# Annabelle – Interview 1

(Officer, 24 years, married, yes, +9)

## C

Right so we are on.

## A

Yep

## C

Right so basically its what is called a semi structured interview I have only got 8 or so questions and its really just a chat about how you are feeling, how you felt when you approaching of your air force career, what you were thinking what you were feeling really, and how you are doing now really so its not so bad, ok so. First of all, a nice easy question. Why did you join the Royal Air Force?

## A

Because travelling back from Germany backwards on a VC 10 at 7 years old I decided that’s what I wanted to do and nothing else ever changed my mind.

## C

And you were on the VC10 because?

## A

Because I was flying back from Germany.

## C

With your family.

## A

Yep.

## C

You were a service family?

## A

Yep, yep. But I didn’t join because of them but it was the only world ?????? England. I didn’t know enough else about the world to think about any other job . So any job that I thought about doing was always a job which you could do within the Air Force and I couldn’t imagine not being in the Air Force and therefore part of the reason I joined the Air Force was because I didn’t know any different. If I am honest not the ????? I should have done I now know what I should have done but it wouldn’t of entered my head then because I didn’t know anything else.

## C

Yeh, so how od were you when you joined?

## A

I was 19 when I started at IOT ???? but 18 when I went for the interview. 18 when I got offered my slot.

## C

OK, so you were you are breaking up a little bit actually.

## A

Is it because I am too far away.

## C

That is a bit better yer, ????? picture quality but that’s better anyway. Ok so it was always something you wanted to do it had never entered your head to do anything else you just wanted to ..

## A

Yeh I didn’t know. There was no concept to do anything else with both parents being serving and every significant adult in my life being military or ex-military there really wasn’t. I was too young to naïve about how the world works to think about anything else other than joining the armed forces.

## C

Can you think of anything that specific that appealed why that was why you went. Obviously it was a known factor

## A

So for me I know myself well enough now at the age I am at to know that I have em a stubborn streak that gets to the point of if I have decided that I am going to do something I am going to do it. And therefore having decided that is what I was going to do and having set my mind on it and therefore it didn’t matter who suggested what else to me it was instantly rejected because at some very young age I had made my mind up ??? apparently 7 (laughter) from there on in that’s all I was ever prepared I was going to d and nobody could persuade me otherwise and the only thing they did succeed in dissuading me off was rather than going into Trade Group 10 discip which was disestablished and amalgamated into the administrative trades em they at least persuaded me to go for a commission when I scored high 90s across the board for the airman’s thing. And that was the only change anyone was able to dissuade me from and I think that was primarily because I had decided and nobody else was right.

## C

Okey dokey, so when did you think about leaving the Royal Air Force?

## A

Not when the Air Force thought about me leaving it. Erm I I had a few moments during IOT. Actually the first time I thought about leaving the Royal Air Force was when my mother was sectioned in hospital and erm I realised I couldn’t do everything that needed to be done, erm the second time I thought, obviously I decided I didn’t leave but they were going to put me out at uni because my life was upside down but I managed to stay in the second time I thought about leaving oh crumbs when I had glandular fever and I was really really poorly and I didn’t know if I was going to be well enough to come back but again I didn’t want to leave but again it was started to think about what if I couldn’t stay and as soon as you start thinking about and open your mind to other alternatives that you then the brain is then actively thinking about other alternates whereas before it never entered its head to think about anything else and then I guess really it wasn’t until .. Chris did I think about leaving the Air Force when we were down the Falklands?

## Husband

No.

## A

Really! One tour got a bit pissity but I didn’t think about leaving then. Nor down the Falklands so it is all my sons fault (laughter). It’s a hormonal change. Oh Son’s name its not your fault your fault its all the changes that happened to my body and my brain cause I had a baby. They are good changes so it doesn’t matter.

??????????

## C

So it was So it was when you had your son but obviously you didn’t leave when you had him.

## A

No but when I was pregnant I got offered a very very good job, erm the desk officer who was Smith at the time erm phoned me up and offered me a really really good job in the LSC and I said do me a favour call me back in a few more weeks and offer me that job and she said what? And I said phone me back in a few more weeks and offer me that job and she phoned me back and I said I am ever so sorry Ma’am I can’t because I am pregnant and she said that doesn’t mean you can’t take that job and I said yes it does because it’s a really good job and I cannot gap a job of that magnitude for 6 months maternity leave and from that point on I stopped thinking the same way that I had always thought which was job career, job career, job career oh there is a husband in their somewhere job career and even from that point it was actually that is a cracking job and that is exactly the tick I need and it will put me right in front of everybody and everything else no, does it mean gapping it? No I’ve got a baby blab la bla so even before he was born I was changing my approach to life I guess from chemicals and I don’t know that’s my excuse I just changed slightly.

## C

OK so I understand what you are saying but why did you think that job was too important to gap tht you felt you know why was it so important to gap at your own expense effectively?

## A

It was a pivotal job, a pivotal pivotal job it was the top SO2 job in the LSC you don’t gap that post.

## A

But could it not..

## C

I mean yes it it has been subsequently gapped and I was not happy about it and people have taken in command jobs and gapped it and I wasn’t happy about that either because I just don’t think that is morally appropriate not because the world owes them the fact because they are off on maternity leave and therefore they need a job to come back to it doesn’t mean it needs to be that job but there are jobs that are really really pivotal and it’s a max full time job for a person and if that person then goes then somebody else has to pick up that max full time job spread it out amongst a bunch of other people who that are all absolutely maxed full time jobs and some of them are DV cleared and its just a nightmare and like I in I couldn’t have looked myself in the mirror and gone ha ha somebody is trying to cover that job while I’m off having a baby. It is just not who I am I am pretty black and white on things and on that one I just couldn’t have done it. Sot That was the first thing well I wont do that job so which was gutting but at the same time I still couldn’t have taken it even though I was told you can still have it, No you don’t understand I can’t. That’s just how I feel.

## C

It was in effect a self-imposed restriction, to not to do it.

## A

Yes. Yeh you know you have to there are too many times when you have gone around and you hear people bemoaning gapped posts for maternity leave or wha??? You know the world has only just got its head round the fact that you can stay in after having a child and all the rest of it let alone I mean my mum lost her job in the Air Force because she was pregnant with me and I have had years of my mum bemoaning the fact that she lost her entire career despite the fact of my father being medically .. (tape malfunction)

## C

Ok right we are back on, so erm I understand what you mean by pivotal but I really want for the tape for understanding what was so crucial about that job why was it such an important job? To you to the Air Force?

## A

Erm well it was operational it was 24/7 you were on call on the time its one of those jobs where you are not allowed a life. (laughter) erm and I was having another life to add to my life and it was just going to be too difficult.

## C

Perfect perfect so ultimately your decision to leave was because of Harrison?

