**Interview 014 Pseudonym: Chloe**

INTERVIEWER: Can you confirm for me that you read the information that I sent and that you’re happy to go ahead?

CHLOE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Great. Thank you. Do you want to get the cup of tea first? Would that be easier?

CHLOE: it’ll just be a minute until it boils so if you’re happy…. I’ll get it in a minute.

INTERVIEWER: Just to start off, can you tell me a bit about your faith history?

CHLOE: Yeah. I was brought up in a Christian home. My parents are both Christians. My dad comes from a Brethren background; my mum comes from an Anglican background. And after they got married they started going to a very small house church which they’re still part of and my dad’s one of the elders. So basically I grew up in a house church – non-denominational.

Ok, now the water’s boiling so….

INTERVIEWER: That’s alright.

CHLOE: I think… I don’t think I can really remember a time that I wasn’t a Christian because I grew up, you know, learning how to pray. You know, I was so young I can’t remember a time that I didn’t pray, for example. And I remember asking God to forgive me for my sins when I really small – maybe I was four or five something like that. I can remember lying in bed at night and praying. And then, when I was a teenager, maybe when I was in my early teens, I made more of a commitment publicly I suppose. I was baptised when I was in my late teens. So, yeah, my Christian journey has just been my whole life.

INTERVIEWER: Have there ever been times that your faith has been challenged?

CHLOE: Yeah, I guess if anything, it was more when I got into my twenties and I suppose I, I didn’t feel so comfortable with… I mean, some of the flavours of Christianity that I came across. Not necessarily so much in my childhood but maybe more so when I was a university student. Some of those flavours of Christianity seemed quite narrow. So I suppose I reacted a bit against that. But more intellectually than practically, you know. I suppose I just wanted to think more about things. But I’ve never abandoned my faith. I suppose I’ve just had periods where I’ve wanted to think outside of the boundaries a bit more or think a bit wider, or that sort of thing. And I suppose when I was in my late, maybe mid-twenties, late-twenties, I was still a Christian but I was kind of maybe playing with the notion of a more liberal Christian faith and less comfortable with very kind of mainstream conservative evangelical.

INTERVIEWER: so what kind of areas would that address?

CHLOE: em, well when I was a university student, I was a student in [UK City] and there’s a lot of very Reformed, theologically Reformed, people around in Christian circles there. So I suppose I was thinking about things like who is saved and what do you need to do to be saved? Those kinds of questions. And I suppose I also, like, when I got into my twenties, I probably felt more liberal on things like drinking and you know, the kind of, the standard things that in certain Christians are considered wrong and maybe for other Christians, especially those who are less conservative, they may be considered OK. So… yeah.. it wasn’t like I just suddenly started living wildly or anything, but I just felt that, yeah, I needed to kind of work things out for myself. So then, I suppose another significant thing was when I was 30 I started going out with a guy who had been a Christian but kind of was describing himself more as agnostic and I suppose going out with him kind of made me realise that I didn’t, I really didn’t want to abandon my faith. And actually that liberal, that whole liberal wing of Christianity, if I went down it too far, it became quite, em, disappointing, if that makes sense. And then we didn’t, we ended up not, we didn’t stay together. We were together for a few years. But yeah, I think that was one of the things that made the relationship difficult. Because I realised that I still had a strong Christian faith that I hadn’t given up on. And he was much more ready to abandon it, I suppose. So, yeah, so I don’t know if that’s a good summary or not – I mean there’s lots of other things that I haven’t mentioned but those are maybe some significant… My childhood is significant, my university experience of Christianity is significant, my own kind of going into my adult years in my twenties was kind of significant. And then having a relationship with a guy who was agnostic or something along those lines was kind of significant as well. So….

INTERVIEWER: So… how did you get from there to here? To where you are now?

