# Nicola - Interview 1 19 Oct 2017

(airwoman, 13 years, single, no, +7)

## C

I just want to double check a couple of things.  Are you 29 now?

## Nicola

No, 30.

## C

30, and are you married?

## Nicola

I'm single

## C

You're single.  And that is your own place you are in?

## Emma

yeh

## C

No kids?

## Nicola

No

## C

And what was your last job when you left the Air Force?

## Nicola

Erm recruiter at the \*\*\*\*\*\*\* office.

## C

Ok.  And you are currently working in what kind of role?

## Nicola

Erm so I sort of do internal recruitment, I am a recruitment advisor for a not for profit organisation.

## C

OK.  I just need to ask these questions so that if anyone ever asks me if you are real I can give the details otherwise I could be just making everything up.  Right I am just going to crack straight into it then if that is ok, yeh?

## Nicola

yeh

## C

So, you joined the military when you were 16? And why did you join cause that is that is quite young, isn't it?

## Nicola

yeh well I think it wasn't I did at well school but I didn't want I started earning money erm and then I just wanted to leave and earn money full time to be honest.  So I wanted to become a photographer, I googled photography training and erm then I took the selection test and I didn't have enough spatial awareness to become a photographer erm so I became a HR administrator also my uncle was in but it was wired because I never really thought about him being in until I actually until I actually started going through the process the recruitment process. Erm  I don't know at what point I changed my mind it was like, no I don't want to do that I want to carry on doing this job that I was doing but then my uncle wrote me this massive long message about how he was in Beijing in the embassy and it was amazing and it was really glamourous so yeh I was definitely eager to do it. yeh so.

## C

So, so what sorry what would you say really appealed to you then about joining the military as opposed to, to continuing doing photography in a different?

## Nicola

I think probably like erm the independe4cne of being away from home at that age definitely as a teenager I craved independence erm and probably like being able to travel and go to different countries that appealed to me.

## C

ok that is fine cool.  ok so when did you start thinking about leaving?

## Nicola

Erm so on and off I always kind of saw 30 as the time.  And cause my 12 cause I joined at 16 and my first years didn't count count erm in my service so my 12 years I was going to get 30 that was kind of like a half way point as well isn't it erm you need to get erm a resettlement grant at that point as well erm a lot of people you know would say oh you get in the pension trap if you stay longer erm and all that sort of thing.  I had always had 30 as like I would decide then if I would stay in for ever or not but a lot of the time I kind of felt like yeh I love it I am going to stay in forever and a lot of people were really surprised when I put my notice because I had it was a life style. So I think I always kind of had it in my mind that I could leave <><<><>,but also I would look at other things and I couldn't see what else what I wanted to do so that would be a reason for not leaving because I couldn't see anything else that I would want to do more than what I was doing do you know what I mean?

## C

yeh

## Nicola

erm yeh so yeh <><><>< while erm and I when I did put my notice in I hadn't decided what I was going to do.  So, I put my notice in and yeh then just decided through the resettlement process I guess.05:22

## C

ok, it was just something that you had in your mind you just thought after 12 years, being 30 its a good point to either move and start a new career in something else or stay in and commit full ..

## Nicola

well I kind of thought that 40 too, it seemed like it was too old to start a new career in my mind then erm and it seemed like as well I think, another thing was as well erm like moving around every couple of years its really exciting when you are young and going away and the possibility of going away <><><>< its really exciting when you are young and then you know even though I don't have like some responsibilities and reasons why it would be more difficult I just think you just get tired of running yourself around a bit and you just want to settle down and yeh I and so I did buy a house before but I got posted away from it and then I rented it out then I ended up selling it cause it is too difficult looking after it and now I have  like bought this house and I can live in it and I can travel to work from it everyday, you know and I am near my mum as well so there's lots of reasons I suppose its when you are older like your priorities <><>< actually change I think don't they.

## C

So did you have any nervousness about making that decision to leave?  Is there anything you were concerned about?

