Jessica 3 Dec 2018

Interview 2

Jessica

...and you can throw away specific boxes that you are keeping for that particular thing for next time you move. No, gone.

C

Did you find the house when you were overseas?

J

Basically yes so when we came back at Easter we spent a week house hunting, long story short we found a house, we had an offer accepted then they withdrew the house from sale.  When we went back overseas. So it was all a bit painful. We continued the house search on-line and we were looking, someone had told me who was also house hunting at a similar time to us.  Oh you can pay people to go in and do a none biased viewing of a house and they will tell you the realities of what they think of it so we had jus started to look into that and our financial advisor said "do you want me to go and view any properties? have you got any in mind? Ok, he is offering that means its free. Cause he didn't know us that well and he knew all about our finances and well actually we are achieving the same thing. Someone who doesn't really know us to go and do a none biased viewing.  We liked everything on rightmove that we has seen of the house and then he viewed it and sent us some videos took some pictures as well and it pretty much lived up to everything we thought from rightmove so went for it having never stepped foot in it.

C

Oh my God.

J

Some people would argue with the common sense of that, but very luckily for us we love it so it is all good. It couldhave gone horribly wrong.

C

That is quite impressive bravery there.

J

Yeh bravery, stupidity take your pick.  It has worked out alright but you know it could have not.  But then it just took a tremendous amount of time for it to go through bearing in mind there was no chain on either side was just crackers. What on earth is going on, they want there money, we want to pay them the money so we can get in the house and not be homeless. And it still just I think from what I can gather it was the purple bricks solicitors on their side.  They sold through purple bricks and all the feedback I've had is purple bricks is great at selling houses, the front end of it, but the back room the back office stuff, the solicitors useless. And it was true.

general talk

03:2206:08

C

If my calculations it has now been just over a year since you left?

J

Just under a year, 31 Dec last year.

C

On reflection then how do you feel about that decision to leave?

J

Fanbloodytastic.  Feel free to quote me like that or may you will want to just say fantastic.

C

no a bit of swearing is all well and good.

J

It was absolutely the right decision the thing , one of the many things I craved was doing the school run and going on school trips and just being there and I have achieved that in spades.  Just recently there has been quite a few different days where one of the kids has been ill or there is a school trip or whatever it might be and I have been able to be there .(unintelligible)

C

Yep and that is what you really wanted wasn't it?

J

yes, very much and it is particularly even more relevant with my husband being at High Wycombe Monday to Thursday.  I need more than ever the flexibility to be the one that does whatever is required.  Definitely the right choice.  I went to, as sad as it was, I went to a military funeral on Friday. And of course I'm with loads of people I know and it was fantastic because what I had a realisation of early this year. Cause obviously we were still in overseas lots of people were cycling through, so I'd be like come round for dinner, come and play cards, come and drink beer whatever and it dawned on me that I have walked away with a lot of friendships and that made me very happy. Someone said something quite early on, I can't remember who now, but when I left someone on the facebook past that I put about it.  Someone put something along the lines of "Glance back fondly, but look forward" and that summed it up for me that is how I feel. That I glance back very very fondly I am fiercely proud of what I did if someone disses the Air Force I'm the first to jump on them but it is a past part of my life but with a current element of I get to see the people I made great friendships with. Which is still wonderful and obviously I get to live the RAF vicariously thourgh my husband to a degree.  But it has been wonderful.

C

Is there anything you would change about your leaving experience itself? The practicalities.

