Emma Interview 2 – June 2018

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C

You said something in the last interview about family life and military life being incompatible and you said it was all the extra stuff that you have to do that makes it difficult to commit to being a parent and being in the military and I just wanted to delve into that.

E

yeh obviously out of area is the big one and there is quite a lot of preparing.  So, for me being away for 4 months and actually now it is usually 6 months it is just an incredibly large amount of time away and you miss so much I mean my husband was away for 6 months last year and I know how much he missed So I couldn't even .. I couldn't even imagine that now.  But it is the little things as well isn't it? It’s the for me being in the military isn't just a 9 - 5 job or an 8 - 5 job it is the dining in nights it’s the going to functions its doing parades to a certain extent it is doing things like orderly officers and things like that.  So, especially with my husband working away and me being up here so an orderly officer I mean I was lucky enough that I lived close enough to be able to do it from home but it was like a Saturday, I can't go anywhere except my house and actually you have got to go in in the mornings and salute the flag come back home again go back in the evening salute the flag come back again technically you are supposed to come back in at 1000 o'clock to shut down the bars or whatever else you are meant to do which on a Saturday meant getting the kids out of bed like 6 times well 5 times essentially to go in and out and it was little things like that. So.

C

Thanks that was great.

Emma

which is probably exactly what you thought anyway.

C

Well exactly.  But I can't presume.  I have to be careful I am not making massive assumptions.  ………. Is your husband still down South?

Emma

yeh but who knows Air Traffic or Air Ops, they have combined us with the Fighter Controllers.  The promotion board is in October so he may or may not get read.  Depending on whether he does or does not get read depends on how much he digs to get out on his promotion tour if you know what I mean.  That is why he went there or to come back to a station or whether he stays there or whether he gets processed.

05:30

C

So, you are in the old waiting game then.

Emma

It is probably a bit more uncertain now because as I say they are combining two branches, they combined them at the start of April it was the first time they had done a joint promotion board.  So, I don't think.  You would think that where he is he would have a fairly good ear to the ground and essentially, he gets the impression that nobody really knows how it is going to work.  They don't really know how they are going to assess an air trafficker against an ABMer they don't really how they are going to promote them and I don't think they really know how they are going to send so technically I think they are supposed to send any ABM to an Air trafficker to and any Air Trafficker to an ABM job.  A controller all being the same, so yeh I think it is the first big experiment as to how it is going to work.  The Flight Lieutenant promotion board is the first experiment.

C

and he is caught right in the middle.  it’s great to have your fate and your life in the hands of such military mindedness isn't it?

Emma

yeh yeh so I don't know I don't think he holds out any hope this year.  He's frustrated in that he has done everything that he is supposed to have done so, yeh he will get read next year and ……..it will be fine.

C

yes, it is very stressful but at least you are settled I suppose.  You are not hanging off it in terms of where you are living and .

Emma

No, I mean to a certain extent we are because we need to decide whether we stay here or we move with him

C

yeh so you haven't made that ultimate choice yet.

Emma

No, I always said I would move with him and but we have the decision we were going to stay where we were for the moment and then erm he was always adamant that we kept the house up here and he would just commute yeh I mean like you there is a list isn't there.  We weighed it up again at Christmas because I was really struggling at Christmas erm with him being away and we were trying to wait it out where would be better for the children, where would be better for me, where would be better for him, where would be better overall. But it constantly moves and changes doesn't it?

C

It does there is no right answer is there.

Emma

No My husband is very much of the belief that even if we if we lived together he wouldn't see any more of the twins really, than what he sees now because he would leave the house at 7 o’clock in the morning and get back at to the house at 6 o'clock at night so he might get 15 minutes 20 minutes every day but that would be about it so and whereas this job at the moment he can work from home a little bit but he sort of like the only thing we gain quite a lot is we get to sit and have dinner every night and watch the TV and things like that  so it’s we gain but they don't.

C

But are you happier.

Emma

yeh its little bits isn't it 09:29 like going out with friends or going to the cinema or going to the gym or going for a run.  Something along those sort of lines that I aren't really doing at the moment.  I can't really do anything so.