## Nicola

Yeh, at one point my hair was actually falling out onto my pillow (laughs)

## C

Really!

## Nicola

Yeh, I was freaking out, yeh like I went to find out what it was and it was like stress from leaving, yeh cause there was times when I thought oh my God, I've put my notice in and I don't actually know what I am doing and a lot of people were like well you can change your mind and I thought like No! like I shouldn't just change my mind because I don't know that is just a ridiculous reason, you know.  So it was a long, I'm glad I gave myself the 18 months <><>< cause it was, it was like an emotional rollercoaster erm but yeh made it, its not as bad as I thought.

## C

So its so what was it that you were scared about then, or nervous about?

## Nicola

I think it was the unknown, so like not knowing like what was going to happen.  That I wouldn't fit in with you know civilians like you know, like you know you get told from like basic training like you know you are no longer a civilian, like civi whatever and it gets drummed into you doesn't it, throughout your career you are different from them, <><><>, whatever, I suppose you need that don't you. You feel that your something different and you know feel that the reason you are doing something definitely you do need that while you are in but then you need to change to transition from that afterwards to kind of stay sane. Erm so yeh it was just it was just during that transition really of just like become thinking like what a civilian is, there's lots of differences and kind of come to terms with it and that it wasn't this big scary thing that maybe I wouldn't be able to do as well and like job wise you know you think cause I'd never had, any other job that I'd had before being in the RAF was like a manual job so I I just seemed like it would all be too different and even like when you are looking for work looking at the role profiles on websites is looking at the job descriptions it was I mean you can't its hard to relate it all and just being just kept thinking oh my God,  I can't do that.  And then it turns out that you know its actually a lot less than what I've have been doing before.  But its just worded differently so it was just really scary for those reasons thinking  that you couldn't be that person you didn't know what it was erm yeh just the unknown and like would I regret it as well cause its such a big decision cause I've been in for so long like but you don't know until you've done it but you have to make that leap and it is like a leap of faith it really is, yeh, yeh, soryy to have gone on.

## C

No, no gosh no its great.  But you said it wasn't I mean you are what literally only 2 or three months after leaving and you said erm it wasn't as bad as you thought so ..

## Nicola

No well I got a job and I literally started working before I had like finished erm so I was still being paid by the RAF and then I got this new job as well and its such a lovely a lovely organisation it is really nice to have a job where you know that the organisation is not for profit and are doing so much good erm and it is really easy to get enthusiastic about that kind of work.  So it has been really easy for me to become a recruiter for this sort of job because it is really easy to sell this kind of thing because it is all really nice. Erm and then its feel good as well for you and for everybody else that is working there you know it is a feel good sort of job erm and its you know walking distance, I cycle to work and yeh I've got my house so normally you would like I already see my family way more erm so all the things that are there already the only thing I have missed out on is erm so I I was like part of the surf team and they have surf champs the other week and seeing that on facebook you know I couldn't just like go down to Newquay for the week and like it wouldn't come out of my leave or anything like that, like I  thought I had a little bit of a pang then but I mean I was really sad that I would really miss it or I'd have some sort of mental breakdown but it just hasn't happened (laughs)

## C

Good.10:56

## Nicola

It might yet, its early days (laughter)

## C

Lets hope not.  So erm can you give me erm a sort of vivid memory of your time in the service?

## Nicola

Erm, mmm like like a positive memory or

## C

Well, yeh but it doesn't have to be positive, if you think back to those 13 years something that jumps out.

## Nicola

Erm mm <><><>< happy cause there is so many erm, er so one that one is slightly more significant than the others erm <><><><>< Benson erm because that was like my first camp so I think that is more special to you and I was I was spent longer there than I did anywhere else.  I was 5 years there, erm and and I have a lot of memories there and lots of friends I made there I still see quite regularly.  Erm even though we haven't been posted together since then I formed some really good friendships erm so probably like memories of of working there and erm a did a couple of detachments while I was there as well  to the Falklands and to Iraq which were both memorable detachments for different reasons.  So yeh so probably that time more than anything else.

