**Interview 006 Pseudonym: Rachel**

*[older participant for comparative purposes]*

INTERVIEWER: Could you confirm for me please that you’ve read the information that I sent and that you’re willing to go ahead with this interview?

RACHEL: Yes. [states name] and I have read the information sent to me and I am happy to continue with this interview.

INTERVIEWER: first of all, can you just tell me a bit about your faith history?

RACHEL: Yeah. My parents were Christians. I am one of three girls. And, I’m the youngest. And we all grew up with a lovely Christian home. And, er, we’re all firm in our faith. My mother, in her involvement in church was always involved with the mission area of the church and so I remember having missionaries visit and they came and stayed in our home. Some of them I remember very much. And, em, but I don’t think I ever thought about being a missionary. I finished school, went to train to be a nurse, met my husband who was a chemical engineer. When we were dating, we felt that God challenged us as to whether we were prepared to go wherever He wanted us to go. And I remember we said yes, but we got on with getting married and having children. We had our first child when we lived in [UK city name] then we moved to London because of my husband’s work and we had two more children. And it was when our youngest was just one year old that, em, well, it was a little bit before for me… God said to me through a verse in Isaiah, that ‘a year from now your roots will tremble’. And then, a year to the day, my husband had a morning of prayer and when he’d finished his morning of prayer he came out and said “I think God wants us to go overseas as missionaries.” And that was quite a surprise. We’d been very involved in our local church, in discipleship, I did a lot of evangelism, he was one of the church leaders, one of the team of elders. And I guess I had thought that God might call us to be full-time Christian workers, but I hadn’t thought about the overseas aspect. But we said yes and our church was super-supportive. And we went to All Nations Christian College for a year and did a – we did a bit of both years, the Biblical year and the missiological year. We only spent a year there because our son was seven rising eight and they said it would be better to move sooner rather than later. So, em, we left for … we looked at a number of missionary societies. This is 28 years ago. And at that time we said to them we felt that we were very much disciplers. I enjoyed evangelism, but we weren’t, we didn’t feel we were “church-planters”. And a number of the mission agencies sort of weren’t quite sure what to do with us. Because in those days it was still quite a traditional idea of what a missionary was. And then, also, we said that we wanted the children to be with us. I felt that God had given us our kids and we should have them with us. So that also meant that some of the missionary societies didn’t know how to sort of place us, because they used residential boarding schools for the children. And then we found [ Mission Organisation A] and [ Mission Organisation A] was just beginning to … well no, they already had quite a variety of opportunities and when they looked at our skill set they said that they felt we could fit in and that we wouldn’t have to put our kids in boarding school, they could be with us. And they recommended [Latin American country] at that time for various reasons. And so we moved to [country] and – now you’re going to ask me for a date – it’s 28 years ago, whatever that is. With our three children. Our son was 8, our daughter was 6 and our little one was 4.

When we first moved we did a year of language learning. That was really good – I recommend that to anyone. By the time we’d finished that I felt fairly comfortable in [language]. [Husband] says he still wasn’t quite so comfortable, but he was good. And then we started to explore ideas. We worked a bit with local church. He worked a bit with an organisation that helps pastors, and it was basically helping them to think about setting up small groups in their churches, which was not common in [country]. They didn’t have the idea of home groups or whatever you call them in your church. So, em, he was helping with that. I was getting involved in teaching in the Sunday School. I took upon a group of 8-10 year olds. And then he was invited to work with the student movement, which is like, it’s part of IFES, the Christian Unions organisation. And that was a great challenge. It really was a challenge because he became what you would call a travelling secretary for the student movement but he covered an area which was part of a state and part of another state and it was larger than the whole of the United Kingdom put together. And so it meant a lot of travelling. We actually decided to move at that point, so that his journeys were not quite so long. And he did that for nine years. It was great. He got very involved, he was helping to provide evangelistic material for them to use in universities. And, yeah, it was super. But it meant he was away from home quite a lot, em. I’m the sort of mum that copes with that, but it does affect the kids. And I was very involved in the local church – by that time I was working with teenagers and evangelism with teenagers. It was going really well. But I think, particularly our youngest, felt it that daddy wasn’t ever around. So, he made a decision to change. And he also had recognised that there was a big need in [country] to encourage the young people to think about the contribution that they could make, young professionals really, as they finished university. To say: ok, I could help churches, or I could help Christians, or I could help with evangelism in other places. And so he did a Masters degree in [country] with the focus on preparing professionals for mission. And he actually produced a book at the end of that. And at the same time started getting involved with a movement within the IFES movement, to encourage people with professional skills to see that they could use those skills in the mission field. And at the same time, we started to get to know a little bit about [ Mission Organisation B]. I don’t know if you’ve heard of Mission Organisation B, it’s a mission agency that places people with their professional skills. And they wanted to start in [Country] to send [Country-ians]. So I started to help another lady and basically we got Mission Organisation B [Country office] off the ground. So that was 16 years ago. And we started recruiting and preparing and sending Country-ians all over the world. And that was very exciting. At the same time we were invited to go to a mission training centre in Country and help with the training. So we took that opportunity and we both went initially as teachers and then my husband was asked to be the Director so he was the Director in the missions school up until January this year when he asked to step down. I stepped down from Mission Organisation B last year and he stepped down from the Director this year. We’re both still teachers, but we are in the UK at the moment – supposedly on furlough, but because of the Covid-19 we don’t know when we will be going back. So it’s a bit of a strange feeling. Because we came for a break and to sort of start looking at where we’re going to return to because we finish at the end of this year. And, em, it’s all a bit up in the air now. But that’s fine: God knows. So that’s …