C

No, I do know how you feel because it made me feel quite trapped in that I suppose in that

Emma

yeh I really, really especially in January I was really like, what have we done? why have we decided that I am staying up here? my husband was like well shall we just move you down cause the children weren't really in nursery cause we had started them at the infant school cause the infant school takes them from the term after they are 2 so we left them at their old nursery for a bit of continuity then switched them in January.  ……… But those first 2 weeks of January I was really struggling cause I was like I don't see anybody, I don't talk to anybody, my in-laws happened to be away as well so I was literally going Monday to Friday with not seeing anybody, not being able to go out to the gym not being able to take the dogs for a walk, not being able to do my stuff at the hospital not having any friends because I don't know anybody in this town.  So and then and once they started school and I was getting out and I started to meet some people and I got to know some other mums that like here it all became that little bit easier and actually although I finished work because I kind of feel quite guilty I finished work to spend time with the children and now I send them to school effectively 9-3 mon and tues and 9-12 on wed but actually that is probably better because it stops me getting to wed morning and …and by they either adore each other or hate each other and anything mum says is just worth laughing at and not doing.  So, we are in that proper teenager stage.

C

you know I used to stand there and think.  People used to listen to me, I used to be respected and now this.

Emma

he is like (pulls face) …………….12:31 (talking about twins) They are at the stage at the moment when I will take them out and one will go in one direction and the other will literally go and stick two fingers up at me and go in the other direction.  And I am like, which child to I love more?  Which is why I had a spare.

C

Make a choice

Emma

Who is in less danger? which one has got a stranger nearby that might stop them and help.

C

oh dear.  I don't envy you that.  In saying all of that then we are just approaching, its 6 months since you actually left but since you finished work so how on reflection how are you feeling about having left?

Emma

you know what I go through ups and downs as to whether we made the right choice or not.  So, at the end of the month when we have got no money and we are suing my gratuity to kind of supplement bits and pieces or sacrificing something I like I think we shouldn't have made this decision but then.  My husband is quite good cause he turns around and says we made this decision cause it was right for our family and you are spending time with the children cause you wanted to and you can go back to work in a few years or not if you don't and you weren't enjoying it.  We knew we were going to struggle for money so yeh.  Cause it’s a shock isn't it you go from what is it top level Flight lieutenant just under £50k to £9 it’s a massive shock of getting used to it.  So, for the most of it I have made the right choice I don't miss it.  Don't get me wrong there are elements that I miss so in terms of being able to talk to adult people and there are other elements that I miss and that side of things I don't

C

That is not so much the Air Force is it?  That's company

Emma

I've not missed my job, I have not missed going into work.  So, I think I have definitely made the right choice.

C

So, it’s the money and the company.

Emma

yeh, bad isn't it.

C

I think you would be odd if you weren't able to accept that compromises have been made because you have left and there are days when you think oh god you would be easier at work, especially at work.

Emma

I've been there an element that thinks I’ve made a mistake I've made a mistake I haven't got any money but my husband goes it’s not a mistake because you are happier than you were.

C

So, is there anything about your leaving experience then that you would change is there anything you would have done differently?

Emma

I don’t think so.  Like I said to you at the time though you I didn’t really do any resettlement courses or anything perce that is going to get me anything as opposed to anything that I enjoyed I still don't think I would change that.  Because there is nothing I would want to qualify for at the moment I don't know what I will go into.  At some point I will use my ELC's  I don’t know what I will use them for, I've only got 4 years to use them know so yeh changing them from 10years to 5 years  all of a sudden especially when you are leaving for motherhood or fatherhood that those circumstances, actually 5 years isn't that long because 2 of those years I have literally spent standing still not doing anything and actually even when they start reception then I mean you are talking I'll be 4 years into it before I am even contemplating thinking about what I want to do so.

C

I don't know if you are aware they have changed the resettlement rules so you can access your resettlement after you have left.

Emma

Oh really, I used all mine for the courses. It’s only the ELCs I have left.

C

So, what advice would you give someone else who is just about to leave?

Emma

It’s funny because so many of my friends are going through the process of leaving or have just left, like my cousin just left, she has finished work she has left for the same reason I have the rest of them I mean my branch has a very heavy rate at the moment.  But apparently there is no problem.  None of them have asked for any advice because a lot of them have very set ideas about what they want to do because they are either leaving for family or they are leaving cause they are going to get a civilian instructor job at Shawbury so.  Advice, I don't know because I left in such different circumstances to somebody that is leaving to find another job.  If someone is leaving for the reasons that I am is do something that you enjoy with your resettlement and take the most out of it that you can.

C

So, going back again you said that it was a relief to make that decision to leave.  Are you still of that mind?