## C

Ok, and there was anything while you were in the service that worried or concerned you?

## Nicola

Erm in what way? <><><

## C

Well is there anything that sticks out I mean you mentioned moving around started to get wear a bit thin was there anything else that you were expected to do which you just thought uhh I've had enough of that.

## Nicola

Erm I think there's at work being in a male dominated environment it can wear a bit thin that is its alright sometimes but I just think as you get a bit older or spend time away from that and have to go back to it it can be a bit of a don't know I just started to find it a bit I knew it that it wouldn't be acceptable in other places.  I was just like urghh this is annoying up yeh I think that sensing this job that I have now is a completely female dominated because it is erm well its mainly women that end up doing not for profit jobs to be honest so erm yeh it is a much nicer environment to work in its a lot better.

## C

So can you give me an example of what you mean when you said men..

## Nicola

so erm its like so like being in a male dominated environment its like the kind of jokes they have between themselves like lewd banter that kind of thing and even if it is nothing directed at you or you are even involved in a conversation it is still happening around you erm and that can just be a little bit uhh why does this have to happen?  (laughs) you know I think it is something that you put up with from early on and you get used to erm but it doesn't mean it ever stops having an impact and even even in my last 6 months yeh I still thought about that.  <><><>, in my last 6 months I remember thinking ohthank God I don't have to put with this anymore cause I knew it wouldn't be acceptable outside.

## C

yeh.  ok, erm is there anything that worries you now as you are in terms of your job, your security and the life style?

## Nicola

erm like the money is not as good, its not so much of a worry as ughh I will have to work my way back up again kind of thing erm I I have already sorted of thinking ohh what if I get board and also my age is actually become more of a, a different I see my age from a different perspective so like being in the RAF I was like 30 is being old and then 40 was like you know you could end your career at 40 you can retire you know, so 40 and you then you'd sit and you would like by the time you are 55 and that's <><><><>< and in my work place now there are people there who are 65 and they are as fit as a fiddle they are still going to carry on forever and your just like wow actually I am only 30 it suddenly dawned on me that I have another 35 years at least of working and I can do anything you know its not like, its like this weird thing of how my age hasn't become, my age has changed so that's not so much of a worry it is just something that I think about more or maybe it is a worry because I have been thinking well Do I want to do this forever could I do something even bigger even more you know like II even thought about going to university and things like that. I mean I have just started an OU course and I am thinking about stopping work and going to, I could travel to Cardiff Uni from here easy on the train so even yeh all sorts of considerations that I haven't thought of because I'd thought 30 was old and now I realise its not.  Because in the military it is old, you know, wow do you know what I mean?  Its really weird.

## C

I do I think that is amazing, you are right because if you haven't reached a certain rank by a certain age you are almost written off, aren't you?

## Nicola

yeh yeh

## C

that happens at all ranks all the way through the system and it is a bit erma bit odd yeh different to cause well I think they have extended the age now to 60, you can stay into 60.

## Nicola

yeh, in certain areas they have yeh.

## C

But erm for us who I left 3 or 4 years ago it was always 55 or after your 22 that was if you had't reached the correct rank you were out weren't you.  that is brilliant, its like a new lease of life isn't it?

## Nicola

It is its amazing.  Cause I am actually really young.  (laughter)

## C

Oh dear, so if you had a magic wand and you could change anything about that military experience is there anything you would change?

## Nicola

erm,  yeh I would have liked to have an overseas tour.  Erm <><><><>< I don't think I would have changed any of the tours I did have or any of the jobs I had they were all quite good for different reasons and I got something out of each of them.  yeh I wouldn't really change any of it yeh.

## C

With, with that in mind then what do you think is the most positive thing you have taken from being in the military?