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. It’s very strange, isn’t it? One of the questions that I ask people – at the moment it’s just – it’s ‘how do you make decisions?’ ‘how do you go about taking major decisions?’ And at the moment it’s….

[laughter]

RACHEL: I think you can…. I have always been very aware of God working through small steps to take us to big steps. So, for example, when we were going out and we went on a conference and we felt God challenge us as to whether we were willing to say yes to him in our lives: that was a step, it was a small step. And then, later on when he said first to me “your world is going to be shaken” I understood that was very clear. And I prayed. And I knew it said “a year from now” and I wrote it in my, in the margin of my diary, and I prayed and I waited. And it was no surprise to me when, you know, my husband said “we need to take this move.” So, and that’s happened several times. I’ve felt often that God has unsettled us, has made things happen that mean that we change, em, our perspective on the future, and then when he says “right, stop this and go and do that”, it’s not a surprise. It’s been very interesting because I, I think last May, I stopped working for Mission Organisation B. I’d been telling them for a while that I needed to take a step back, it was getting too much for me. And, em, they found someone else, I trained her up. She took it over, and I stepped back. And then my husband started saying “look, I would like you to find someone to be the director”. And then something quite suddenly happened. Our daughter – one daughter was still living in [country] with her husband and two children. And his work situation changed such that he needed to come back to the UK. And, em, my daughter said to me, “I know you’re talking about retiring…” – we were actually talking about retiring in 2022 – she said, “does it have to be then? Could it be sooner?” And I said, we were walking along the beach: oh yes, sorry about this, we were walking along the beach. And I said to her “well, I’ve already handed over most of my job; daddy needs to hand over his responsibility as director. If we can find that person, then it could move forwards.” And I then spoke to him and he said, “well, I’ve already had an idea of who they could invite. If she says yes, then yes, it could move forward.” And so that happened. And then he started training her in October and she took over in January and very much said, “right, I’ll take over, I’ll call on you if I need you.” So we came back now for our furlough sort of … well, we’ve done. So if we only go back and pack up our house it’s no big deal. We’ve been closing doors. So I don’t find it – yeah, making decisions… it’s not a big thing for us I don’t feel. It’s more, God takes us in little steps until we’re ready. We have to be listening, don’t we? We have to be aware of the way that he’s speaking to us. And sometimes that’s very specifically through Scripture verses and sometimes it is through our circumstances. And sometimes it’s through other people asking us questions.

INTERVIEWER: Who do you think have been your models in faith in your walk?

RACHEL: [pause] Different people at different times. I think, em, my parents were a great model to me in their very faithful walk with God and commitment to his word and always wanting to have, em, times reading his word. I think for my husband similarly, my husband’s dad was a Baptist minister so that was important in his life. I think as we went to the mission field there were a number of people that were significant. I think there was one person – she was… her name is [name] …. She was one of the first wave of missionaries to go out from [Country]. She went out as a young person, a single lady, to [African country] during the civil war, with the university students. And then she returned to [Country] and she was working in the mission centre and [husband] got to know her through the student movement and then as we moved to the mission centre we got to know her more. She was somebody who always inspired because of her commitment and faithfulness.