CHLOE: So, yeah, so I was going out with this guy for a few years. When we split up I realised that … I mean I’d always had a kind of interest in working overseas and that sort of thing, and, yeah, and I realised that I could do that, there wasn’t anything stopping me doing that. And in terms of the work that I’m doing, em, I’m doing linguistics research with, well my sending organisation’s [Mission Organisation 1] but I’m here with an organisation called [Mission Organisation 2]. I’d always loved languages, but I didn’t study languages beyond – well, I’d done A-Level French, but I’d always loved languages. And then when I realised that I could maybe do something overseas and combine that with doing something with languages, that really appealed to me, so I studied some linguistics before I came overseas and then I’ve ended up doing that… well that was four years ago that I started studying linguistics and I came over to [country] in 2017 and just have really enjoyed that. So I feel like that’s the right thing for me to be doing. To be doing language research.

INTERVIEWER: So are you in a city there….?

CHLOE: Yeah, well I don’t live normally in the city but I am now because of the coronavirus thing, we’re in lockdown so I’m in the capital city but normally I live about a day’s journey away from here…. In a more kind of rural location.

INTERVIEWER: Who would you say have been your models in faith?

CHLOE: Em, well, I guess my parents were quite significant. I mean they were the huge influence on life, during my childhood, even right up till now I suppose. Even if it’s not as obvious. I mean, I’ve had a lot of… there are a lot of Christians in the family, so my grandparents were Christians and almost all of my aunts and uncles are. And then I’ve got a really good friend from university who’s still a really close friend – I suppose she’s kind of a model of faith in the sense that, she’s someone whose opinion I will value. If there’s a theological issue, I know that she will see things in a balanced way but she’s also not afraid to say what she thinks and, you know, she has, her faith is really firm but she’s also broadminded enough to debate things and think about things rather than just coming up with some kind of pat answer so…. Yeah, I mean those are people I know, I don’t know if you’re referring to people whose books I’ve read or people whose lives I’ve read about, I was just thinking more about people I’ve known in my own life.

INTERVIEWER: Different people answer it in different ways – I get both.

How have you found moving to a different country, a different culture?

CHLOE: I’m going to get my cup of tea now.

INTERVIEWER: that’s your home culture, the cup of tea

CHLOE: Very much so, yeah. Sorry I should have done this before. I came to [country] in 2017 and it was actually, I had quite a crazy time to be honest with you. I also had a really good time. But it was like a rollercoaster. And, basically I went to a really rural area, quite soon after I arrived in the country. And I was quite isolated and there wasn’t much support from the organisation – they just kind of sent me out there. I think they just kind of let me get on with what I had to do. And that was quite hard, but I loved being in a rural context and I made really good friends where I was living. And I loved – those are the things that I love about being in [country]. I mean it’s nice to be in a warmer climate – people are generally more open and hospitable and all that kind of stuff. So it’s warmth, not just like the climate’s warm but you know people are warm as well. And yeah, so I had… there was difficult stuff as well. There was just one colleague living in this, the village, this rural area I went to work in. And it turned out that she wasn’t really coping with life and I was living with her in her house but she was kind of crumbling mentally and emotionally and I kind of ended up absorbing a lot of her stress. And eventually she… there was just crazy stuff that happened. She kind of, her way of… she kind of kept… it was like a mental breakdown or something and she couldn’t even talk to me and it was really difficult. Eventually I had to move out, but then I was homeless for a couple of months and I had to go and stay with colleagues in a different place. Then I ended up going back to the village again and moving in with a local family. And that was a really positive experience. They really cared for me and looked after me. So that’s where I ended up, living with a local family. Then I ended up having to move out of there because of conflict that was getting worse, so the organisation that I am working with evacuated us from the region. So, yeah, so I ended up leaving because we were evacuated, and coming back to the city. So that first year and a half that I spent in [country] was really turbulent. Then I went back to the UK for a year and did some more study and stuff. And now I’ve been back in [country] this time for seven months or something, eight months maybe, and it’s been less turbulent and, yeah, more settled. A bit easier.

INTERVIEWER: up until now?

CHLOE: yeah. So now the situation’s quite… we’re in lockdown at the [organisation] headquarters in the capital city and we don’t know how long that’s going to be for. It could be a few weeks or it could be a couple of months or, we don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: how do you deal with all the uncertainty and the change? Both the first time and with the current situation.