J

Yes one thing. So I've let it go because I've had to for my own sanity but I've, even though I served over 16 years I lost 12% of my pension and my lump sum because I technically ET'd. Now I still I never got any legal advice at the time and I kind of wonder if I should have done, it water under the bridge now but while 16 wasn't an option point for me because I didn't get picked up fine, I extended my commission by a year to get the posting to High Wycombe so it was 17 years not 16.  So because I left before 17 years technically that was an ET.  No an option point.  I get that I still think it is wrong to make me loose 12% of what I served 16 years to get.  So I don't think I will ever be truly comfortable with that but it wasn't important enough to make me stay. All I would have had to have done was 7 months, it just wasn't important enough to me.  When we say down and had the conversation my husband said thin what that 12% would add up to over 10 years, 20 years, 20 years and I was like. I might go under a bus tomorrow, it doesn't matter the reason I am leaving is not financially driven.  Yes I have some financial goals in my business but the reason I am leaving is kids so actually that 12% I will make that back in my business.  I will make it not matter but I still think it was dodgy.

C

You've probably already answered this, you left for the kids but where do you fit into this picture.  You have got your husband you have got the kids, where are you?

J

And I think to be honest that was an intracule part of the decision. Is that the decision was made based on the ids however, I also saw it as an opportunity for me to achieve the business that I want within the requirements of the sort of day to day of being a parent.  So I saw it very much as a dual decision if you like, where it has achieved what I wanted as a mum but selfishly, more selfishly I have also achieved what I wanted from a business point of view which was to give me the time freedom to work my business around the children.  It really was intracule to the whole thing.  And rather have them fit in around whatever I was doing I could make, and I am making what I do fit round them. So that was  a hugely connected part of it.

C

If you could give yourself any advice, in terms of the process, would you do anything differently over the last year?

J

That is a tough question.  I suppose the one thing with hindsight its one of those scenarios where you don't l know if anything is going to be good until you experience it.  I did, there were a couple of things I had issue with from a transition point of view.  But I am not sure you could ever sort alleviate it or plan for it because you don't know how you are going to feel til you do it.  So for example, when we got to the Falklands I was there as a dependent so that is a fairly unique scenario I imagine that on leaving the Air Force in fact before I've left the Air Force I am then somewhere else but as a dependent.  Obviously I've got a dependents pass but for the first 2 months I used my 1250, because I had used that for nearly 17 years, that is who I am.  That will get me onto camp actually no your not you are here as a dependent you are not a Flt Lt Jones here you're Mrs Jones and that took a little bit of getting over.  15:17 It took me about 2 months and once I got over that I was like you know what, dependent, I was like dependent.  I am not dependent on any body.  How dare you.  Actually its just a word.  Its not the best word but they don't mean it in a derogatory way its just the word they have chosen which just means you are not there in a certain capacity you are a child of, wife of, husband of whatever.  So once I'd got over myself that was fine.  And then something else ………...I don't know I think it was actually a good thing that we were that I was living on a military base because it was almost a half way house to transition where if we had moved straight here it would very much be, yeh I know its our local base for arguments sake I'd only visit occasionally.  When actually it has taken a really long time to get over there and being a dependent, I don't know I am second guessing myself but I do think it was useful that it happened in quite an intense way and quite quickly and I suppose the other thing I almost felt that I had to relearn parenting because I was actually there so much of the time, previously all I had had to cope with was the morning, the evening and the weekends.  Now I was having to cope with a lot more and also the biggest adjustment that I had to make was that I had left a career where I was an SME, I knew my stuff people respected my opinion people would seek me out for advice, people liked having me as a line manager it was a good place to be and I was now spending all my time with 2 people who hardly ever listened.  And trying to explain that to my husband, why I was feeling a bit down about that was quite difficult cause he was like, I've been through some big changes too, I've got a new job and I am really busy and … yeh but nothing has really changed for you long term, you are still serving, you are just on a different posting.  Yes you have got new people to get used to but nothing has really changed.  My life has changed immeasurably from what it was obviously going through that transition process I had to get around but I don't know if  would have done anything differently per se.  It was just a transition I had to go through and I didn't know that before hand so I don't know if I could have planned to do it a certain way if that makes sense.

C

yeh its almost like you can't appreciate what is going to change.