Emma

I think so yeh.  I'd always said that when I had children I would leave.  Because I wanted to be there for them.  I wanted to be able to take them to school I wanted to be able to go to football matches cause that is what my mum did I always remember mum being at school to drop me off and pick me up and certainly friends of mine that have got children they enjoy that side of things. So, I think it was a relief I think I had got to the point where I had so little time left I can leave so I will do.  It drags on doesn't it 12 months is a long time from putting your notice in to leaving and that 12 months is all get me out, get me out, get me out, I think if you are slightly unsure you over things then it might be a bit easier in some ways you can still change your mind while for me cause I wanted to leave getting round to leaving was finally its here.22:14

C

I suppose it gives you that time to think but if you don't need it you are just waiting.

So, we talked a bit about what you miss about the military which is not a lot.  Is there anything do you think about your life in the military that continues to influence you now in a way.

Emma

I think it is always going to isn't it.  You spend well I spent 16 years in the military so all of my adult life from age 18 was in the Air Force or in the UAS because I joined the UAS straight from because I had a bursary. At university I was still in the Air Force but not and then so I think a lot of things that you do I don't necessarily think I will be able to pin point exactly what it is but I guess it is simple things like when you are planning to go out for a day or timings or how just how you operate in general it is all very military influenced.  Even in terms of dressing the children and getting them haircuts and things like that you can tell that both my husband I come from that sort of background with my nephew has got like hair is all over the place and poor xxx can't get anything past like a short back and sides before he is being whisked down to the hairdressers.

C

So, when you say how we operate what do you mean? Do you mean that you approach everything from a very?

Emma

it’s kind of like because you are so used to planning it is very much like I need this to get to there to do that I need to be there by this time.

C

Structured I suppose

Emma

It is structured and it is I guess it is like Monday is my house clean day so if I haven't done my house clean on a Monday it is like Arggghh.  Isn't it I need to do it it is that kind of it is those subtilties and those, I think if I hadn't of been in the military would I have had those traits? Well I'd of had some of them but I think they have probably been enhanced by the fact that I have been in the military and I have been so used to planning.

C

What would you say has been the most striking thing about coming out of the Air Force about civilian life that has taken you?

Emma

I think I don't think I appreciated in a lot of ways how hard it was to make friends in your 30's.  In a lot of ways, I was probably I think I kind of knew it I think we talked a little bit about it last tie but actually making friends in your 30's is really chuffing hard.  To suddenly being in the military you have this massive core of friends I say friends because they are aren't they you can literally go anywhere and talk to anybody and as a person to talk to people and all of a sudden, I was in a situation where actually I don't really know anybody.  And I am not around like-minded people who will do the same things so I remember at the school gate.  Luckily, I have met people who are the same as me but it was literally taking me months to get past the hello how are you from some people and it is like urggh.  So, I miss that side of military people where you can sit and within 5 minutes you can know each other’s dogs’ names to this is really really hard work and none of you are like me whatsoever.  Luckily, I have managed to meet a couple of people who are very very similar and I have managed to chat to them and stuff and that has been a lot easier.

C

So, would you say that's made you change how you approach strangers?

Emma

I don't think so cause I think I will talk to everyone anymore.  I mean it is very noticeable because a lot of parents literally stand there and then because it is a small time so it is really obvious that they will only speak to people that they know so there is a few that are just like me and don't know anyone and don't say anything.  I don't think it has changed how I approach anything. I think I expect people to be like military people still.

C

What exactly do you mean by that?

Emma

just in terms of being very outgoing and outspoken and will converse quite easily with people and find it easy to talk to somebody that they don't know.  Whereas I don't think I really had the appreciation that actually a lot of people really struggle with that.  28:43

C

(talk about my experience)

Emma

where here is there is like a core of people.  It is very inbred.30:00

C

So, would you say is there anything that you have learnt in the military that has been useful in these scenarios?

Emma

I guess the military has just given me the confidence to just speak to people.  In a lot of way, it is really weird because I am quite confident in a lot of ways and I will speak to people but I am very underconfident at the same time.  I don't like kind of just go in and go arghu I think making complaints and things like that I really don't like doing that side of things its quite strange but then I am quite confident in going "hello, how are you doing?" and do you fancy going out for coffee and this sort of thing.  Which I guess the military side of me more brought out. I think people see me as a very confident out going sort of almost bolshy individual but I guess that is the military side of me.  Whereas I am probably not quite like that.  Once you know me if that makes sense.