## A

Oh, when I left yeh. I left because I’d juggled some absurdly good jobs with a child on my own mon to fri including being an MA to a 2\* and then being his SO1 EXO and his MA for a period of time then his SO1 ExO erm all of that without a husband who was either overseas doing dets that didn’t count cause his job in PJHQ meant they didn’t count, which I don’t think was fair, erm and then that can go in the record. (laughter) If they have gone over seas it should bloody count whether it’s on a job or not. Erm and then he was in town and he was in PJHQ and he was just maxed out busy bless him he was driving back each weekend and how he didn’t crash the car I am so glad he didn’t die on the M4 so many times but you know I was doing all that and at one stage I had one of my fondest memories was having a 2\* on the phone at 8 o’clock at night going “but I don’t want to” at the same time as having a 2 and a half year old on the floor on the kitchen going “but I don’t want to” and I kept having to put my boss on mute and telling my son off and then going back to the boss and at one point I missed it and I turned round and said to my boss “well you just have to and this is why you are the 2\* and bla bla bla” and he went “ok, Laura” and I said I am really sorry sir I have just used the wrong tone on you “it fine” (laughter) and I basically 2 year old toned my boss. Erm and bless him he was phenomenally tolerant and I was very very lucky I had one of the best 2\*s going while I was trying to do MA jobs and XO jobs with a child but there is you just can’t do it and then my son stupendously decided to go to school a year early which meant I couldn’t throw him in at Creche at the car park which you know at HQ the Crèche is at the car park. So you park the car you throw him through the door at half past 7, you yomp to the office and get there just before the boss having opened up the e-mails on route on your blackberry so that it actually looks like you have been there a bit longer. Erm work through lunch and do everything that you can do so that you can then dash out of the office no later than 8 minutes to 6 God help you if you leave at 7 minutes to 6 you aint going to get there in time and you almost every single night without fail my son was the last child in creche the child was already with his bag and his coat and there wasn’t time to do a proper handover he had a book so that I could then read the book if I ever had time at night and then I would put him in the car and he would fall asleep on the way home and I’d carry an asleep child up the stairs unless he was having a hissy fit because he would then wake up which meant that he wouldn’t go to sleep because he had already had 20 mins of sleep in traffic (sneeze) and then I would scoop him up in the morning sometimes he would let me get him dressed sometimes he would have a head fit and I would just had him over because I couldn’t spend the time in the morning and I’d just hand him over to someone in the morning and say “your problem” here is the child here is the bag of clothes and then I’d go to work. And it was like hang on a minute I am not raising this child somebody else it and I was getting shorter and shorter and crosser and crosser because I was more tired everything had to be done at 300 miles an hour because I was trying to juggle too much my son was stressed I was stressed and I guess the day I realised something had to give was my son was thankfully he was an amazing child who slept almost all the time from day dot but by the time he was 4 years old I had about 3 toes left and I had gone through all my fingers and my toes erm on broken nights sleep and on one particular occasion we had 2 nights back to back and on the second night he got into bed with me and he was having a hissy fit and he threw his dummy on the floor and I was so angry and I just stormed from one side of my bed all the way round and threw myself to the floor to pick this \*\*\*\* dummy up and I hadn’t bothered to put the light on because I knew how to get round the bed by that point cause you do and it was dark and you know how to get round a bed and what I hadn’t realised was that the trouser press had been relocated to to my husbands’ side of the bed cause he was now making his way back home between postings and he was slowly bringing stuff back from themes and it was I had brought my head down and my arms went either side of the trouser press because its orientation was in line with the side of the bed and I then brought my chin full force cause I was in a temper tantrum and I was tired and I brought my chin down on top of the trouser press as my arms went flying past it ??? I whip lashed my neck, I put my teeth through my bottom lip and I fricked my neck to the point where I was very lucky I didn’t do some serious damage. And I gave myself concussion erm I couldn’t scream because my teeth were through my bottom lip pinned. Erm I put my hand under my chin and made my way in the dark to the bathroom where when I moved my hand from the bottom of my chin there was an audible splash as the blood pooled in the sink I then reached for the light switch and there was blood everywhere. Erm and manged to pull my lip with the most disgusting sound and feel ever and I remember thinking “now what the fuck do I do?” and I cleaned myself up and I taped my lip cause it was the only way to stop it bleeding and put a wodge of erm baby muslin that was brilliant cause they are always everywhere and then went back through to bed and thought well I can’t do anything I may as well stay here and I text sent a text to my chief of staff going I am really sorry I’m not going to be able … I might be a bit late this morning I think I just ought to sit here for a little while before I try and drive. And then I drove my son to creche, put my son in creche and went to work and I was doing fine until one of the ladies who is a mum came in and took one look at me took me to one side and said “oh my God are you alright” cause apparently, I looked as white as a sheet and then I just burst into tears and they were like “what the hell are you doing?” I went to see the Doctor and the doctor went ape I was on antibiotics I had butterfly stitches I was off work for a week I had somebody RP had to drive me home I wasn’t allowed to go to my house I had to have a grown up with me for the next 48 hrs and I suddenly thought in real life that was significantly massive I put my child in the back of a car I drove through Bristol rush hour traffic and went to work because work was so important I had not actually got this balance right of the fact that I had cricked my neck, I had given myself whip lash I had given myself concussion and I had put my two front teeth physically through my bottom lip so that I have a scar and work was still important enough for me to take myself to work. Do you need to hit pause?

## C

Toby.

## A

I recognise that look.

(interview interrupted by small child)

## C

So you were taken aside by another mam basically.

## A

(laughter) so

## C

You were

## A

I’d I’d basically worked out that (sigh) that work had become more important than everything else that was more important so like I say the other mum took me to one side and I burst into tears and that’s when I realised something has got to give what am I doing. What am I doing and then not long after that my husband got posted to the MA job my husband got posted and of course he got his Wg Cdr and when Chris got his Wg Cdr I was like “I don’t have to work now” and when this happened I was like “I’m not doing this anymore”. And then I realised that I had I’d basically burnt myself out the docs were concerned I was concerned everyone was concerned erm I had neurological pain and aches all over and they couldn’t get to the bottom of it. A lot of it was stress related but there are other issues going on with me but erm it was it was a stress trigger that had caused all my joints to go nuts and the aches and the pains and everything else. Erm and it got all too much really and Chris was able to get posted into AW into DISCOM erm and I had the option of a really really good job again erm having just got my husband into AW and I said I went for a career brief because I wanted to know why I hadn’t come off the board and they were like well she needs to do this tick again cause an in-command tour down the Falklands on promotion doesn’t count I was like “how does it not count?” First of all it is an in command tour yes, so why does it not count? You’re not .. well if you read it it is not as competitive as those that have done their in-command tour in their last tour before promotion, Well no it won’t cause they are normally on their fourth tour and I was barely wet out of Flt Lt’s rank when I went down there in fact the first 6 months because of the way the gazetting worked then I was promoted in the on the 21 of Jan coming of the Dec board. So, you know, I was like off go off you go down the Falkland and they turned round and said that doesn’t count because you were acting for the first 6 months and then you came back because you were pregnant down the Falklands and you can’t be pregnant down the Falklands so you didn’t finish your 18 months I went no I came back because I went and did ICSC I came back 2 weeks early because I was pregnant before I did ICSC but I was still on strength of the Falkland Islands whilst I did ICSC which I was scheduled to do at the end of my tour down the Falklands. So, I did my 18 months erm so that was disheartening to put it mildly in fact that is another stupid thing heavily pregnant drip in arm in fact, not heavily pregnant 8 weeks pregnant drip in arm with hyperemesis we don’t think you should be doing ISCS well when do you want me to do ICSC? With a baby breast fed on the course erm or before the baby is out of my body I would suggest it will be a dam sight easier before the baby comes out of my body. Yes but can’t you do it later bearing in mind you are telling me I need to do it because I have already done my in command tour on promotion and therefore the course that is meant to prep you before you go in command it’s a bit late anyway so I though ignored them I am going to go and do ICSC and they couldn’t stop me because it wasn’t my doc it was an advisory doc erm and so then I did ISCS well and as you know because you were personally there erm and I had a lovely time it went extremely well and it was just the easiest breeze ever, not. Erm and I went through the whole of ICSC with hyperemesis I was so ill that the doctor said you are not to go on the trip t France so I get the Wg Cdr told she needs a waiver to not to go to France and the Wg Cdr says “If she does not go to France she will be withdrawn from the course” at which point I go that’s fine I know I am ill I know the doctor says I can’t go because I keep vomiting and I get travel sickness anyway so God knows what this is going to be like as I can’t even do a 20minute journey down the road. Abd the trip to Bristol last week nearly killed me but of course can do a Battle Field tour to France in a coach and round France in a coach and back again without dying we can do this because I have just struggled most of my way through the friggin course you are not pulling me off the course now and when we get to Calais to find out that there are 4 other people on the course not on the bus, one was given a sports waiver, and 3 were sick. Oh, that’s bothered me because my voice has gone and my eyes have gone teary. So, despite medically ill I still stupidly made myself go on a battle field tour that they didn’t want me to go on but didn’t want to get thrown off a course because I had to get the tick to get myself ticked be able to get all the other ticks that you have to so I guess I got fed up with another tick. So, I said thank you very much I am not going to do another in command tour I have jumped through hoop after hoop after hoop from pregnancy from birth from running this child around on my own cause you can’t manage co-location cause you keep failing on that one and no you are not rearing the family apart when I’ve just managed to do it. So the child needs stability and I am going to go nuts otherwise so that was it so yes my son was the reason I did not take the final tick for promotion and then having made that decision was on leave when the promotion board came through and my boss phoned up and said “How did she do on the promotion board she must have been promoted this year.” For the desk to go “No the reasons she is in CSTAIR and the is doing the job she is doing is because she turned down the job that would probably have given her the tick f or the report for her to have been read .. right you can’t guarantee promotion but she can’t she is not going to get through the screening she is not going to get through the sift and it’s like what do you mean she won’t get through the pre-board and my boss the on 1\* didn’t believe me I think they just thought it was an excuse that came out of my mouth and then they were both vey cross because bearing in mind that the three1 \*s that were sat on the board, one worked with me every other day erm one worked with me about twice a month and the other one had been briefed by for me 3 times before they went OOA and were on the other end of a VTC most weeks. So, they all knew me very very well and all was needed was from my 1\* to say “can someone just read her profile whilst you are doing your board please” and it would have circumnavigated the whole she needed to do a second in command tour and somebody would have read me and my boss was just I just seriously guys what part of I am not going to get through the boarding did you miss? Erm but that was annoying but what happened 48 hours before that was coming back off leave and opening an e-mail to be told that I had 16 days’ notice to go on a 14-day exercise to Northwood for a non-real exercise it was a pretend exercise erm because no other specialisation at Sqn ldr rank with this Q could be found across the entire branch. Go to Northwood for 2 weeks. And my boss wrote we looked in your diary and we could see no reason why you could not go to which I very well actually at the time I went he can “fuck off” which is interesting on a 3\* floor plate erm and walked off the floor plate but I did come back a little while later and write an e-mail saying very politely cause I was angry and I am extra polite when I am angry erm but I did make the point that perhaps they should have checked the 3\* diary cause I did work offa his diary or indeed the 1\* diary because if I was free would be invariably covering off meetings on behalf of the 1\* erm as I did and therefore and also it would have been really nice if they had bothered to check my husband’s diary because they would have noticed that he too was at PJHQ at the same time they wanted me to be on this frickin exercise. And I had a 5 year old that needed to go to school and I thought that that might actually trump erm the need to be where I needed to be erm to which the response was well dear DISCOM you can’t send her husband away if we are sending Anabelle away so you need to find somebody else from your area who will either cover off Anabelle’s requirement or her husband’s requirement so I had enough by that point because two fold erm I had been let down by a team that was supposed to be ????? after me and I had already turned down any future advancement in rank to try and make a work life balance so that at least one of us could look after the child and they still screwed me over with 16days notice for a 14 day exercise. Really that is not enough tie to tell you to sort child care out. Erm and then because I was married to somebody else in the organisation they then said to his organisation you need to find somebody to either fill his part or her part but we are not going to find somebody else to do it it’s your problem now. That then affect him how the hell does that work? Gone are the days when I was a child don’t be naughty at school don’t bully that kid and that kid because they are the bosses kids and I will get called into the office for you being naughty cause that is what really did happen in those days if the child was naughty the dad got pulled in by the boss and told to sort the child out ????that doesn’t happen anymore and if you are married to another person in the armed forces and something is not going to work they just contact your other half’s boss and sort it out. But that is now affecting him but it shouldn’t have any bearing on him whatsoever erm and all because we had a child that needed to go to school. And its just like hang on a minute there is a child and we are both here and you therefore on the same hand you can turn round and dump a problem on somebody because we are in the same organisation you should also acknowledge that we both can’t be away at the same time with only 14 16 days’ notice. So, I em I went through and saw the chief clerk erm ????? was away so I saw Mr Jones the ???mam … What?