INTERVIEWER: How did you find culture, living in a different place, all that kind of thing. How was it at the beginning, later on?

RACHEL: Culture’s beautiful, isn’t it? It shocks you. And then you think you’ve learnt it and then you discover you haven’t learnt it. Yeah. I think committing yourself to learn the language is incredibly important because until you have a good grasp of the language you don’t truly understand the culture. I think you always have to be prepared to be surprised by culture because there are small things that you don’t necessarily observe at first. And then come after a while. I think one of the most difficult experiences for me in terms of culture actually was three years after we had been in [Country]. The [Country] culture is a Latin culture. It’s very inclusive. So whenever you… for example, if you have… a child is going to have a birthday and you want to have a birthday party, you might invite their friends. But you have to be prepared for the fact that all of the family of their friends will come. So the friend will come with their brothers, with their mum and dad, and sometimes with grandma and grandad as well. And that is part of the culture. And when you get married you have to expect that everybody you know at church will turn up, because they expect to. So that is … and we… we had a group of friends, we were moving, it was the time we were moving from one place to another, one city to another. And my kids said they wanted to go to the cinema and they wanted take one or two friends each to the cinema, and I thought that was ok. But I had been working with this group of kind of early teens, and there were other kids of course. But our children chose to invite – I think there were six or eight of them, I don’t remember now how many. But after the event, the mother of one of the other children phoned me up and was very angry, very angry. I was really shocked. Basically, she felt that I had excluded her son. And that was a surprise. That was… ok, this culture is deeper… this culture of inclusion goes deeper. And I think to an extent I ended up after that erring on the side of exaggeration. I remember my son at one point saying “mum, you don’t have to feel that you have to include everybody”. And I sort of said to him, “oh, I do. I learnt my lesson.”

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like your children “got it” more because they grew up with it?

RACHEL: Oh yes, absolutely. We laugh at some things because… for example… The English culture, you probably know, is always apologising. So, em, you bump into someone, you say “oh sorry!” Or you, as a mum, you prepare a meal and if you don’t think it’s quite what it should be you end up saying, “oh I’m sorry, this isn’t quite…” Well on one occasion our son at the meal table said “for goodness sake, stop saying you’re sorry.” Because in the [Country] culture you don’t say you’re sorry, because it’s a culture of [pause] shame, a shame culture. I have to think in English! And you don’t do that because it means that you are bringing shame on yourself and you don’t do that. So they had very much taken it on board and I still hadn’t to that extent, obviously. So they were very [Country-an], which was interesting as they grew up. Because although they were very [Country-an] they did some things that weren’t. So for example, the [Country-an] culture is very family orientated and children wouldn’t normally leave home unless they were going to get married. Very few at that time were going off to university in another city. And in fact, if they went to another city, sometimes the parents would move with them to be with them, right. And all three of our kids, as soon as they hit end of school and were only 17, got up and left. And my family, my friends around me, couldn’t understand that, you know. “why did they do that?” And we had to acknowledge that that was because to some extent they understood their English culture even though they’d been in [Country].

INTERVIEWER: interesting. Do you think there were things that prepared you for going and living in another culture? What do you think helped?

RACHEL: Well, I think maybe for myself having grown up in the culture in my home where my parents were always concerned about others, were always seeking to help others. I think that probably helped. For both of us when we were at university we were both involved with the movement of the Navigators and we saw reaching out to others as important. That doesn’t necessarily help you cope with the change of a culture and a language, no. I know that the year at All Nations was very important to help us prepare. Working through things in theory does help you when it comes to the practice. I think we had one or two friends we made early on that spoke some English that was helpful for us. There weren’t many people who spoke English. So friendships on the field are important. Yeah. I think those things helped us. It wasn’t easy.

INTERVIEWER: do you consider yourself a “missionary” and what does the term mean to you?