C

yes, but you feel you have the confidence to innate a conversation with

Emma

Definitely, for example there is a one of the mums I have got to know she has got twin boys as well and it took a lot of @#@ing into the first couple of weeks but because we had that sort of connection we would sit and chat and then after about half term an a bit of them moving school I was like do you fancy going for coffee and she was like oh yeh we will and then I met another mum as well not knowing they knew each other but that is a different story that bit but Louise turned round to me and said after the other girl, Kate had left and said I can’t believe you got Kate out for a coffee, and I said why and she said well you are like the only person I have ever met that has ever managed to get that girl out with another mother and talking because she really suffers from anxiety and mental health.  And doesn't do it.  And I was like Oh I just handcuffed her and …But yeh it is funny that side of it.

C

It is different I made lots of friends in the end but it was like a whole term before

Emma

The frustrating thing for me has been that there is quite a lot of twins in the town but I didn't know and they cause they all knew each other they formed like a twins group where actually its more about mums getting together than it is about the children getting together and one of them happens to only live 3 doors away from me in the next street but we can see each other’s houses.  but neither of us realised where the other lived but I had met while I was pregnant and then met up with after I had had the twins one of the other mums in the group that had twins and she knew all of these and they had all met up for all the years that I have had the twins and been living in the town and never once did she mention that she lived here or mentioned me to them either.  So of course, they have now met me through school and are massively annoyed that for the last 3 years they could have been here helping and providing support when my husband was away and so it literally took until a month ago for me to meet them and I was like URGGG.  So, I have met two or three of them at the school gates and then over the course of the last couple of months they were like let’s all meet up I think unfortunately for me I just met the wrong person from the group if that makes sense when I first had the twins because none of the rest of them particularly like her so.

C

Oh dear

Emma

Well put it this way they are not very upset when she can't make a night out it’s a bit they describe her as being a bit all about me.  So, and there are massively annoyed that I didn't get introduced and they were @@~@~@ she happened to have prem babies I had prem babies mine came earlier than hers they were like she likes to trump everybody in everything she did and you beat her, if that makes sense so that's the that's the kind of why I didn't meet them but actually now they are a really good group of girls so, we go out for cocktails.

C

That is what you want.  I found it had to leave everyone when we left Wendover I did find it quite difficult cause it had taken 2, 3 years to build up those connections and walking away from everyone was really tough.  And even though they are not the same you haven't got that depth of friendship with you mates since you were 18 or your family they were still the people I could call up and say I need help.  Steve is out of the country they would still come.  They were still very good friends and we have kept in touch.  To move away and think Oh I am going to have to do it all again.

Emma

yeh one of the girls happens to be married to 36:38

randomly she happens to be married to a civvi air trafficker controller works up in Scotland and she was looking to move up there in the summer but they have delayed it for another year and I was chatting to her and it’s really hard to move somewhere when you don't know anybody and she is like and for her that is the most difficult thing because she is local born and bred and her friends are here, her family are here and she is terrified about relocating across the country, so I guess it’s less to a certain extent its less  of a problem in some ways because I am used to moving and having to make new friends everywhere.  And if I do move we will end up in a quarter which in some ways is may be easier if you are living in quarters.

C

I think it depends doesn't it what the patch is like, I mean we got here and it was really easy I mean within a week I was like I'd been invited round for coffee ten times and the kid were playing in the street with other kids so it was really easy but it is not necessarily like that it’s a small patch here whereas some of the larger places aren't quite so good it just depends where you end up.  It’s a gamble. A gamble.

Emma

I suppose the advantage is having been in the military I would know some people there anyway as well my branch is so small.

C

But that is weird as well to be honest with you cause I know lots of people here cause I have worked with them but I am not here as a professional officer I am here as Steve's wife so it is a bit odd a bit strange I mean I am going to know all the execs soon cause there is a bit of a change over happening, and I have either worked with them, lived next door to them gone on ops with them.  Steve it going it will be really nice for you and I am like no its not.  It’s really weird cause I am not I don't know but so it’s very friendly so I can't complain.

Emma

So, we will see where my husband goes I think.

C

yeh I think so.  So, what about would you say you still consider yourself part of the military family then?  Do you identify yourself as ex-military or do you just go?