## C

You are breaking up a little bit again. Are you ok erm as well cause you are looking like you are getting really upset and I don’t want to rake everything up if you are getting upset?

## A

No I am sorry I will try to keep it a little more succinct rather than emotional, I am sorry.

## C

No, no I didn’t no its you can get emotional on me if you want I am just you know concerned I don’t want rake everything up and …

## A

No but I did go through to Mr Jones and I said to Me Jones “So Mr Jones this exercise” “Ah yes ma’am” he said looking up brightly until he saw my face and then he went “yes ma’am” and I went “So, just how are you going to make me go this exercise because it’s not like you can put a gun up against my head and force me to go anymore can you?” I said and erm “hmm frankly I do believe the real law might actually breach and trump military law” and he said “what do you mean” “right what are you going to do if I don’t turn up?” and he said “well we will charge you ma’am” and I started to laugh cause I was slightly hysterical at this point and took a deep breath and tried to control myself and I said “with what?” and he said “dereliction of duty” or something like that and I went “you what” and he went and I said “well how is that going to work” and he said “well first of all” I said (laughing) “well who is going to charge me?” bearing in mind I am in the 3\* outer office. Erm so erm the CO will charge you and then he because of your rank and where you work it will go to air Command who will review it in manning to determine if there is a charge to be heard and erm then it will get processed through and then they will determine if there is a charge to be heard and then at some point someone will decide whether there is or there isn’t and charge you. And I said “well how long is that going to take?” and he said “about 6 months” and I said “well that is alright then I will just wait for that to happen because my PvR will have been completed by the wont it” and he said “What PvR ma’am” and I went (sigh) “do you really think I am going to stay in after you have done something as stupid as this” erm so they wouldn’t let me PvR for 2 weeks because I actually got on really well with the admin lot and they could see that I was at my wits end and they didn’t want me to emotionally PvR and everyman and his dog had a chat with me cause they knew it was emotional but I did PvR the day before I went for this frickin exercise?

## C

You went on the Exercise?

(13.15)

## A

I went on the exercise because the solution was to screw another person over with only 11 days notice and that isn’t on though my son went on a couple of play dates with sleep overs my husband juggled what he needed to do at PJHQ down to erm a couple of days and nights and we managed to make it work between friends and juggling ???? we were very lucky but it was completely unnecessary and I wasn’t prepared to do that again but I was also not prepared to screw anyone else over that way because my life was upside down and I had a little bit more warning to through it onto somebody else’s plate with nearly 11 day to go was not on. Its its not how its done its not erm who I am it’s the same as why I didn’t take the really good job in the LSC its not who I am its not how I operate its not how I think. So we sucked it up and I did it and I PvR’d and I hated it, Erm I didn’t want to leave I didn’t tell anyone it wasn’t on Facebook that I left cause of course as soon as I left I went straight back in again erm as an ADC as a reservist so that I could try and manage my life erm and my working hours cause all I really wanted to do was drop my son off at school in the morning and pick him up after school and him not spend more hours in school than I was spending at work. Erm so that is what I decided to do so I left and then joined straight back up again. And so as far as the world was concerned I hadn’t left the Air Force. In my head I hadn’t left the Air Force I’d just and I still say this today I haven’t left the Air Force I have just changed my terms of service so that I can manage my life better. Erm and that is what I have done, however, erm the other week I spoke to my Gp Capt and I said to him Sir, Thank you so very much for erm ranging the FTRS job because they had advertised it and they couldn’t fill it and I said look I would do the job if it was ADC because of the hours erm and so he reapplied for an ADC appointment I said my contract finishes on the 31 march 2017 I know you would like me to extend or at least apply for a erm the job twist because it is going to carry on to other projects but I said I am not going to I am not going to extend my contract erm because I am (sigh) I am still working 5 days a week, albeit half days mon and Fri, 3/4 days tues and wed and a full day Thurs because my so does Karate after school so it doesn’t matter. Erm because that is what when you add all of that up that makes your 3.5 days a week you have to work. So I am getting paid 3.5 days a week which means that is exactly half a week which is half pay so I am on £26k a year which is less than half of what I was on before but it is the way the wage works out erm but I am actually working every single day. On a full day I will invariably get into work around the same time as everybody else and I will normally be the last one out of the door because you know how everybody else works in an office environment in a staff job and I am doing a staff job find me a staff job where people work 7 days a week, yes we get paid 24/7 and that is what happens in the military but they need to understand that most of these FTRS jobs are in a staff environment certainly the ADC ones are and even the the bosses could see their was negligible different to me working half the time to what I was producing because that’s not who I am again I just do the work that needs doing. Erm but at the same time three and a half days is not half your life because you get the weekends off so I am working every single day is being effected by work but I am actually working3 and a half days on a 5 day week, that is not half and yet I am getting paid half the wage and I thought I am getting paid 26k to work my ass off 5 days a week for the Air Force when you were paying me significantly more not that long ago so I just had a bit of a crinkle about it which I think is justifiable and I I also kept running into what does she know she is just a sqn ldr well actually the last 2 jobs I did was an SO1 and yes that is the rank on my shoulder but I’ve got 20 odd years of experience behind me and I have just spent the last 5 years in 2\* and 3\* outer offices so my strategic understanding and currency is pretty tops and that’s why the boss wanted me to come and do this job and I just kept running into this wall and because I no longer had a career path or the desire to stay and behave myself for promotion I could see myself see myself taking my “I don’t give a shit attitude a little bit too far and was either going to cause myself a problem or cause my bosses a problem and I would not wish to do either. Erm and then I was watching other people get promoted and people getting promoted going Anabelle I’ve been promoted and almost positively apologising tome for getting promoted and me not being promoted and it’s like its ok I’m ADC I ‘m a reservist I can’t get promoted and they were going I didn’t know you had left and I was like I’ve been gone over a year so it just all got a bit icky and I thought .. and then I found myself getting grumpy with my son again and occasionally having to leave him in late room because work got a bit too much and then it was the juggle again and it was like woah no I am going back to where I was and while I disliked my time out between leaving or between my terminal leave and all the rest of it and then going back in whilst they sorted everything out I just went I have to stop altogether and this time I am able to mentally accept that I am a person and not a Sqn Ldr. Erm which sounds really stupid but I am me and I have had the time this last 18 months to be more m and less work because I’ve had to sort of go you are not a real sqn ldr any more, some people will kill me for saying that when I am an ADC I am really sorry political people when this is transcribed I know I should say I am a real Sqn Ldr but you are not I am sorry but in my head the same person that wouldn’t take the job in the LSC and the same person who still went on exercise in my head not there is a difference between a reservist and a regular. I get to choose if I want to go and get shot at but that is not what being in the military is about you don’t get to choose you get told erm so I don’t feel that I am in that same place, so somebody said to me well why don’t you take a Wg Cdrs ADC job and I’m like cause I wouldn’t be a real Wg Cdr. And then I suddenly realised actually therefore it doesn’t matter anymore. And I worked out that its all those lovely things you see on Facebook and all the rest of it nobody is going to write on your epitaph was a great Wg Cdr but a crap mother but that is probably what it would need to say and I suddenly thought that is not what I want and I was watching my little boy grow up and coming up to me in the car and he’d just put his hand across cause he would sit in the front seat cause cause he gets car sick and he would just go “its ok mummy” and Its just like he is 6 and he is mothering me because I am getting stressed again at work and I just thought no this is wrong so it just did this all stops now. Erm am I bitter? probably not acute enough to be bitter, am I sad? very. Does it still get me feel like somebody is carving up my insides? occasionally about here, in my throat region yes. Erm do I feel like I have failed? I’ve stopped thinking like that now I don’t’ think I failed I think the system failed me. Erm but at the same time I do look at all the choices I have made all the sacrifices I have made I am glad I woke up and realised to stop putting anybody else through those sacrifices for all the wrong reasons and erm therefore my son no longer has to live vicariously through sacrificing so I think I have got a career and I have realised that being a Sqn Ldr, Wg Cdr Gp Capt in the Air Force is nothing it’s just pay. It’s just pay, that is all that matters its just money erm it’s a shame it took as long as it did for me to realise and I get really cross about all the things I’ve done that I didn’t have to do but I did because I was a good egg and I bled roundels and I’d made all these sacrifices and didn’t take the job I should have take and still went on the exercise and all the rest of it because that is who I am and that’s how I was raised by military parents and all the rest of it but I’ve stopped beating myself up about that now, I think I have just got to live with it. And move on which is why I can’t stay in uniform anymore because staying in uniform it’s just keeps ripping the scab off every time it tries to heal. So I am fine I don’t know what it is going to be like watching Christopher going out of the door because he has finally coming home at long last, yeh! There is no hope of him getting Gp Capt so for the first time ever we might actually manage co-location without his job moving without promotion moving him and without me nailing him to the floor for at least 18months if not 2 yr unless they send you OOA in which case I am going to kill somebody.