J

yeh I think you are so , focused on, well I certainly was.  I know its the right choice and I am just enjoying the fact I am doing the school run and doing what I set out to do.  Hating the school run as it happens you know quite, you know, where I thought I left the Air Force for this, really!  They wont do as they are told I hate the school run, but it is still never fully detracted from you know what I'd still rather be at home suffering this torment than be at work full time.

C

What would you say you miss most about the military?

J

People. Definelty people, there was always something going on there was always people around even like the very few occasions, its only been the once where I had my own office.  Even then there was always people, whether they were at the end of a phone or just like the next room or the next office and people are what I thrive on and that is one of the reasons I changed branch because I need people. I need a certain interaction and all the rest of it.  And I've forgotten the trail of where I was going.  What was the question again?

C

What do you miss?

J

20:14

So it would definitely cause I don't miss so some of the socials and things I can still do that casue my husband is a mess member and I could become a mess member if I wanted to and everything.  But I still get to go to nice functions with him and I still get that nice side of things but it is the relationshps that you carve with people over time and share the experiences and the fact that you bump into people two tours time or whatever it comes to be and that was always a huge part of it for me.  I remember when I left the fighter control branch, I left from Scampton, and my leaving present or part of it was a big picture signed by everyone just of everyone because they knew the thing I was going to miss the most was the people. the work, well I wasn't going to miss the work anyway because I didn't enjoy it.  Same applied when I left the Air Force, its always been about the people which is why I was so happy when I realised that I had taken so many friendships away with me it didn't end just because my service ended.  And that was nice the thing that is nice now is I the line of work I am doing and the way I am choosing to do it I am spending a lot of time with people.  So it is not that is not now missing from my life I have just a different to achieve it because that is something that motivates  me and makes me happy, its spending time with people.  So that is why I am doing so much networking because A, its good to expand my network from a business point of view but actually it is social interaction with people cause working with yourself can be lonely, theres a potential for it to be lonely so.  All about the people.

C

What would you say then is there anything that you learnt in the military that continues to influence you now in your day to day  life.

J

there must be because I think before I joined the Air Froce I really admired things like the smartness and that sort of organisational hierarchy and structure. I like structure that is how my brain operates that is how I am wired, I like structure.  Then obviously I got a lot of structure good and bad  across the time I was in and I think post RAF there is still whether you call me institutionalised or not but you know structure to what I am doing is still important to me.  So the hierarchy thing doesn't exist anymore because of the type of work I am doing but for example, I have a weekly plan and it sets into half hour chunks everyday what I am doing because I like structure. I like to know what is happening and where I am.  And I am not always the best at it or planning each week properly but I do operate well whether I am writing lists or writing in a planner or having a planner whatever it might be and that was very much the case through my time and again I think some personal pride and discipline because I was very very proud to serve and very very disciplined in the way I acted in the military.  I believe very much about leading from the front and being setting the example I still feel I do that in what I am doing now as well.  So I think there is probably huge amounts that I have taken forward with me I guess partly because that is just who I am but partly because of the working environment I got used to working in and I guess you kind of automatically maybe take some of it whereas I think it becomes more of a choice once you have left.  You choose worn off whereas when you are in you have just got to be a certain way to a degree, there is a bit of flex but so I think there are lots of things I have taken forward definitely.

C

What about your own personal behaviour, the way of being, the way you are they way you interact with people.

J

I think again its probably not changed all that much because I still want to be seen as a  professional. I'm doing a lot more than selling some aloe vera products which is what a lot of people think I am doing.  I want to have a professional profile and I want people to work with me and be part of my team because they buy into who I am that I am authentic and that I have integrity and I mean it when I say I am passionate about helping people.   I want sort of people to be a part of that and it is very important to me that I am seen as professional in the way I do that and its not just a lot of people don't understand network marketing and that is fine cause e why would you unless you had an involvement with it.  You say doctor you know what it is you say shop assistant... network marketing?? and that is fine but its my brand is me I suppose, not the company I work for, my brand is me and my sense of pride in putting that across  in a credible way is huge and I guess that was the same when I was serving as well I wanted people to believe I was absolutely authentic and had integrity about the way I acted and I genuinely spent my Air Force career being able to sleep at night cause I never made any decisions based on what someone else told my I should or I always did the best for the guys type of thing.  You know look after the guys and the girls. I feel very similarily now about being on ?@?@.

