able to tell me what that would be I even said “is it a deployment because if that is what you need me to do?”

I wouldn’t have gone, I would have left but at least then there would have been an element of honesty. But I was told there is not many deployments left now you have already been out of area albeit not in recent years but you have got that tick as a Flight Leiutenant so I think

Since having children it was all about the impact my job was having on my family and the stability I wanted for them. And then when it came to actually leaving it was the financial side as well. Where are we going to live, can we survive financially can we on one wage along with my pension etc etc. And then once we had worked all those things out it was pretty a no brainer to be honest.

It was no longer worth the sacrifice.

## C

**And how did that make you feel?**

## L

Relieved. I think relieved that I didn’t have to pretend that it wasn’t worrying me or that I could voice it and then when I had my long conversations with my desk officer or with my boss my boss reaction was I completely understand and in no way tried to convince me otherwise and He said “if I hadn’t had children you would have been a Squadron Leader by now” and because he is very career driven and he has made massive sacrifices in his personal for his career I just think he expects everyone else to do the same.

My desk officer said, “Oh Lisa don’t jump ship just yet we will find you something else” but I said “to what end, why? Are you telling me that if I do this then I am going to get promoted?

“Well I can’t forecast that”

”Well then you can’t give me anything, I am going to uproot my family, my husband is going to live in London and I am going to be on call because I am the deputy Squadron Commander pretty much for a sqn that is geographically dispersed and I am supposed to do it while looking after 3 children and oh by the way the Air Force won’t give me a house big enough for an au pair so you are not helping me here so why am I putting myself through this stress”, and it just then became you know what you are not making this enticing enough anymore for me and whilst I am scared of what is on the other side I don’t want to stay purely because I am scared. Whilst I still have a little bit of time in my working life I would like to see if I am only a Flight Leiutenant of the RAF or if I can do more than that which I think I can.

## C

**What has been the greatest challenge to your career progression?**

## L

I did put in a service complaint and I had a very interesting and a very protracted conversation with some senior officers in manning and with the Station Commander and it is evident and despite the fact that they tell me otherwise it is very obvious that there is an ingrained attitude, that even though women who take maternity and it is a protected factor under law that actually you are almost as the Group Captain said to me “had you had the advantage of an extra report you would have come higher on the promotion board”

So you are telling me by inference that I was disadvantaged and so they don’t see it that way but there is very much that line in the sand and so I asked them had I come back after 6 months what you are saying is that I was entitled to maternity I just took too long Those king of conversations were had. And actually they ruled in my favour and they reconvened the board and I scored higher but came lower on the board, so I got more points, I scored higher, but came lower down so whatever way they explain this to me unfortunately they are never going to convince me that the reason I didn’t get promoted on that board had nothing to do with that I was on maternity.

So that has been my biggest disappointment to be honest you know what but actually I put up a good fight I was a bit of a thorn in their side for a couple of months and I have still got grounds to take them to an employment tribunal, I haven’t quite decided whether I will bother to do that but you know I think I got my point across. Actually I don’t think they give a monkeys, I’m just it’s done and dusted now. That has been the biggest disappointment, that whole saga because if I had only suspected it before I did the service complaint they have now confirmed what I had suspected. They can stuff it. They don’t pay me enough to put up with that shit.

## C

**So if you had a magic wand what would you change?**

## L

I think that is quite simple I would change the hierarchy’s attitude, oh actually I’ve got an even better one for you the Chief of the Air Staff who I met at an event a couple of weeks ago. I was chatting with K she is from employment policy and we were having a chat about maternity etc. because I had set up this peer to peer and they are trying to resurrect it. Once more because obviously I got pregnant and then buggered off on maternity and never did anything about it.