CHLOE: well, this situation doesn’t feel too difficult to be honest, because it’s quite a comfortable place to be. I’m in an apartment with running water and there’s a hot shower and there’s a washing machine here. So it feels very comfortable. And there’s a few other people that are stuck here as well – they’re living in other houses just around me, but we’re all inside the same compound. And, but they’re all lovely so I’m in a nice community. So it feels – socially it feels like it’s a good place to be. So, I suppose I just take one day at a time sometimes, like a way to cope. I think, I think you have to be really flexible to live and work in overseas, especially if you’re in Africa where life can be kind of unpredictable anyway. But I mean, this coronavirus thing, this isn’t just Africa, this is worldwide so everybody’s dealing with it. Yeah, I mean to be honest with you the unpredictability and all the changes that I went through initially, especially the situation with my living situation, I coped with it quite well, but it was quite stressful so it did take its toll. But I mean I just did things like, I would always go outside every afternoon. I had a bicycle so I would go out cycling. I had a guitar so I would play music, I would play the guitar. I would usually, em, have kind of fairly regular calls with people back home. So those are like practical things that I could do to cope.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there’s anything about your growing up, childhood, youth that helped prepare you for living overseas?

CHLOE: yes. I think, yeah, for sure. I mean my parents are quite open, hospitable, you know, they were always quite… they would be generous to people around them. So I think that taught me to accept other people or kind of be open to other people. That’s probably helped me to mix with people who are different to me. Yeah, they wouldn’t, they weren’t… they didn’t just mix with people who were like them, they would mix with lots of different people who had come from different backgrounds or different countries or… So that probably taught me how to mix with people who are different to me, which is I guess important. Because it’s not just the [Country-ans] that I’m living with and working with who are different to me, it’s the missionary community is mostly Americans and people from other countries. I think the other thing that I probably did learn from childhood was persevering. So my parents are quite strong, they just, you know, they don’t give up easily and they don’t have meltdowns, they don’t have tantrums about things. They just kind of keep calm and keep going. So I suppose I’ve learnt a bit how to deal with stress by seeing how they have dealt with it. They, if they’re frustrated or stressed, they don’t … I didn’t grow up seeing parents who just threw a wobbly because something didn’t go their way or because they were annoyed, they would just, you know, keep going and stay calm, and yeah, and persevere. So I can see that I’ve learnt some of those traits off them. So, yeah, I don’t know – does that answer your question?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. How do you go about taking major decisions?

CHLOE: generally or?

INTERVIEWER: generally – I’m thinking like big life decisions, things like choosing to move country and those kind of things, but yeah, big decisions.

CHLOE: I probably make decisions pretty much on my own but chatting to other people at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: so do you kind of go through a process internally?

CHLOE: Yeah. So I would probably be more – I would probably process decision making more internally. I think, yeah. Probably.

INTERVIEWER: And who would you talk to?

CHLOE: probably like the people that I’m closest to are like my parents, the good friend from university that I mentioned already, the one that I respect for her Christian faith. I’ve a couple of aunts, one in particular that I’m very close to, so I would often discuss things with her. I have [siblings] and if – I wouldn’t necessarily always ring them to ask for advice about things, but I would be able to talk about things with them as well. Like one of my brothers in particular is quite a good person to talk to about things. There’s a lady in my home church who, she’s kind of like a link person for me while I’m here, like a link to my home church. But she’s quite a good listener and she’s quite wise and she thinks over things carefully before she gives any advice, so she’s quite a good person to talk to as well. And she’s someone that I really trust. Like quite often when I’ve been overseas we’ve done skype calls and that sort of thing and I can talk to her. So yeah, it’s a variety of people, it’s not just like one person.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the kind of support structures you have. You mentioned your church? I’m thinking different aspects of support?

CHLOE: People who are supporting me while I’m living here in [country]?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, in whatever way they’re supporting you. How does that work?