## C

He's not there is he? (laughing)

## A

Yeh ??????? yeh so we can at least try and co parent properly and it will be lovely it will be lovely because our son is at that age where he really needs his Daddy now so stability is important. So (sigh) I am mummy Annabelle now. I still do really strange things so I get pithy when somebody calls me Anabelle down the phone instead of Mrs Baker erm I think that is impertinent people use me by my call me by my first name and I I I did get cross the other day and say to some poor young man down the phone who called me Annabelle I said right you don’t know me I don’t know you, you’ve not been introduced to me not I am likely to sleep with you so I strongly suggest you stop using my first name which is reserved for those people that fit that criteria. and address me 24.07 appropriately young man er which was rather interesting and is on tape recording somewhere and I am sure I’m that person that when everybody has their their call centre training gets this tape of this obnoxious cow who refuses to be called by her Christian name because she thinks its impertinent that a young man is calling her by her Christian name but its little things like that that still bug the hell out of me. So it’s not I am not completely civvi and I don’t think I ever will be completely civvi but if it works for my son that’s more important than everything in the whole wide world.

## C

You know

## A

??? laugh at me on tape

## C

No, No its just its just its I think being a mam in the military isn’t it I think and I think erm yeh I had many of the same thoughts.

## A

I tell you what mate and you can frickin well transcribe this on the record and it needs to be in big bold letters for the flippin military to understand you can’t be a mum in the Armed Forces you can pay somebody else to be the mum for you or you cannot be good in the Armed Forces but the Armed Forces does not allow you to be a mum and in the Armed Forces not when you need to be a mum. Lets be honest are you always need to be a mum? Oh I don’t know my mother yeh maybe not transcribe that bit. (laughter) But most normal people when life isn’t great even in the age that I am at now would normally if its all going pear shaped phone the mother up. But I think it is fair to say that children really need their mum when they go to school up until they go to secondary school because they really really need they just really seem to need their mum and all you need is 5 years, 5 years where they go do you know what let’s just let you drop off at school first then carry on with work and then leave to do the school run afterwards the deal with that is you don’t have your lunch break and you don’t spend an hour and a half going for a run like everyone else in the office does so actually let’s look at whose done how many hours here today if we clocked up everybody else in and out you’d still be doing more hours than everybody else in the office and you would be able to drop your kid off at school and pick them up afterwards but no that’s not how it works and they just don’t give they just don’t cut you that slack and I am not saying it’s just for mums it should be for either parent that needs to be able to juggle the work life balance when the child really needs it. You know throwing my son through the gate at three and a half because the obnoxious child decided to be precocious enough to go to school a year early, I (sigh) I three and a half and I just dropped him off and went bye. And off I went to work. Now because of who he is he was absolutely bloody fine but there were other parents their whose children who were of the right age being dropped off but even towards the end of reception year they were till crying and clinging to their mums. I am so glad I have never had a clingy child but there again my son would turn around when I dropped him off at creche at 2 and a half and go “It’s k mummy I know you have to go and get your pennies I will see you later” (imitating a child’s upset voice) you know and it is like I drilled into him No mummy has to go and get the pennies so when I sat down and told my son I was leaving the Air Force his words were “but Mummy you can’t” “why not” “cause we wont have any pennies” no don’t worry Darling Daddy is going to get plenty and then when I said its okay Mummy is going to go back to work “Oh does that mean we will have more pennies” “we will have half as many pennies Darling” “Oh ok” and then I’ve said I am not working again he has gone “oh how ..” and I’m like will you stop worrying about the pennies (laughter) and its because from dot when I was dropping him off at creche I’d say mummy has to go to work to go and get the pennies. And this poor fricking child is now scarred for life and I think God (laughter) how else .. how else is it going to manifest itself over the years.

## C

Erm

## A

Yeh but the Air the military does not allow you to be a mum, be in the military, not yet. I know it would like to and I know all the PC stuff would like to and all the equality and diversity ?? in fact I know the person that runs it bless her. Would love to but we aint there yet and it’s going to be a ruddy long time before we are. Because people still can’t get their heads round simple things of “somebody got promoted, somebody got a better job than me HUHHHmmMM” before we even go “somebody is working less hours than me” oh oh for goodness sake. So I am sorry its … its never going to fix itself in my lifetime and I think too many changes need to happen e before around the outside of the armed forces before the armed forces is forced to conform so.

## C

What do you mean there, can you elaborate … with that statement?