## C

**What was it about?**

## L

It was peer to peer we were going to do workshops for example filling in school application forms or what childcare is available in the area, or what your maternity right are or things like exercise in pregnancy. I spoke to the general manager and she is on maternity leave now and things like support especially for women who have just been posted into the area, who are maybe trying to get to grips with their job and maybe childcare for other children and they find they are pregnant for some people it is a lot of information to take in so I set that up, you know I have been here for a while, I shall share some of my knowledge and experience and so I was having a chat to K about resurrecting this and I have a lot of the planning that I initially did and Chief of the Air Staff came over and he said “oh you two look very serious” and K explained what we were talking about and who I was and he made some comment that I didn’t hear and K laughed and I said “Och yes Sir, thank you for sponsoring my family” and he said “Well I don’t really have a choice” and it was the way in which he said it that he then realised, because I think my face, cause I was completely sober and I think he saw my face and tried to back track about how

“We are going to have to, hopefully with the NEM things can change. But we really must in order to foster and nurture our brightest stars we are going to have to stop disadvantaging them when they take, when they have children.” And that came out of the Chief of the Air Staffs mouth. And I felt like saying to him “Well Sir you are the person to do it. Change the attitudes, change the attitudes, cause it is all there. Even if it is not in your manuals it under law, you can access it through the internet, you know that thing called google, you can sometimes get on Dii Sir, I’d get one of your staff officers to google maternity rights under law you know Equality rights I can give you all the info if you want ‘but it is the attitudes and peoples interpretation of what they can and can’t do. And you are the person to do it.

It is about changing attitudes if you really mean what you say in so far as you want to nurture your brightest stars. And your brightest stars are not all men, your brightest stars are not all singles with no children or people have the fortunate kind of household who can abdicate all responsibility for the family and dedicate every waking moment to the RAF, your brightest stars are mums, your brightest stars are dads, your brightest stars are individuals who have got a whole range of skills and experience that go far wider than the RAF and if you really want to keep them, because they are going off and earning 90 grand plus in other areas, other companies are getting the benefit of your shining stars are going to have to put your money where your mouth is and stop acting like an excerpt from the 1950s. You either mean it or you don’t and no amount of policy is going to change the attitudes that you have in the RAF. The minute we start moving away from this old boys club, even if you look at our Air Officer system, you don’t necessarily get jobs on your merit it’s about whet your senior mates think you who should go where. So I think if I could wave a magic wand, it would be to fast forward the hierarchy which is predominately male of the RAFs attitude and some of our higher officers who are female don’t have children, have no

responsibility for another living human is to bring them up to date with modern thinking and I am not saying that industry has it perfectly sewn up there is discrimination in industry but if you mean what you say then it’s there just make sure that the attitudes go along with it and people don’t say stupid things like disadvantaging and if you hadn’t had children and all those little comments that just starts degrading an individual’s self of worth and starts having a knock of effect to their self-confidence.

You start believing that you are only worth what you are doing at that particular moment in time and you don’t strive or aspire to be anything more.

## C

**Why do you think they have got that attitude where do you think it comes from?**

## L

I think it is a very antiquated attitude. When you look at our hierarchy you have to follow a certain path in order to get to a certain rank. We don’t have, where you can go to different companies for example as an MD or director having being to another organisation and bring all that experience with you. We have a very archaic and we have to and I understand that but I think those individuals who are high up in our organisation who really do drive how we operate all the way down have a very 2.4 family mentality, you know even if they don’t necessarily, maybe they are on their second or third marriage. The woman has very much been the home maker and therefore has looked after things so that he or she can focus on their career. Or they haven’t for whatever choice they don’t seem to I am not judging but we don’t seem to have an awful lot of through blood where young aspirational or inspirational individuals who also happen to have families or visions as to how we can best utilise our manpower.

Because that is how Manpower is one of our most stretched resources that they do the majority of them are in their 50s