C

So what is the biggest thing that surprised you about civilian life?

J

People talk to you differently I guess that shouldn't be a surprise but it was.  That is one of the reasons I struggled letting the 1250 go because if I went into PSF cause I still had some resettlement to do so I had cuase to go into PSF on quite a few occasions and when I went in and said I was Flt Lt Jones and showed my card even though I was in civies I got a very different response from when I was Mrs Jones and I just felt like, not do you know who you are talking to but you know I know all this I know all this crap sounding this you know I've just finished almost 17 years of service you know I get this, I'm not stupid and I think people almost assume a different level of not intelligence knowledge I suppose and they assume that you have never served I think is the thing that surprise me.  Not that they should ever assume that you have but you know what I mean the fat they assume you haven't that got to me a bit particularly as a dependent you know 'wife of' you are just Mrs, you are only here looking after you kids.  No, you know I served Queen and country as well, I am just as valid as you are.  And yeh I think that was quite an unhappy surprise that they speak to you differently and but could you honestly expect it any other way. I suppose if I was to put myself in there shoes they are going to assume that you don't know the acryonms and you don't know how PSF works and how allowances work and how the hierarchy works and everything else.  So is it unreasonable? probably not, was it annoying? Yes.

C

I think there are a couple of things there that strike a cord because you used the word valid.  Do you remember John Smith - coming in the back gate story walking with John, salaute, what about me?  Hello!  ….. Its a constant reminder to me that I am no longer valid.

J

And I think that is a big part of what I am striving for is to be seen as a valid person, as a valid business woman not just wife of John Jones.

C

So do you think, do you notice a difference in how people interact with you.  That was how military people reacted to you.  How do civilians, other civilians cause we are civilians now.  How do they react to you? Is that a different relationship.

J

Do you know and this has not occurred to me before in some respects its similar cause they equally assume that you have never served they equally assume that your whatever it is you have to do is a career or not or you are a stay at home mum or whatever, so I think they also make the same assumption and I did find myself early on almost having to establish that I have lived this life I have done it.  I actually maybe know a bit more about what you are talking about than you do because you are wife of and have never served and you know I understand it better than you do. Erm but I think the difference is I think other civilians will just generally for the most part take you as it comes whilst although they have probably made the same assumption that you have never served they I think they feel more so that they are meeting you on equal terms.  Whereas when a military person meets you its not an even, my perception is its not an even relationship from the other side.  whereas with the civilians it probably is more so, more even.  But again that does depend on who you meet what there background is and what there thoughts are on the military and you know it could be quite different depending on.

C

So just so I understand  there is a relational hierarchy between the military, people serving and people not serving. yes which doesn't exist in the civilian world because everyone is on a plane.  And that relationship is that a serving person is higher than a non serving person.

J

yes.

C

I went to a battle of Britain dining in night story - Rachel wore her medals and I did not.  And I was sitting there on the Top Table because Steve was PMC and I kept looking at Rachel and thinking it is really good that people are seeing that there is life after the military as a female officer, through Rachel.  Then I was sitting there thinking a bit more about it  and sort of there is 2 things  going on here.  I felt like I had 2 identities I could be at that dining in night.  I could be Steve's wife and be lower, because that is what you are.  Or I could be a retired serving officer and be lower because I'd given up and left.  And I didn't really want to be either one of those lower identities, but that is now I felt. I felt I had the choice of being 2 people I didn't want to be.  Which is why I tend to avoid most social functions because I do want, I know how I used to think about officers wives or officers husbands for that matter.