## Nicola

I just feel really capable of like it makes you feel that you can do like anything in any situation because you get thrown into so different situation so you kind of just feel like nothing is really a problem and I have definitely noticed that since I've been in my job where I am now.  I can see solutions to problems while the others don't and I think that is because in the military you know you do just work things out you know I mean I remember like literally painting like a rack you know cause you build something from scratch you know you will just whatever you <><>< yeh its just the way it works but people expect a lot to be done for them or to not have to think about things too much it seems, as much like well in this outside, well I don't know about everywhere but in my experience so far I think from being in those environments it has made me a better person in that way.

## C

That is brilliant so how would you describe life in the Air Force to a stranger who didn't really understand anything about the military?

## Nicola

Er well I did that all the time in recruitment, (laughs) <><>< erm well yeh I would I would <><>< if I had a choice I would do it all over again, if I could.  So erm its <><>< yeh I think it is a good environment for a younger person to like grow and get experience and travel opportunities and you know just get to do lots of sports and things like that are fantastic.  Erm yeh that's what I would say about it.  Erm but the other thing this is something I mentioned earlier but it slowly dawned on me as well when I was younger although I did I was interested in current affairs, not as much since as I've grown older and erm I went to Iraq and everything but I never gave it enough thought.20:17 about everything and I think because I was so young I think like that but then when Syria was on the news a lot more and you started seeing all the children and that and then I started thinking about bombing and that and I didn't become a complete hippy but in my head I was kind of I was finding it a little bit more difficult to erm to be okay with being within an organisation that was doing something that I didn't really agree with anymore.  Erm and that kind of slowly happened over the last few years and then when I had put my notice in it it became okay for me to have, it was like in a way a felt disloyal  and I to have those thoughts so much and in the last 18 months I kind of got more and more like it.  Like and more opinionated about it and I felt like it was okay for me to, I wouldn't express those opinions in work but like you know with my family and with friends and things I felt like I could have those opinions whereas before I didn't feel like I could.  Erm so I think that as well yeh.

## C

That, that is really interesting.  Because by making that decision to leave you almost gave yourself permission to to think that the Air Force, or the military, or the Government, whoever you know depending on what level you think of it erm wasn't necessarily doing the right thing. Yeh?

## Nicola

Mmm, well yeh it wasn't just that it was it was actually all to do with bombing which is like the main RAF thing as well. It was, cause you know how you get taught I don't if you get it at Cranwell but anyway, you know how you get caught the Geneva Convention and how you know unless and like I kind of always got that you know I had my head round that you know and unless someone is actually causing harm to you specifically you can't like fire at them.  To you know like civilians getting injured and like bombing and things and I just thought well we're not complying with that are we like it doesn't and seeing all the pictures of children and like that entire country just completely destroyed and like I don't know and I met some people as well who were Iraqis, and they talked about how when they left erm and then their entire home erm well they said their entire home land basically couldn't be recognised now and its the same for like Syrian's even if they did want to go home like there is nothing left, erm and I I and I you know I'm not saying that there's a a quick fix or any other fix that I know of but I just think that like that I can't agree with that any more and that was the main the main thing that the RAF did erm oh one other reason as well (laughs) there are a couple of reasons now.

## C

Its alright

## Nicola

when I was interviewing erm so as a recruiter you sometimes you can do like 10 interviews a week and a lot of the time I was interviewing really young people you know.  Sometimes they were like 15,16,17 erm and one of the questions that you had to ask was like one of the question you had to ask was at the end of the interview erm was erm as you are aware we are an armed organisation erm and erm you could be or you could be armed with a weapon erm and something about your life being at risk and you could be asked to take someone's life.  But basically it was like part of it erm and how do you feel about that?  And then you can see, you know, because you are watching someone's face, when you interview them and you can see like these 15, 16, 17 year olds having to seriously think about what how they would feel about taking someone's life and I was I just thought oh my God what am I doing, like, and I just really started feeling like ohh this is not very and so I I think I don't know if it was just because I'd put my notice in I was naturally disconnecting or if an actual part of me was making me erm I don't know so that I would be okay with leaving maybe it was something, part of it was making me like go against it or something but that started happening as well so then it made it easier to leave, yeh.