Their life experience is completely different to me, to be honest as a female, who has been in the RAF for 18 years and has 3 small children. Their life experiences are completely different to mine and I feel no connection to them what so ever. And I don’t feel that there is no interest in what have to say or what I have to offer because as soon as I started to have children I became a none entity really. And I know there are a few, I think, I don’t know so much about other though I have spoken to some fathers who have been told that where through personal circumstances that They are the ones that have to do nursery pick up or drop off because their wife has a career, and they feel very much inhibited by the fact that “I am really sorry I need to go and pick up my child” or “I am really sorry but nursery closes at 6 and I need to be there” We have been talking around this subject for several hours now can we just get to the chuffing point. There is that kind of pressure that you are almost not allowed to talk about them inside of work so I think it is just that we have got old antiquated stale individuals who quite frankly I can’t see any vision I am not inspired by any senior officers, and I have worked for a few of them. And they were uninspirational station commanders and they were uninspriational senior officer. And until we get some of the new blood through, and even then I’ve got a couple of friends and they are already thinking about leaving because they don’t want to stay they want to go and work for these big shiny companies who offer far far more than the air force can and who they feel are going to be in amongst the best of the best of their peer group.

We are becoming a bit frayed around the edges a bit stale and a bit stagnant if I am being honest we just do things the same way over and over again and it’s boring. It’s really boring.

## C

**So you made the decision to leave, so what keeps you awake at night now?**

## L

I think when I actually decided to leave it was what opportunities would I have when I left. Do I have anything to offer an employer outside of the Air Force? How am I going to compete with people who I fell or felt, I don’t know, had far more skills and far more experience to offer an employer than I had? Cause I found when I was doing my CV I found that really emotional I couldn’t seem to fathom what is my USP that they go on about and to be honest I don’t think I have got that really kind of pin pointed yet to be fair. But the responses I have got from companies that have approached me it has been very positive the 5 jobs that I have put feelers out for I have got interviews for three of them. I think I would have got more but I don’t have the industry recognised qualifications and that is something that I am doing at the moment. So it has given me a bit of a push so actually now the things that keep me awake at night are if I do take a job in X, Y or Z how practically am I going to make that work with 3 small children and are they going to be understanding about the fact that I am and I am going to have to be very selective about who I go and work for.

So one of the companies which is an American company I think I am going to move away from it because, you know, I don’t really want another all-encompassing job where I am on the end of the phone, you know my husband’s phone goes off at 4 and 5 in the morning e-mails from his office in America I don’t want that, I don’t want that. I also don’t want to travel into London so it’s about trying to work out what is going to be a good fit for me. So the things that keep me awake in terms of that is is there going to be another organisation that I am going to fit into and I am I going to be able to fit into a another area or am I going to struggle am I going to find it a bit too alien after spending 18 years in the Air Force. But if you don’t try you are never going to find out are you and unlike the Air Force where you have to give a year’s notice I mean Jesus if it doesn’t quite work out I have been slightly reassured that there are other opportunities out there. Not all of them are going to fit and I am not going to fit all of them but hopefully I will find my round peg at some point.

## C

**So when you say fit can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean?**

## L

I think the things I am a bit nervous about is that I am very comfortable in the Air Force I have been in for a long time I know what I can and can’t get away with in terms of conversation, dare I say it banter. But also I wear a uniform I don’t have to think about what I have to wear, I don’t have to think about anything other than putting my hair back in a bun and sticking a uniform on. The things that I am worried about in terms of fitting are am I going to feel alienated from a workforce that has a very unique way of interacting and operating and I had a little bit of experience with this when I worked with another Ministry of Defence organisation, that were all, they were none military and I did struggle a little bit I must confess because I am very much, when you say you are going to be some where you turn up when you say you are going to do something you do it that kind of mentality and they were much more fluid in their thinking they had little break out areas where they always seemed to be having chats and I find that quite frustrating because, just do it! We have talked about this we know what we want to do I am very much of a planner and forecaster and I want to know but what I can’t be doing with procrastination and constant updates on everything and trying to find that level I think I might find that quite alien and that is what I am worried about in terms of fitting.

Am I too aggressive in my behaviour? Am I too military? So I do get irritated when we say we are going to do something then 3 days later we are still talking about it. That kind of thing I think I will find frustrating, but obviously I am going to have to adapt how I behave whilst also ensuring that all the things I have told them I am good at don’t get eroded.

One of the things I have said is that I am very self-disciplined I am a self-motivator when I say I will deliver something I endeavour to deliver and if there is a delay then I have to plan as to how we can get it back on track. Where I think if I go into an organisation that is very fluid, I think that is the term my husband uses, “They are very fluid” I’ve got to get sucked into that and all my unique selling points then get a bit eroded and I think it’s about trying to find your niche, we will see.