## A

In what’s going to have to happen outside the Armed Forces before ? (sigh) so if you look at something as simple as working from home erm working from home has been going on in the civilian environment in industry for a very very long time, erm job share has been going on in the civilian environment for a very very long time hell the civil service of the in the MoD have been doing it for a reasonable amount of time it’s only about now in the last 3-5 years that the the Armed Forces have started to consider options but I whilst I, in the 5yrs that I have been at HQ I have had a boss that as the 2\* was having a 2 and a half hr commute and he would on Friday’s work from home unless unless there was a meeting that he needed to go to. And even with that mentality there were people that didn’t think people working from home meant they were working from home. So I then went into an environment, XXXXX (30.19) deliberately to slow everything down, take a back seat, ditch my career, try to do a mum job and just but stay in the Air Force and earn a wage. And erm me being couldn’t quite get that work life balance right even though having done that but so I asked about having Thurs working from home because Thurs just worked with everything my son was doing and everything else and I got told No, No No No , I don’t believe the military should be working from home. I think it is an excuse to not be working unless you are at your desk how do I know that you are actually doing any work. And I am like you have got to be kidding me, erm and you know that was 2 and a bit years ago. And so when you have got senior officers who do not understand that you can trust somebody as senior as a Sqn Ldr who has been covering Wg Cdr jobs prior in outer officers to produce work from home when they are at home erm you are just if you are walking into that wall you are not going to be able to do flexi you are not going to be able to work from home you are not going to be able to say right I am banging out now but I will finish this piece of work at home. I’ll go and pick my child up from school and then do the rest in the evening. Nooo. You tal .. and and and em God and there are places where everybody is trying to get in before everybody else to be seen to be there. They’ve got no work to do I’d like to point out there is nothing happening, particularly August. August is fascinating everything stops in August, the Army go on block leave erm in industry everybody goes on holiday all the contractors don’t quite suspend themselves but it is a quiet period because nobody has actually placed any in August so now there is none being coming up for regeneration in August it’s a really quiet time. And everybody diligently still gets in as early as possible. And it’s like I can’t leave cause the boss is still here, what do you mean you can’t leave cause the boss is still here? I can’t leave cause the boss is still here. Its 6 o’clock! Yeh but the boss is till here I can’t go home til the boss goes. So actually, until we can get over that mentality of stupidity we are never going to get to the point of flexible working, being trusted that to work from home or partially work from home or fully work from home to be able to get a work life balance and we are slowly starting to pick things up from the civil service we are slowly starting to pick things up from industry but its its never going to get to the point of …. ADC being an option and then being … there was speculation that we could go to ADC to be able to juggle your time or your hours or just the equivalent of ADC hours erm and then go full throttle again once the child had got to secondary school its only 5 years, its only 5 years. So to be able to feel like you are not failing as a mother you have to ditch your career. Well what did I just spend the last 22 years doing? That was a fricking waste of time wasn’t it. (laughter) You know my boss, my civilian contractors boss, my boss, his wife is a neurosurgeon a friggin head surgeon for Gods, she is a brain surgeon. And she’s just had their daughter and it wasn’t easiest of of births and all the rest of it, she has gone back to work one day a week, one day a week to keep her hand in. Erm to stay current to do the surgeries that she needs to undertake and then I? ??? are they saying to her I am going to strike you, end ex your career. No not at all. You know, but the military the second you say look I can’t do this anymore you have got to give me some space. Well if you don’t take this job now all these youngsters will go past you, you’ve end ex you know you’ve got to tear your family apart .. where is reality there? They have lost and they are going to lose now end ex now people might want to counter argument this but I will put the facts in front of them if they want. It’s not 22 years cause they have lots of 22 year sqn ldrs out there. There are 22 year sqn ldrs in the branch but there aren’t any body (approx. 34 minutes) else that has got 9 out of the 10 qualifications, you know, I was stupidly broad and I don’t just mean my backside you know. I’ve done so many things within the branch and there is no way for me to be able to go, for them to retain it. What was the point? I know I have a lot to offer because I still sit in meetings now and go “there’s your answer” and they go “God should have thought to ask you first” that only happened on Tuesday of last week. I wasn’t meant to be in the office, I walked in and the civvies there went we don’t understand this blah blah blah how would that work? And ????? well this is how it happens in reality this is what a PEP is this is what we are actually doing. Blah blah blah and they said “well how is that going to interface with the base inventory system and MJDI?” and I said “well this way that way and blah blah and the went “oh I get it now we should have thought to come and ask you I have spoken to so many people over the last 10 days and not got an answer” I went seriously did you not think to come and ask the logistics officer on the floor plate (laughter) you know do you not think I might of touched it at some point over the last 22 years? (laughter). The military the military has got to get its get its head sorted out its loo its losing its haemorrhaging people. I mean ok you are on the end of the line think how much experience they have lost losing you, frickin heck look at your qualifications. Its barking, you’ve got letters after your name. (laughter).

## C

I’m after more (laughter)

## A

But ok I am looking at my peers I am looking at my female peers erm no lets lets go one better lets look at the females who have made it to a decent rank, they have children. Do they see their children? No. There are, I wont say names on here cause otherwise you would have to transcribe them

## C

Everything is anonymous

## A

Is it?

## C

Yeh, I’m changing your name to Gertrude. (laughter)

## A

Sorry, that was really funny, erm I shall have to I shall have to chan come up with some sort of like silly facebook name of Gertrude something now, Oh that’s really funny. Erm back on track, sorry

## C

No. Its ok.

## A

But There’s a really well known Gp Capt who I have spent many times with her pra ?????? in tears going “I can’t keep doing this” Hubby left his job in the Armed Forces to hep raise the child prior to that her mother moved in with them to raise the child shes now gone I’m not doing this any more and has left or is leaving where are we at now, July, she may have already left the Air Force and she is going to go back on the 90 day lets pull her in when we need her and I might look into that because then they can pull me in as almost like a contractor if they want. And I can dip my toe in but I don’t think I am a high enough rank. Although speaking to the people who know about this stuff I’ve still got the experience even if I don’t have the high enough rank to be pulled in on the 90 day so they might want to review that one as well. But that is what she is going to do because she she she just can’t do this any more she needs to be with her child she feels dreadful but has taken until her child is nearly at secondary school for her to just go enough. There is another really well know Gp Capt with children who her and her husband are still in and they are still pushing and they are hitting rank but I have sat with her and erm my God I never thought I would see this person crumble but she did. Because she doesn’t see her kids.

## C

I know

## A

She gets in, she gets up in the morning and the nanny does all of that because she is up and out and on a train before they are even out of bed and when she comes home they have had their bed time story and the nan the nanny is raising their children. And she is like what am I doing? I have no idea mate because Mrs bleeds roundels I I’m not even going to have a child has now gone I’ve tried to do it all and its not possible and I’m not prepared to do that to my child and I fully get it and I strongly suspect that they will also leave. And there is another person

## C

I know

## A

Who has children and has been promoted and has never had the challenge of co-location being they have never had the problem of not having co-location they have never been asked to to the to the choice they have never been forced the choice just because of the way its gone and its not the persons choice it’s the systems fault. But that sticks in my craw as well.

## C

Yeh

## A

And I find it really hard because I am really pleased for the person I am really pleased for promotion I am really pleased that their life is working out and they are the lovely one of the loveliest people on the planet. But at the moment I can’t talk to them because if I do it might unleash a torrent of hatred which is not aimed at them in the slightest (laughs)

## C

So what .. you have answered so many of my questions

## A

I’m so

## C

No which is fantastic but I am just going to ask them just to get the clarity and the suc… I can’t speak What’s the word? the (together) succinctness

## A

Yeh

## C

Yeh. When you when you finally made that decision to leave how did it feel. Youknow what was your first reaction inside, your first feeling inside when you finally decided to leave.

## A

It was like a very special family member had died. Is exactly how it felt and then I went into utter denial. I went into the full grief process. And I was in denial for a very long time. Is that succinct enough for you?

## C

That’s erm, yeh that does it (laughing) Erm, so you em so you were very unhappy.

## A

No. I was devastated. Unhappy isn’t strong enough.

## C

No

## A

Again, even now it is like remembering somebody that has died. Sqn Ldr Annabelle Jones has died. ????? I am somebody completely different that person is mourned that career is mourned I try not to think about it because then I get upset.

## C

Yeh, yes,

## A

Somebody has dies, it’s the it’s the only way its I wasn’t overly close to my father. The loss of my career affected me more negatively and emotionally than his death did which makes me sound like a cold hearted bitch but I’m not ….. but that is the emotional impact

## C

It had no you

## A

It had on me.

## C

Ok, ok I am going to change the subject, not change the subject but move it on a little bit, to try and (laughter) to try

## A

?????? he question

## C

No no no I wanted the answer and that’s that’s you know I get it I do get it.

## A

You know you are going to get straight answers from me as well.

## C

And that is why I wanted to interview you

## A

(laughter)

## C

So just to .. for your job then, your job as an officer in the RAF how would you describe that to a stranger?

## A

Being an officer in the RAF?