## C

That is absolutely fascinating. Really, really interesting.

## Nicola

yeh strange isn't it, yeh.

## C

I don't I mean yeh it it is but you are right you have got I mean nobody goes away til their 18, nobody would go overseas

## Nicola

yeh, but we do ask them that question at 15 sometimes because they are they are you know applying then to actually start when they are 16.

## C

And of course you have got to think in your head do these people really understand what I am asking them.

## Nicola

And there's a child, I'm asking a child if they are okay to be taking someone's life, I mean what the hell?

## C

yeh

## Nicola

its just like I I mean I was like a robot when I first started  and then it just slowly dawned on me there were .. I don't know I just couldn't then I just though what am I doing, yeh children are so taking someone's life wow I don't know (laughing)

## C

yeh, I had never thought of it like that at that age but I suppose it was the same question I was asked when I joined up I am sure you were too but I hadn't really, I was older I was 22 when I joined so it was different but yeh that really got to you and you didn't you didn't like, like it.

## Nicola

No no, what am I doing? yeh. yeh.

## C

So when you made that decision to leave can you just explain how you actually felt then because you had all this stuff going on ..

## Nicola

Oh it was so hard it was so hard I was really emotional it was ... I couldn't sleep for like ages afterwards it was so I mean I did feel like it was a little bit of a sense of relief I think but at the same time a sense of panic and I just felt massive anxiety and stuff and like I I have never not been able to sleep I can sleep anywhere I am really good at sleeping and I started having like erm yeh like feeling like anxious and not being able to sleep at night and stuff because my hair started falling out. Erm and I was like freaking out (laughs).

## C

So why do you think you reacted like that, because you had pretty much logically made that decision to leave because you are coming up to 30 but you still had this very emotional response.

## Nicola

Erm I think because I am a loyal person and you know I did really erm and I had such a great time and I was still there was still part of me that wanted to stay yeh I think there was definitely was still a part of me you know that wanted to stay, a part of me in one sense part of me that wasn't sure erm that I was dragging along to the end of the18 months you know I still right up until the end they sent me and e-mail saying you know you can change your mind your mind if you want to is there anything we can do for you to stay in you know I got e-mails from manning saying we can offer you a posting somewhere, what do you want? du dud du And I was like no I'm just gonna to leave and people at work you know even literally right up til my last few weeks my boss is saying to me you know if you want to change your mind (laughing) you so so erm it was there as well and there was a part of me I think it was just because of me did want to stay and that is why I was fighting with that part of me and just dragging it along with the rest of me.  Cause your not just one person, not just one person it sounds a bit funny but you are not just one part are you you are lots of parts so you know so it was just yeh, making the rest of it be ok yeh.

## C

yeh ok.  Erm when you actually made the decision to leave then were you supported, people were trying to persuade you not to go but did you find you resettlement useful and were you able to access it?

## Nicola

yeh, so I am the kind of person I really get on board with stuff erm cause like I love organising I love planning erm kind of like courses so this was like amazing for me. (laughs) so I really got into it all erm and I really got excited by it all and just I I threw myself into everything I made use of every single set up and opportunity there was and some of my friends were <><><><<><>, set my process together erm who didn't <><>< all of these things I heard <><><>, they moaned <>< you should have done this, you've hacked this, you should have done this so yeh I think I made use of everything and I found it really amazing really good really good courses all of erm all of the support I had from that was really, really good. I couldn't have asked for anything more yeh and still actually you know I still have e-mails from them checking that I am ok and ,.<><><><happy.

## C

And you said it was really during that resettlement process that you thought you'd go into HR that was when you found that you really wanted to be when you left?