## C

**With all of this that has happened, how do you feel about the Air Force now as you are leaving it? Emotionally how do you regard it?**

## L

Because I still live in quarters and I still have a very much close interaction with the RAF, I don’t feel that I am leaving yet if you see what I mean. So I am in this lovely hiatus where, because I am going back to this reserve job, I am in this lovely hiatus where I don’t have to put up with any of the negative stuff but I am still going to family happy hours, I am still going for coffees with colleagues, I am still using the station crèche I still feel very much part of the community. I think when I move away and I move out of it my emotional response might be slightly different but I have out grown it, if I am absolutely honest I’ve out grown it I was very nervous about leaving when I first put my papers in because I didn’t know whether the Air Force had valued me at the right level, you know, a bit like when you put something into auction are you going to get higher or lower than your estimate price, and I did kind of think has the Air Force valued me at the right level and actually as I have discovered the jobs I am being put forward to by the recruitment consultant, jobs I am going for they are significantly more than I am on in the Air Force, notwithstanding the lovely houses we live in etc., the actual wage you get in your pocket with the opportunity, if I get certain other qualifications which can enhance my earning potential even more so at the moment, I am glad that I have left the job or at least the job I was in and I don’t think that even if I continue on the reserve I will be very surprised if I am still there a year after starting.

I feel obligated to take the reserve job because I said I would, and that part of my military kind of background ethos I don’t think it will ever go away I kind of feel obligated to take it on I said I would. So I at least need to give them the opportunity to find somebody else. But in terms of the rest it because the Air Force is much more than a job I don’t feel detached from that so when I finally move away and my daughter goes to a different school and my two boys are in a different nursery I think that will be the litmus test as to how I feel about it. But I feel free for the first time in a long time completely shackled the shackles have come off and that the future is very much what I make it, whether that is good or bad, and I don’t have to curtail down to somebody else’s vison of what my life should be like. And that sounds very dramatic, I get that, that sounds very dramatic but actually if I am being really honest that is how I feel and I am not trying to lay all of my woes at the Air Forces door they have been a very good employer and I have done things I would never have done had I not joined the Air Force. I have met some inspirational people that I am not sure that I would have met if I had done any other job and the memories are memories that I will hold very very dear. And If and any of my children ever wanted to join the military then I would be very encouraging but it is time for me to go.

## C

**What would be your best memory?**

## L

Oh my goodness, do you know what there is loads of them. Actually loads of them I think all of them revolve around the people I have met from being on a training exercise and the calamities you get up to in the middle of the night when you are trying to night navigate around Longmore Camp you know to a girl I knew in the Falklands thumping a Major. I can honestly say there is too many for me to put my finger on, you know my first tour in the Air Force was in Italy you know fucking amazing, I have been to the Falkland’s, I have been to Oman I have been all over the bloody place. I have been winched onto a cruise ship in the South Atlantic, that’s one way to gate crash I cruise ship, there has been too many but all of them have been as a result of my interaction with people not to do with any personal achievement or anything like that. But just and I think that is what I am going to really miss but you know the friends I have made I am going to keep I am going to keep in contact with, I am friends with people who left years ago, years ago and I am still mates with them, I have a lot of very happy memories. They were my family for a long long time when my family were in NI and I do see them as my extended family with all of the ups and downs, they frustrate the hell out of me they don’t always behave the way I want them to and all of that but I am incredibly proud of the time I spent in the Air Force and I am glad I made the decision to leave when I did because it is not, somebody said to me “oh it’s not the Air Force that you joined” it is, that is the problem it hasn’t fucking changed. It is not progressing any faster, I personally don’t think, it is stagnating and I think it needs it really does need some new blood now how they do that I don’t know, there must be some way of injecting some kind of life into the organisation because it is catatonic at the minute. But I do love it and I have loved it, it has been a good little home for me. A wee off from NI.

## C

Thank you.