## C

Yeh, what how would you

## A

????upon a time I would have been very proud to say I was somebody that now but now I just say no I am not the RAC and no I don’t fly planes. Erm part of the reason that I am now mentally more able to eave the AF is that when I joined I thought I was joining something to be immensely proud of something that in the olden days being the major in the village meant that you were somebody **really** important erm because the major in the village was really important and now I am a nobody. Erm so and you are in the Air Force and? You know how much money do you earn? Hmm God, you know lets go and be a banker in the city. You know its ….. I used to say O I’m a Sqn Ldr in the RAF and people would go “oh wow” now you say to the mums I’m a Sqn Ldr in the RAF and they are like “oh right, what’s that then?” Erm ….

## C

Mmmhmm

## A

You know I got asked the other day “do you have to wear your hat when you are in uniform?,” “errr yes when I am out in public yes.” “Oh why? cause it scares the children” (laughter) right, ok.! (Sigh) they think you are a policeman and it scares the children, good, some of them … (laughter) erm but it does mean that sometimes when the children are being naughty and their parents can’t control them I do have a tendency to look at them, now my look is normally enough but when I am in uniform with my hat on they normally freeze. I just think I am assisting the parents but apparently, I am frightening the children. So erm so now when I describe the job that I do I try not to because it’s it is no longer the job that anybody actually used to think anything of.

## C

Ok, ok that’s fine. Erm when you if you think back to your most challenging tour you know the one that you … what sort of things would keep you awake at night when you were in that tour?

## A

Oh god, erm I don’t know what I would say was my most challenging tour cause I have always given far too much of myself in every single job. To the point I was still climbing the ruddy stair stairs when I had glandular fever and was relapsed and should have been in hospital. Or doing ICSC and should have been in hospital. God most challenging tour.

## C

What was yeh, what was the

## A

I don’t, I don’ have a most challenging tour.

## C

No?

## A

No I think, I suppose the most challenging moment in my career ever was sitting on my bed in Basra with my laptop open writing it a if your reading this I’m really sorry it means I’ve died erm letter. Because at Basra for a short period of time before I went up to Baghdad but there was a lot of rounds coming into the cob in that period of time a stupid amount of rounds. And we were loosing a person pretty , much eery single day. Erm and the day before I flew in the C-17 I was meant to be on left early to go and pick up the RAF Regiment guys that unfortunately had been crushed in their corremechs because a 240 round landed right next to them. Erm that was probably the most challenging 6 weeks of my life because the round were coming in constantly, you couldn’t get through an hour without something kicking off. And I, there is nothing you can do when there are rounds landing you don’t know where they are going to land cause they are not aimed properly they just fire the dammed things in and you just lie their going “please don’t land next to me” and sometimes they land bloody close erm and the frag and the shrapnel and everything bounces off the walls or off the side of the port aloo (laughing) that you are on (laughing) ?????? oh my God it’ll come through the plastic. Erm yeh and then you can hear people screaming not that far away from you cause they weren’t in a plastic port aloo. And so they got fragged out erm. Yeh that was probably the most challenging time of my career those 6 weeks cause I had no control yer just just sitting ducks sitting ducks. Arrows in arrows in a pond. Nothing you could do. What was I thinking then? I have no control there is nothing I can do and I might die. So I got half way through the paragraph and I went “What the fuck are you doing?” and hit delete (laughter) dropped my lap top ??????? and said you are not going to die and you can stop thinking like that right now. And that was about week 2 of the 6 weeks and I managed to get through it and then I went up to Baghdad and nearly broke my nose rolling into the wall when the helicopter went over the top and I didn’t. It was my first night in Baghdad and I rolled the wrong way and I had got to the point where if I heard a noise I automatically rolled out of bed onto the floor and then rolled the other way under the bed then rolled into my Kevlar which was led on the floor ready for me to roll into erm and then roll under the bed and then have the stuff on top of me and that I had got so automatic that even in my sleep as I was waking up from a noise I could do that and my first night in Baghdad I rolled and went straight into the wall and tried to smash my nose open. I wasn’t in Basra anymore and there wasn’t I I wasn’t trying to get out of bed to rollunder the bed. So yeh that was probably my most challenging time. Those 6 weeks. Probably not the answer you were looking for mate.

## C

No, its all its all good stuff its all real isn’t its all what happened.

## A

Yeh

## C

But so. I mean I can understand why that would keep you awake at night but

## A

Oh quite literally the dam things were dropping

## C

Yeh (laughing)

## A

Wel ???? let me I have always woken up in the middle of the night writing lists by the side of my bed. Erm always.

## C

For Work? Work Lists?

## A

I would wake up to write erm sentences that would come into my head for SJARS cause I would be writing them in my sleep erm I would wake up and go oh shit I need to do that tomorrow ad write lists that I needed tod o when I was an MA. Erm I’d sit up for 2 hours in the middle of the night and just go down stairs and do work because my brain was thinking because I was dreaming work. Erm that’s ….. yeh as my husband says it was either important or triv. I never really had I I I was very extremist it was either one or the other

## C

And does that, does that, does that still happen now? (voice in the background?)

## A

Erm, it did that’s why its one of the reasons it started to again which is one of the reasons why I said I’m not staying. Because for a short period of time it stopped .. erm because I wasn’t working I wasn’t owning my job. Its my personality flaw but its not I don’t I don’t work I live and therefore work becomes the important thing. It takes over everything I come back to smacking my head on the trouser press and still managing to get to work, really!?! Best decision? No but my brain was saying I’ve got to go to work. You know and and that is the problem it is all or nothing with me and you get absolutely all of me if you have got me doing something for you. It

## C

How did it how did it feel to make that decision effectively for the second time to leave to leave to go you know what I am not going to do this anymore?

## A

Erm it was a hell of a lot easier and it was when I was mentally ready to make that decision I wasn’t ready to make it the first time round it was forced upon me by things that were well beyond my control erm nobody held a gun to my head and made me type the 7 key strokes but I didn’t see the last key stroke cause I couldn’t look at the screen and do it and I was in tears as I clicked the 7th key stroke and erm em the staff sgt said “go for a walk ma’am” and handed me a tissue because it broke my heart and broke everybody’s in there they knew it was absolute silence in there while I was doing my 7 key strokes. Erm there was noth.. I couldn’t do it the first time round but I had to do it. This time it is different cause I am in a different place cause I have already severed part of the lfe and the things that worried me were like how am I going to get to a doctor? Well its shit the NHS you know I phoned then up and said I’m poorly I need to see somebody isit an emergency? No its an emergency because if it was an emergency I’d be on my way to A&E but I do need to see somebody, the next appointment is in 6 weeks time. Well I will be well by then thank you very much I’ll self-administer (laughing) after a couple of those you kind of just get on with it its not as simple as phoning up the med centre and going can I see Alex today? Alex isn’t in today ma’am what about such and such and that would be fine. (51.15) And then just pitching up and going mate I’ve got a temperature of \_\_\_ I’m running out of ibeprophene and I need paracetamol and he’ll go yeh what’s this yeh lets do a throat check, that’s what it is, go. “We are going to get your tonsils out at some point mate”. “Thanks”. You know its (sigh) it is everythings awful. I’ve gone to a private dentist and they are still crap (laugh) they ???? cost a lot erm. So and that’s fine but once I’d got over the fact that I wasn’t going to die without the support network its not as frightening but you have got to remember I grew up in the Air force when they with drew medical and dental and dependents support and all of the rest of it. I joined up anyway. So I pitched up with my son at the doctors and they gave me this prescription thing and I turned round and I am looking around in the doctors and I am going well where do I take this? And they went “you need to take it to a pharmacy” and I went “well yes but I can’t find yours”. And they looked at me like I was insane. And “I went ok there is clearly something I don’t understand about civvi street here you need to understand I have never done this before” I said “in the military you take this from the doctors office and you walk down to reception and you hand it over to a pharmacists who then politely calls out and gives you to your name and gives you your things a few minutes later”. “Ahh so you need to go to somewhere like Lloyds the chemists” A what? And I eventually let … and bless them they told me where the nearest ones were and they told me what I needed to go and do and I went to the pharmacist and I said “I have to give you this, I’ve never seen one before” (sniggering) ok so if you consider that was my first encounter with real life NHS doctoring coming out was terrifying though I am part way there now though it wasn’t so hard I was able to look at it with a little less fear and a lot more reality and I’ve also realised that I am still a person I am not, while Sqn Ldr Jones died, I am trying to live vicariously with this ADC lark, but Sqn ldr Jones dies but Annabelle Jones is very much still alive and mummy Jones is definitely much needed. Though it it was just a new head shake. So this time it was fairly easy because now I have decided I don’t want to be this part time Sqn Ldr Jones that is messing up with my life now I’ve now seen that I have a life and a life that I can enjoy and I life that I can grow and nurture to develop into this new Annabelle but I still don’t know who it is going to be and I don’t know how life is going to go but I’ve got a fabulous husband and a lovely little boy and I am very very lucky with my lot and I shouldn’t be so bloody terrified and I should just take a deep breath and go for it. Because it ain’t working as it is now. So that’s where I am at and that is how I feel about the second time. It’s now getting in the way.