CHLOE: yeah. So financially my support comes from a mix of family and friends and my home church and individuals within my home church as well as the church officially. And then my financial support all goes through [organisation] and then [organisation] pass the money on to me and that’s done on a monthly basis. And at the start of each assignment – so if an assignment’s for a year and a half or two years or whatever – at the start of each assignment I work out my budget. [Organisation] gets me to work out my budget and then, em, so I work out how much I’m going to need each month for this that and the other, and [organisation] checks that I have enough support to live basically. And that hasn’t been an issue until now. Like, I haven’t, I’ve never struggled financially, I’ve always had what I needed, so that’s been good. I haven’t ever had to worry about that. In terms of prayer support – I mean obviously apart from individuals, family and friends – there’s two churches really that support me in terms of prayer. My home church and then another church that I went to as an adult in a different place to where I grew up. Practically, my home church have been very good. People have sometimes sent me parcels and, yeah, some family members have sent me parcels as well. So that’s just kind of a way of people showing that they’re thinking about me and they just send little things that they know I can’t get here. So, I feel quite, I feel really well supported by my, yeah by my church, by my family, by my friends. So that’s a real blessing.

INTERVIEWER: so, do you call yourself a missionary? What do you understand by that term?

CHLOE: Well, that’s an interesting question because the organisation that I work for does language work and even from its earliest… [connection cut off]

INTERVIEWER: do you want to try just audio? Do you think that would be better?

CHLOE: yeah, let’s try that.

INTERVIEWER: ok, you were just saying about …………. [rings again]

CHLOE: so you were just asking me if I would call myself a missionary…

INTERVIEWER: Yes

CHLOE: and I was just saying that because the organisation that I work for is not a typical missionary organisation, historically it’s been a bit more complicated anyway, so, yeah, it’s often considered itself a development organisation, an organisation that does linguistics work and yes, it has a Christian ethos and the people who work for the organisation are Christians, but because it doesn’t do church-planting or discipleship, and particularly because it often works in countries where it would be dangerous or unwise to be explicitly Christian, because of all those reasons it’s kind of less overtly Christian than other Christian organisations. I probably would sometimes… I would probably generally hesitate to like put an initial label on what I’m doing at the minute. I’d probably say I’m a linguist rather than a missionary. And, em, yeah, I heard one, an older lady a few years ago, who has worked for [organisation] all her life and she says it depends who she’s speaking to. Sometimes she would describe herself as a missionary and sometimes as a linguist. Em, but yeah, if I describe myself as a missionary it’s often kind of like a bit tongue-in-cheek or something.

INTERVIEWER: so what would be your definition of missionary – how do you see it?

CHLOE: I suppose the stereotype of a missionary is somebody who leaves there home country and goes to a very different part of the world with the primary purpose of spreading the Christian message, like whether it’s through church planting or discipleship or em teaching in a theological school or working in a missionary hospital or working in a missionary school. And I suppose that stereotype existed more for a generation or era that is kind of on the way out. So, yeah, so in terms of what is a missionary today – I mean, I suppose I still feel it’s someone who’s doing work that is specifically Christian and they’re doing it in a context or a country that’s different to their home country or their home context. But I’m kind of aware of the fact that it’s a bit of a loaded term and that it’s quite complicated. It’s not – and it’s – for some people it might be a derogatory label to put on somebody.

INTERVIEWER: Can you expand on that a bit? You said loaded – in what way?

CHLOE: I mean, I guess, a lot of Christians back home have this mental presentation of a missionary as somebody who is a bit unusual or a bit odd or a bit disconnected from real life. I mean people who are leading busy lives in the Western world with stressful pressurised jobs, they can see missionaries as people who are having, not necessarily an adventure but maybe they’re, you know, it’s like a way of escaping life. Of for some people maybe the idea of a missionary conjures up somebody who’s pious and judgmental and religious and has some kind of superiority complex or, I don’t know – I just think it’s quite complicated for Christians in the Western world sometimes to, yeah, from their perspective to understand why someone would want to go and live in a different country. And I think the other complication from the whole thing of being a missionary is that missionaries generally are financially supported by people back home, so people at home who are struggling financially might sometimes find it offensive that just because you go and live in a different country, you get financially supported and you don’t need to worry about earning an income in the same way as people back home.

INTERVIEWER: that’s interesting. How do you think Britishness is viewed where you are?

CHLOE: Well, you know part of [country] was a British colony up until independence. [Historical and geographical detail omitted to preserve anonymity]. [Country-ans] I think have very mixed views about the British for obvious reasons. But I think the British were not as disliked as the French in terms of how they understood the colonies.

Are you still there? It says connection poor.

INTERVIEWER: it went very strange for a moment but then it came back.