Emma

I tend to probably because I don't have a job if this makes sense.  The conversation tends to go oh what do you do Oh I am a house wife but I used to be in the military almost as a that is what I used to do or they will go what did you do before?  Oh, I used to be in the military.  I am proud of the fact that I was in I am proud that I served and I am proud about the time that I did. So, I never want to hide that so I'd say in a lot of ways I do certainly where I am going to functions and things like that I probably know more people than my husband.  I was just remembering we went to the Christmas Draw at High Wycombe and I started talking to ACAS cause I used to work with him and my husband was just standing there going urgg.  I was like it’s not my fault.  I don't know about you but a lot of the people  I joined up with are now at least Wing Commander or higher and of course of these one, two or three starts are people who used to be the bosses when I was the liaison officer and things like that so yeh I have this random knowledge of lots of senior officers as opposed to any of the flight lieutenants cause none of my peers are flight lieutenants anymore.41:16 So if I am with my husband and have gone to a military function then yes definitely but I have no connections with the military, I am not on a patch I am in my own house.  I don't get any welfare support I just don't hear anything.  My husband is going out of area for 6 weeks in Sept-Oct I don't suspect I will hear anything from anybody.  It’s a detachment as opposed to a long time so I do I do but I don't.  It's a bit of a wishy-washy answer that one.

C

No, its fair enough.  It’s a bit of a mixture.

Emma

If my husband wasn't in the military I don't think I would feel part of the military family.

C

you have not joined any associations or anything like that.

Emma

No, I keep toying of the idea of RAFFA but I haven't got as far as actually joining them.  And again, with the HQ at High Wycombe they approached me with the idea of doing a zero hours contract but I have not heard anything about that I think she got a bit busy with everything and never sent me any information.

C

Is that something you are interested in?

Emma

Maybe I don't know I think it depends on what the jobs were that came up, if that makes sense and I know with that @~@~@ maybe in a couple of years’ time when the twins are a bit older then I know there is some way you can do the 9-3 9-2 hours terms time.  Maybe but I guess it’s an easy option isn't it it is going back to something I already know.43:25 or branch out into something different.

C

So, with that in mind where do you see yourself in 5 years’ time then.  The children will be 8.

Emma

I don't know.  I actually don't know where I will see myself in 5 years’ time.  I'd still like to be taking them to school and being here when they get home and taking them to swimming lessons that is where I would like to be.  Job wise I have got no idea.  I still do not know what I want to do I don’t know what I want to do I think a lot of it depends on my husband whether he does get promoted whether he gets promoted again after that whether he is I think in 5 years he will still be in definitely I mean we have spoken about with him whether he tries to get something a bit more special so I think his 20 year point is 2020+ I don't know other than having the kids I don't know.  Cause again we spoke about trying to tours abroad and both of us quite fancy the idea of America going across there and doing something else, he still talks about toying with the idea of going to join the Aussies.  I wouldn't do that while my parents or his are still alive. Cause it is too far for them to go.  But once they’re gone who knows.

C

The world is your oyster so to speak.  So, what is your in terms of what motivates you at the moment it is still very much focused on the children.

Emma

yeh definitely.  I guess its motherhood, you know that motherhood is quite hard full-time motherhood is quite hard a friend of mine works for the NHS she is thinking about giving up and you have got to understand a you are always skint and b its really actually quite tough being with them every single friggin day.  When they were babies and you are on mat leave yeh that is hard but actually now having 3-year olds to deal with it actually chuffing hard because you can't just stick them in a corner you have actually got to pay attention to what they are doing all the time.  So, you feel you need to actually do things and stuff.  If you know what I mean.

C

I do they do require that constant supervision.  46:59 talk about my children.

Emma

my very much want to do it for themselves but they actually can't. then you have to make games up so luckily having 2 I can make it in to a competition who is the winner and who is the loser (talks about children).47:49

C

Actually, that is pretty much all my questions.  Oh, I was going to ask you.  There are two things actually cause you said about your ELCs you are just standing still.  Do you mean in a professional context?

Emma

yeh in a professional context it is like

C

you have just hit the pause button almost.

Emma

and that is one of the frustrating things about ELC they are worth so much money and you can do so much with them.  What I can see happening is I just do some random courses of general stuff as opposed to anything useful with them because I kind of want to use them because the money is there. 48:48

Talk about ELCs

It is quite frustrating that you can't say I'd like to take a sabbatical from my five years for three years and then start the clock again, ok so I still might end up doing some random course but at least then.  Particularly in circumstances like mine you are doing that but yeh.49:54