## C

Getting in the way of?

## A

Life.

## C

Yeh, brilliant brilliant ok. Erm What it it doesn’t flow on very well from there but (laughing) I’ll just go with it cause its on my list.

## A

We should be having glasses of wine with this mate.

## C

We should. I am quite happy to take an admin break if you want to get a glass of wine.

## A

No no I have a husband and there is a bottle and a glass…??>>

## C

Send him off. Send him off What would you say then bear in mind everything we have discussed so far what would you say has been the greatest erm challenge to your career progression, you know why isn’t it Wg Cdr Gp Cat Jones?

## A

Oh hell, Erm. Erm ….. there are so many different answers to that and it depends which one I choose. The arrogant obnoxious me with the “it’s not fair” erm the realist goes I just wasn’t lucky enough erm and therefore I suppose the real answer is the system aint working. Erm There are too many men and women of various branches of utter excellence that are not getting promoted and therefore I cannot suggest it is anything other than its not great but I have made choices that have made my profile not as shiney as perhaps it could have been. I have made choices that I know will have prevented me from being “me, me, me, me me” when you need to be in front of everybody. I am now quite happy with those choices but at the time I resented being made to make such choices cause I don’t think it is reasonable but actually if you were doing a job in civvi street you would get fired if you weren’t pulling your weight and you have to work your socks off to get the job or the promotion or whatever so (sigh) whether whether it is liked or not when you decided to have a family things are more important and therefore you end up making choices because they are more important and part of it is growing up and realising rank is just a pay check and it doesn’t have any bearing on whether you know more than somebody else or you are more important than somebody else or you are better than somebody else. It just means you happen to have got the right jobs in the right order and not had to make some shitty choices and when the right people sat and read your report somebody decided to score you one or two points more than somebody and else and you got yourself promoted. That’s the way it works but don’t look at me just because you have got a more senior rank on your shoulder and think you are better than me cause you aint you just get paid more than me. You are not better than me you just get paid more than m, now the problem is when you make that realisation it doesn’t work in the Armed Forces any more erm because then you find yourself just telling senior officers things that you really shouldn’t be telling them. Erm so thankfully I didn’t reach that point til after I had left and now I am a fairly liberated Sqn Ldr which is quite entertaining at the moment erm but …. (sigh) why is it nor Wg Cdr Gp Capt Jones because it didn’t work out that way. It It can’t be one thing and it can’t be anybody’s fault because if it was I would trun it round and round in my head and I would never be able to walk away.

## C

Mmmm

## A

And I have to believe that the system is bigger than it being ones person fault but I

## C

MMM

## A

Do believe the system isn’t right there are too many good people being lost and there are too many people that are getting the ticks in the boxes but have no depth or breadth and are utterly useless when the shit hits the fan and ???ouldn’t be wearing the rank that they are wearing because all they are doing is a tick exercise. And there is no depth I mean my belief is the reason it is not Wg Cdr or Gp Capt Jones is two fold- one because it just wasn’t meant to be and 2 cause the system isn’t right.

## C

That’s great that is fine. Erm I I know what you mean by the system but can you just explain (sigh) cause it is kind of that unspoken we know but I need to

## A

So having presided on a promotion, being a specialist officer on a promotion board, and observed promotion boards whilst it is believed that the scoring system for the promotion board is erm a good system you only have to watch how the subjectiveness of changing the people that do the scoring and their own opinion and what has shaped their opinions throughout their careers can take somebody who the previous year scored absurdly well and missed out by one can then be so far down the pecking order they ain’t got a hope in hell and then the following year to come back up again and then vacillate somewhere in the middle and then be told you are too old and therefore we are going to kick you out and such ?????>>?way. That shows you that it is not consistent it shows you that there is flaws now there are flaws there is in everything but I think there should be a shifting process but it shouldn’t be a tick sh if the tick sheet is you have to have done an in-command tour. Then tick. Not when you did it. Or how you scored against somebody else. Did they do it? Tick. Have to have done an OOA. Tick. Have to have done x number of years in rank. No not are they any better than anybody else. Somebody else once you have passed all of those ticks could then filter you. (Pause)

## C

mmmm

A

You know, its broken because it is too subjective and the criteria is not concrete enough to enable a consistency with the level of subjectiveness that is applied by the changing of the people that do the scoring. That is why the system is broken.

## C

Ok so if you had a magic wand and you could change one thing what would it be?

## A

For me or for the Air forces promotion?

## C

For you.

## A

For me. What as (laughs) I wish that I had understood who I was more at 18 years of age and had applied myself such that I could go on and learn medicine and be a trauma doctor.

## C

MMMMM

## A

And when at 30 I realised that is what I wanted to do I’d not decided that at 30 I was too old to go to university and train to be a doctor and then specialise in trauma because then at 38 no 37 when I was in med ops I was even more convinced that is what I should have done to the point th that the med medical environment w were looking at options of me becoming an MSO. So I know what I should have done (sigh) but I was too blinkered by my raising to understand that there was other jobs out there that were worth while to deliver and that there was a life outside of the Armed Forces then when I did work it out I was thinking that 30 was old

## C

Mmmm

## A

Which I suppose you do at 30. But not at 42.

## C

Yeh

## A

So that’s my magic wand.

## C

Ok, ok so you have that’s ok so what about the Air Force then, if you could change something within the Air Force then what would you use your magic wand for?

## A

I would make rank a pay check and have another rank for experience. A bit like ….. actually the medical the specialist ranks do that so you will get a vascular surgeon come straight in as 1\*. Cause that is how much they need to be paid but they are a vascular surgeon. But you will also then get you??????>>> pay and rank don’t need to go together SQEP I think is going to shake this down spectacularly the whole issue over SQEP oh sorry sss Suitably qualified and Experienced Person. Erm but you have in the engineering environment you’ve got a person that has got hands on experience that has got reds and greens for the qualification for engineering eng authority they’ve done all their qualifications as structured and chartered and all the rest of it engineer but to have done all of tht they can’t go up the ranks fast enough to get one, two and three star rank.

## C

Mmmhh

## A

But if you are at one, two and three star rank you’re the person ultimately signing off that’s that engineeringly sound but you can’t sign it off (laughing) because you haven’t go the experience. But you can’t you can’t have both so you either have the rank which means you are a manager but you aint a specialist or you have a specialist the Air Force tried to do this with the professional and the what was it the special specialist and specialist and executive. Go go and be a senior officer but have no depth or breadth but you are really really good at doing staff work erm or actually go and be a practical person and know your shit and if it is all going horribly wrong that is the person they come to. Actually they weren’t they didn’t stick to it their were people that jumped ship and went I believe you and I’ll become a professional I’ll become you expert I will be the one that does all of these qualification I don’t need to go up in rank treat me like you do spec aircrew I will stay at this rank but you give me my pay because I have got all these extra qualifications but my rank is my rank but you know what I might just be that rank cause that is where you need that rank to do the physical stuff but I am a massive expert and you pay me because of my expertise and I have another little pic here that tells you I am a really important expert. But I am still only of that rank but you up there mister you’ve got no pics you know jack shit but you know what you are really good manager and you do great staff work and you are really good at managing people and who to go to of your experts some of which might have interpersonal problems because they are really great at hitting metal things but they aint really good at speaking to people but my God that’s who you want to hit the metal things. But we haven’t worked out how to do that yet we are we talk to people by their rank the amount of times I walk into a room in civvies and I talk an people talk tome like I am somewhere up there and then the next time they see me they see me as a Sqn Ldr and they are looking at me and they are doing triple takes or worse the other way round you walk into a room and you are wearing Sqn Ldr and you are surrounded, as I used to represent the boss, by 1\*s and Gp Capts and 2\* and the 2 \* who is chairing the meeting says “Annabelle why are you sitting back there?”, “er I am in the cheap seats, Sir” he went “get up to the table” and there are *bristles* around the room from the middle something ranks that are more senior than me but not senior enough to sit at the table. But the 2\* has just invited *me* to the table, *how dare they*. The reason that the 2\* has invited me to the table is cause I am the frickin expert. I was invited cause I am the subject matter expert and you can listen to me from the back of the room or you can stick me at the front cause I am the one that is going to do most of the talking anyway. (laughing) But they can’t get their head round that, that is my magic wand if you are gonna have managers that are managers that are managers then that’s great train them to be managers train to be leaders put them through all that training all that frickin shriv stuff that teaches you how to pick your nose politely go and do it all learn how to manage people learn how to run around and pull the information from the experts hone it, shade it, shape it put it in a brief and give it to the boss in record time that is a skill in its own right but don’t try and be an expert and more than that don’t look down your bloody nose of those of you that are. (laughing)

## C

Right, (laughing) I like it.