J

Yeh a fair one

C

And I sat there thinking you all think that I've done fuck all except wander around the Air Force clearing up after my husband.   I used to out rank him!!! and its weird cause who gives a fuck really but clearly there is something there and it is to do with status its to do with how people interact with you so they respect you your opinions, it validates you and all of a sudden these things aren't there any more or are being actually turned again.  That is my dissertation in a nutshell.  Right I'll wrap this up.  Do you still see yourself as part of the military family?

J

yes

C

what would you say, we have talked about what motivates you now and it is having that sense of purpose still an that helping people is coming out a lot in my interviews because people will say they want to help people.  And a lot of civilians especially in the academic world don't see the military organisation as an organisation that helps people.  They see it as an aggressive organisation and from the Air Force point of view especially I would say 95% of the people are not in anyway aggressive what so ever actually.  And so that is interesting so I want that to come out.  So as you look to the future in 5 years time how do you think you will look back on the Air Force and where do you see yourself?

J

I think I will still look back very fondly possibly with rose tinted glasses but I will till I die, sorry I'm getting emotional, I'm still very proud of what I did and I don't think that will ever go away.  When you look at various professions and all the things that everybody else does I am so proud that I did something for Queen and country.  I am a Royalist Ilove the Union Jack I don't think that will ever go away because I think that is an integral part of who I am I think.39:21 I am just so proud to have done it I just know that will never change and funnily enough when I left one of the gifts that I was given by one of my ex-colleagues who has also left she does lots of craft lots of pillows very creative and she made me a little cushion just a small rectangle one on a fabric hanger so you can just put it on a hook, and it has a union jack on it and embroidered 'proud to have served' and that kind of sums it up for me.  I think I will just always feel that way but rose tinted glasses might creep in eventually but that summed it up I think and as for where I want to be I've got some quite plans about where I want to be from an income point of view and I suppose income is a part of it.  Whilst I am not driven by the money I do want to match the income I had in the Air Force and more so I have big goals from that point of view but not for the money per se its more about lifestyle so wanting to be able to contribute my bit to the household which I am not doing that much at the moment but that will grow. So I need to be a contributor and for us to go on skiing holidays in America are stupidly expensive to be able to go on those holidays again and feel like I have contributed to that would be wonderful but it is also wanting to create something that my children will look at and go wow look at all the effort mammy put in and look where she has ended up because of it that is a huge driver for is wanting to inspire both them and other people.  So big plans but not centered around the money per se but around that sense of achievement.

Recording interrupted

42:46  43:36

C

I didn't get that last minute.  I heard you say status.

J

And I suppose that's so for me its about inspiring the girls and inspiring other people because I have achieved a certain status in the business world that could be universally viewed as valid, I support valid and status are bearing in mind what we have talked about are probably still quite key terms.  I don't want people to say oh how is your little aloe vera business? You know its not....

C

In that really patronising way (laughter) is there anything else you would like to add?

J

All the really big conclusions I have come to or issues I have had have all been mentioned I think.  the only other thing that does spring to mind it just kind of furthers what you have already said about the dining in night if I think about how I will be viewed when I go to the Christmas Draw in a week and a half compared to how I was viewed in the Sergeants Mess on Friday at the wake they are two very different things because I was wearing my veterans badge.  So and I was in company of quite a lot of people I knew, there was quite a few of us that weren't even serving anymore we all had our veterans badges on but we still spoke to each other in exactly the same way when we were serving but I know when I go to the Christmas Draw if my husband introduced me to all these people he is working with at High Wycombe unless he's happened to mention it to them in conversation they will have no idea that I spent 17 years as an officer myself.

C

If they even bother to ask you, I find.  the invisibility cloak is worn.

J

And I think that  is a very interesting facet of this whole thing is that it is not just the fact that we have left it is that we are still married in to it and I think that creates an extra and added dimension to the way we feel.  Because if you both just walked away from the military and lived not in a military house and just I don't know Steve became a teacher and it would al be very different suddenly.  Because he could be a filthy civilian and it would be different.

42.47