## Nicola

yeh so erm I signed up for erm I did like a 5 week,29:20 <>< level 5 in HR <><><><yeh HR management erm which has go me this job (laughs) so that has really helped I also did coaching and mentoring I also did NLP, NLP <><>< erm and erm yeh I like it was more than really its weird because NLP the practioners course I was doing that because my friend a <><>  instructor said to me that erm the coaching and mentoring would be good to have erm if you are going into HR they like you to have that so I was doing it for that reason cause it would help me get a job but actually when I went through the NLP the course erm like it was in a way I felt like was I ever going to use this so a little bit cynical but at the same time it was a lot of like self-exploration in getting to know yourself so in a way it was like <><><>< not counciling but kind of a sort of reflective medatative sort of thing really well timed for me to get through the process to be honest, yeh it was weird yeh.30:33

## C

Ok so that's good so what were you expecting to be the biggest change before you left?

## Nicola

Erm I don't know I don't really know I think it was that I didn't know like it was just the unknown I think erm erm I don't know.  I think probably like the work place just being somewhere where I am not in the RAF.  I was looking forward to painting my nails and I do I've got like red nails, <><>< with my hair if I needed, so wearing my hair down make the most of it like not having to wear a uniform.  Erm yeh its really I think that's the biggest change that I thought it was just be a different work place that's not the RAF.

## C

And you enjoy being able to do that, you know? To have your nails done and have your hair the way you want it?  You see I've still got mine up.31:34

## Nicola

I know its funny, normally yeh er I've got used to it, I've had to get a better hair dryer cause I'm drying it more (laughter) <><>< in a bun usually not really done but no I do like hair in myself more I haven't quite dyed my hair pink like I said I would.

## C

I have a friend who said that too.

## Nicola

yeh

## C

Erm that has actually been brilliant, there wasn't that many questions just getting a feel of it but is there anything else you that comes to mind that you about that whole leaving option making that decision to leave and then actually leaving and the last couple of months that you think er that was interesting or...

## Nicola

.....I don't know I think we have covered like most things.  yeh it was just like an emotional roller coaster leaving erm but I guess I think its just because you know a part of you does want to stay but you know its not a big enough part of you.

## C

So are you quite excited about the future then and what happens next?

## Nicola

Yeh, yeh so I think in the in this job I am thinking I could work my up in this  organisation, its a big organisation erm there is lots of opportunity and I really enjoy it. Or do something completely different because of what <><><> but I was thinking of, the reason I am doing, so I am doing an OU degree actually I have just started it, erm but it takes like 6 years because its is part time <><><>< and stuff erm and I just like to get on with things. So I am doing it now anyway erm but yeh, I was thinking about <><><> I don't know why I don't mind doing that so erm in January I am like going to start doing a micro-biology A'Level erm I did an English A 'Level in 2 weeks last year <><><><><><><><><><><><><><><<> I am going to start doing that in January erm and I am going to try and get it done before like the application phase in <>><><>< September of November like when you apply to like uni for a<><><> course then apply for Cardiff for physio theropy and that is what I am thinking right now I don't want to be in an office I want a hands on job and erm maybe I could travel with that and maybe I could be more into my sports with that you know cause yeh <<><><>> sporty <><>< other things sporty but I don't know just thinking there's something that feels like options I always like to have options so that I can you know I might just stay <><><><><><<><> like I said about oh my God thinking about 35 years <><><><><>< I've bought this house now this is my base regardless, but 35 years  do I want to stay here for 35 years without like being able to travel for work or anything again you know but it was my choice rather than being in the military yeh. So I'm thinking, I'm thinking I'm going to do this biology A' Level but I am already doing a degree so (laughs) <><><><><><><><><><

## C

What degree are you doing?

## Nicola

Erm English language and literature just because those are my best subjects so I thought I would find it easiest, and it is actually I am finding it is basically compare and contrast texts which is what I did for my A 'Level so I was like yeh I can do this.  So unless I can work <><><><><><><> I don't know how I feel about that. <><><><><><>< *(continues to talk about uni degree)*

*Then we discuss my research parameters. 40:14*