## A

But I’m sorry, but itss wrong. Its that that is what the Air Force that’s ????, the Army is even worse its not the Air Force. The military need to fix their problem with rank. Expert. Rank. The aircrew the??? The most frustrating thing is senior senior people get it and they don’t ever ever look down once you’ve gone to one star or above they are a completely kit different kettle of fish cause they are of the rank so they don’t have to go around going I am more important than you my penis is bigger than yours ha haha ha. Look they don’t do that they are going I am at this rank and actually I don’t want to speak to you or you or you who wrote the brief? Well no I know your signature is on the bottom dear Group Captain who actually wrote the brief? Right dear Flt lt blod and Sqn Ldr so and so come here sit at my desk says 3\* you tell me what the hells going on please. No shut up no shut up shut up. Gp Capt such and such thank you very much I know that is probably how they should have said ti but I want to know exactly what they are saying cause I didn’t actually get to 3\* without actually knowing jack shit either I was your rank once too I can interpret what the Sqn Ldr and the Flt LT are telling me but I want them to tell me in their words. Thank you and that is the problem the staffing roo has to go through al the levels it all gets filtered out. They don’t actually hear it we are now getting really clever 3\* and 2\* that actually go just send me the person who wrote the brief and that is fab . But it is not them it is the bit in the middle you have got to get through the bit in the middle. (mmm) And they don’t get it until they get to the top unless they get told by people like me. Cause my poor husband is in the middle and he gets it all the time. He will never do that cause I will kill him (laughter). But its got to get its head over expert over rank.

## C

Mmmm ok, ok.

## A

???//crew have had spec aircrew Flt Lts for a really long time and there are so respected master aircrew respected not because they you know you see Gp capts you see station commanders going up to Flt Lt spec aircrew and listening to them because they get it cause its aircrew to aircrew. I might be a Gp Capt but you you know more about how to fly why why can it not be I might be a Gp Capt I might be a Col I might be a 1\* you might only be a Flt Lt or a Sqn Ldr but you are spec Flt Lt or a Sqn Ldr and you will be able to tell me if we can get past that I think it will fix itself.

## C

Hmm ok thats

## A

Sorry, you pressed the wrong button there.

## C

No, I think I think I pressed the right buttons. (laughing) My my final question which will hopefully help us end on a high. Erm what ‘s your best memory of the Air Force? And I bet its not Dunkirk beach and the inside of a bin.

## A

No. that will not be my best memory I don’t know …………..oh I am very lucky that I have lots of good memories erm I have had some pretty god awful ones as well. What’s my best memory? I don’t know.

## C

What makes you smile? When you think about the Air Force.

## A

Inclusiveness. There you go inclusiveness belonging erm for all the fact that we are fracturing left right and centre we are being forced out into our own houses the the military is becoming more of a job and less of a less of a life. When I think about what makes me smile about the military and my time in it its belonging its being included its … what we push out of the door. If I am trying if I was trying to think about all the things that are my favourite memory and it was like ok so lets think Marham, yeh running the sqn doing that delivering doing that yes that’s great. Red Flag, delving.???// yeh that was great. Sarajevo God I loved running the airport and the airport got best small whilst I helped them shape themselves they got erm best international small airport which was under a million passengers with me helping them get that that was a biggie. Bagdad sorting stuff out when the MA and the MA and the MA didn’t sort shit out and I just went there you there is your answer and your helicopters coming, your helicopters coming, your helicopters broke down or going away on R&R and then coming back and then giving my boss and myself and the driver slash body guard and the spare in the draw 4 poppies that I picked up when I came back in October for R&R and my boss walking in the and the 3\* SMBRI going where did you get that and my 1\* going Sir? Where did you get that poppy? My .. Annabelle gave it to me. (laughing) and he went “how did she get it?” “I don’t know I will ask her” (laughing) and he went to me “Annabelle where the where the hell did you get this poppy? I got a drilling from the 3\* this morning” and I went “I picked them up when I was on R&R cause I didn’t know if we’d get any out here”. You have had the nearly a month? Well yeh cause we went back on R&R and I knew November was coming and I saw them so I picked them up” And he went “ok” “what’s the problem?” and he said “the poppies have got stuck at Brize and they are not going to be out and the boss wants to wear his poppy and bla bla bla” I said “would you like the spare out of the draw?” and he said “you have got a bloody spare?” and I said “of course I’ve got a spare, Sir” yes please and he he took this poppy to to the boss and the boss went thank you. The problem is is he said where did you get the poppy Annabelle picked them up on R&R at which point he nearly snapped his neck glared laser beams according to the MA at the MA and said “Why didn’t you think of that?” (laughing) It was like…

## C

I just spent the first part of that thinking you were saying puppies not poppies.

## A

Poppies

## C

Yeh I see I was confused but I am with you now (laughing)

## A

Its just there are many many many things many things oh but I don’t have one and I don’t want one 22 years is too long a time to have one good memory I don’t have one good memory I have got probably one a month. Definitely have more than one a year and I (sigh) they all mean something very different. I’ve lost friends, I’ve lost friends in war. Too many of those. I’ve lost friends in training incidents I’ve lost friends just through life. But I’ve I got a lot less of those and I’ve got a lot less horrible times and a lot less shitty days than I’ve got good ones. I’ve got lots I don’t want to pick one. That doesn’t help you’ve help you write it up I’ve got lots.

## C

No that is fine

## A

I have no regrets for 22 years I could say my best memory was looking at my husband at the top of the stairs for the first time of realising that I didn’t know who he was even though I did. And not actually realising who he was so I actually thought phwar I like you. As opposed to going you’re the twat that I haven’t liked for the last 5 years. Erm cause if I had known that at the time I doubt very much that I would have looked at him and gone phwar your nice I would have gone you’re the twat I haven’t liked for the last 5 years. Erm we would have never got together and produced a wonderful child so erm that has got to be a highlight but what is my best memory? I can’t give you one.

## A

(laughing) that is fine that is fine. Great that there are too many to choose from

## A

I still no you said what makes me smile. Its (sigh) having been part of something that does I am very proud of having being a small cog in a big machine that delivers extremely well despite being broken (laughter). That is my memory there you go you want one the memory is pride of being part of something has delivered so well.

## C

That’s that’s great that’s a good one.

## A

There you go.

## C

That is it I am gonna stop there.

## A

Thank you so much for ripping through so many emotions.

## C

Sorry I am sorry. (laughing) Are you ok?

## A

Yeh it has been really useful actually because I couldn’t have had this conversation a year ago I couldn’t have done it I would have been too angry too raw too upset. Erm you couldn’t have had this conversation with me a year ago and its been really useful cause your questions were you know what is your memory and actually I now can say I have a memory and its not a time it’s a memory it’s a memory in its own right but it is a huge 22 year spanning memory and that is really nice to now and I’ve go that now and its in here and I feel good cause and I can say yeh I am allowed to feel proud of what I did and what I was a part of and there is nothing wrong with that but I haven’t actually articulated ??//??? Thought about it think about it

## C

Yeh

## A

Erm so yeh and I am not as bitter I am not as angry I’m not as blaming I am much more rational now it ju just didn’t happen. I didn’t get to Wg Cdr not because I wasn’t good enough of course I was bloody god enough I did it for 2 tours I knew I was good enough everybody around me knew I was good enough it just didn’t happen and I am not the only one it didn’t happen to so I am not that special.

## C

Mmm

## A

It just didn’t happen go and keep breathing find something else to do. You know but no it was really interesting thank you very much.

End of interview - 1hr 19 mins