CHLOE: It terms of how the British are seen by the expat community, that’s kind of interesting. Because [organisation] is basically an American organisation so most of my expat colleagues are North Americans either from the States or Canada. And I think that, in the same way that British people often misunderstand American people, I think often American people misunderstand British people. And I mean it’s just the usual stereotype of British people often find Americans to be too direct or too confident or too whatever, and conversely Americans maybe see the British as being too indirect and not just getting to the point or you know, not being confident and not being positive and all that sort of stuff.

[sound breaking up]

[rings again]

CHLOE: Hi. Is that better?

INTERVIEWER: I think it is actually – sounds clearer.

CHLOE: Sometimes I find if you hang up and redial…

INTERVIEWER: it resets it somehow.

CHLOE: yeah…

INTERVIEWER: some of that was really breaking up there at the end.

CHLOE: well first of all I talked about how [country-ans] might view British people and then I started talking about how other expats in the expat community might view British people and I was just talking particularly about Americans because they form the vast majority of the expat population here. I don’t know if you caught all of that.

INTERVIEWER: I was quite interested in what you were saying about being from Northern Ireland…

CHLOE: yes, I was just saying that, that’s the thing is that a lot of … I’ve noticed particularly with Americans because, you know, especially a lot of Americans have got roots to Ireland or whatever, and then, if I say I’m from Northern Ireland they just hear the word Ireland and then they think I’m Irish and… they don’t realise that I’m British, so that’s kind of interesting as well. Because, em, I don’t know whether I should start explaining that the Republic of Ireland is a different country with a different government and different education system and health system and currency, or you know, whether to just go along with… I mean, so that kind of makes it more complicated as well. I think if I had an English accent people would probably just… I think even for Americans, they’re not always sure what British means. Is it just people who come from England? They don’t understand completely the… and it is complicated, it’s not surprising that people get confused about what British means or what the UK means or….

INTERVIEWER: I’m confused in myself because I was born in England and grew up in Scotland then came back to England – I call myself British because I can’t go for either.

CHLOE: Yeah, well that’s kind of… yeah, if you’ve lived in different parts of the UK describing yourself as British is quite handy.

INTERVIEWER: yes.

CHLOE: I would always describe myself as Northern Irish first and foremost and then I would say I was British secondly, and maybe thirdly I would say I was Irish. But I know it’s complicated because we come from a place that is, has, some Welsh or Scottish people would be very proud of being Scottish or Welsh and wouldn’t want to add anything to that.

INTERVIEWER: yeah, exactly.

Tell me a bit more about what it’s like working in team there?

CHLOE: so, em, the team that I’m working with at the minute is really great and I’m really blessed because it’s a really good situation and the team situation that I had during my last assignment in [country] was where I was in that remote area with a colleague who wasn’t really coping and she was my only, she was the only person in that place so it was really intense and difficult. My team situation now is really good – there’s, in terms of the expats, there’s one family and one couple and one other single female and me. And the family are – [North American] – and the couple who are middle-aged, their kids have grown up, they’re both [North American], and the single female is English. It’s a really good team situation. And we all live within five or ten minutes’ drive of each other. So we’re not physically all exactly in the same place but we’re close enough to each other to visit each other really easily. And, yeah, I don’t know specifically what you were wondering. Did you mean the dynamics?

INTERVIEWER: yeah, how… are there good points, bad points? What do you like and not like about working in team? What does leadership look like?

CHLOE: yeah, so in terms of team.. because I’m doing linguistics research, I’m kind of, I have to be honest with you, doing my own work in my own way in my own time. Like I arrange to meet up with someone who speaks the language and I collect data and then I work on that data on my own. Like a lot of it is, it’s not really a team situation. But I work, where I normally live I work in an office with [country-an] colleagues doing Bible translation. It’s just nice having people in the office around me, even though I’m just working on my own thing and they’re working on their own thing, it’s really nice to have that sense of teamwork even though we’re not working on exactly the same thing. With the expats, yeah, they mostly work from home and they’re mostly doing language work as well. So again they’re just kind of working, like whatever language they’re working with, they’re doing their own thing in their own way in their own time. But I think where the teamwork really comes into play is not so much with the technical aspect of our work but more just with the supporting each other socially, emotionally. Yeah, the people that I have, the expats that I have in my team at the minute are very supportive of me and like help me practically with things. I don’t have a car, I just take motorbikes around. So if there’s something that I need to have a car for, they’ll help me with that. And yeah, like spiritually it’s good. The middle-aged North American couple I normally meet up with every Wednesday morning and pray with them. So we kind of, yeah, we’re quite close and we can share things with each other and that’s a really good source of encouragement, seeing them and praying with them. In terms of leadership, I probably would be more critical because I’ve not had fantastic experiences of leadership in the organisation that I’m with at the minute and I don’t know if that’s just circumstances or whatever but I’ve, yeah, I’ve had some frustrations with leadership. Just to give an example, a couple of months ago I asked somebody in leadership about something, and this is somebody who lives in the capital city so he’s not living where I live all the time, and I wanted some feedback about something and he just either didn’t know how to answer or didn’t want to answer or whatever, never got back to me, and I found that really frustrating. So, yeah, that’s happened a couple of times. Like even when I arrived in [country] first there was an issue that I needed to discuss with somebody and my supervisor at that time was in [N America] and I emailed him and I didn’t get a reply and yeah, those kind of situations I find frustrating because I feel like, em, it makes me feel like my request or my question wasn’t important if, you know, I don’t get a response back. So yeah, I’ll be honest, I’ve had moments where I felt quite frustrated with leadership, but, on the other hand, I’m aware that they’re under a lot of stress and strain, living overseas can be challenging and they’re often juggling work and they have like families, they’re trying to manage that as well. So I’ve tried not to let my frustrations… like I’ve just tried to accept things even when I’m frustrated and not kick up a huge fuss just because I feel a bit annoyed about something, because ultimately that could affect relationships and I don’t want to create ill feeling.

[phone rings]

That’s just my [country-an] phone ringing – I’m ignoring it.

INTERVIEWER: do you have a plan for the future?

CHLOE: em… I’m planning to be here in [country] for another year and a bit. So I’m going to be here until May or June 2021 and then I will go back to the UK for probably a couple of months. I mean my plan was to come overseas long-term, but I’m just taking each chunk of time as it comes. So I came overseas for a year and a half initially, went back to the UK, and then made another decision to come back for, now I’m here for almost two years and, yeah. I feel like I need to be really flexible because living here has just taught me that you can’t make long-term plans. You know, the village that I started off working in and living in is now a war zone – that’s the place that I was evacuated from. And, you know, this time I’ve come to [country] and I’ve ended up being stuck in the city again but for a different reason. So, I would like to do linguistics work long-ish term. And I enjoy living overseas. But beyond that, I don’t have very concrete plans.

INTERVIEWER: Ok. So do you kind of take the decision when you need to?

CHLOE: Yeah. So the way it works both with [Organisation 1] my sending organisation and with [Organisation 2] who I work for here, yeah we just make decisions one step at a time. So I made a decision to come here for a year and a half initially and I didn’t need to make any more decisions until that period of time came to an end and I went back to the UK and knew that I would be there for a chunk of time because of studying. I didn’t need to make another decision until that chunk of time came to an end. So yeah, nobody is putting pressure on me and asking me, what are you going to do for the next five years? You know, people are just wanting to know, do you have a plan of action for this chunk of time that you’ve made a decision about?

INTERVIEWER: Lastly, how and how much do you use social media?

CHLOE: I use whatsapp a lot. I use Facebook a bit. And that’s about it really. I don’t use social media a huge amount. I mean, em, but yeah. Particularly Whatsapp I use it a lot and it’s become really popular with [country-ans] as well so it’s really important to have that. Facebook I feel like, I mean I’m on Facebook and I every so often I just go there and have a look and see what’s going on with different people, but I don’t really post much and I don’t really feel that that’s something… I don’t know, I’ve just never really got into the habit of posting much there. I don’t use – I’m not on Twitter, I don’t know what else there is. That’s about it.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Great. I think we’ll leave it there. Thank you for your time.

CHLOE: You’re welcome. I hope the recording comes out.

INTERVIEWER: It should be fine – there’ll be some gaps and some restarts but it’s ok.