RACHEL: When we first went, I know when people called us “missionaries” I used to say, “oh I’m not a missionary, I’m just a normal Christian but God has asked me to go and live my Christian life somewhere else.” Em… yeah. But then gradually, as we got into training and sending [Country-ans] I think that… I did actually begin to say more that yeah, actually, I am a missionary. Because in [Country] there’s a culture of, er, calling people who work full-time in Christian work “missionaries.” Even though they’ve never left their home. They’re working in the church. Because often this happens when it’s a female because they won’t call them a “pastor” so they’ll call them a “missionary.” And I have to keep saying, “they’re not missionaries, they’re workers in the church.” They might be evangelists or they might be church workers. The term “missionary” to me means “sent.” A missionary is somebody who the church has said “we want you to go somewhere else, somewhere that’s out of your comfort zone, and serve there.” And so, I do differentiate that now and say… In fact recently, I remember, I challenged someone. She kept calling people who they’re training up in their church “missionaries” and I said “I don’t agree with your terminology because a missionary is somebody who is sent. And so I wouldn’t say that that’s what you’re describing.” Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting, yeah. Er… Can you tell me a bit about how you’ve been supported over the years? All aspects of it: the finance, the prayer, practical things…

RACHEL: Yeah… Our sending church was very good, very supportive, and sent us with a good em financial contribution. And then, because we’d been involved in a student movement when we first went and were still quite in contact with a lot of our student friends – ex-students by then, professionals by then – we were able to establish quite a big group of friends who were also financial supporters. And I must say we haven’t lost many. Some have grown old and died. But in general those people have been very faithful in their financial giving. And we still maintain contact with them and visit them when we’re back. So in terms of the financial support, that’s been reasonably good. There were moments when it was difficult because with three children you face challenges with costs and so there was one moment that we did go back to our church and say “we’re beginning to struggle”. And at that point a couple of families in the church actually stepped in and made a special contribution to help us. That was super. And then as the children grew up and left home things became a bit easier.

In terms of kind of other aspects of support. I think that, em, it’s varied. At different times it’s been better and at different times it’s been weaker. I think our church had moments when the people in the missionary group were good and understood and there were times when they weren’t quite so good. It varies. I think there’s more material around for people to read now, which helps. In fact, I think it was four years ago there was a new guy who took on the leadership of the mission group in our church and when he took it on I encouraged him to come with us to a Global Connections conference, which he did. And I think that was really helpful because it really opened his eyes and he then has done a lot more and he’s absolutely fantastic now and he’s giving us more support than we’ve ever had, which is great. To the extent that in January when [husband] handed over the directorship of the mission school – and that was quite, quite a wobbly moment for us, you know, a moment feeling a little bit “gosh, our lives our changing.” And I wrote to him and said, you know, “I’m struggling. This article is very good about the position we’re in and you might like to read it so that you understand why we’re struggling and when we come back it might be difficult.” And he said “oh, I’ve just read a book about that so I know what you’re going through!” So that was really nice. And he actually – he retired [profession] a couple of years ago and he said, “when I retired I know what it was like; it makes you feel this, that and the other.” So that was really good.

I think our family have always been – particularly my family – my mum was a real prayer warrior, was always there praying for me. I knew I could tell her about youngsters I was evangelising, about youngsters I was discipling, and she would pray. My sister has always been super on the practical side of looking after our bank accounts and all our documents – in fact she does it for virtually all of our family. She’s wonderful. And that was always a good support.

The church were always good. Well it varied a bit, but they usually were good at sorting out our programme for our furlough and finding places for us to stay. Sometimes not so good, sometimes could have been a bit better. But, yeah, generally they were good. So…

Our mission agency…. There’ve been a lot of changes in staff and that’s one of the things that was difficult. And in fact, yeah, I know other members of our mission that have said this. It seems that they change every two years, which is very disturbing for you when you’re on the field. Every time you come back, the person that you meet who is responsible for your support and care on the field is a different person. That’s quite difficult. I think they find it difficult to hold onto staff. Yes, so, could be better I guess is the answer there.

And of course when I worked in Mission Organisation B in [Country] and I was – I was basically HR, virtually on my own for a lot of the time, and then I managed to bring in somebody gradually to help me in communication. And now they have two people in the role that I was doing, which is much better. So I was involved in recruiting, selecting, training, sending, liaising on the field, and member care. And so, em, I understand a lot about member care. That makes you quite sensitive to how well your own member care…

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I was involved in member care in Romania in starting sending Romanians: [Country] was one of our models, actually, as we looked at how to bring agencies together and look at sending.

RACHEL: Well I’m part of the national Member Care organisation in [Country]

*[short discussion of terminology in Latin languages for ‘member care’! omitted because it reveals country… then trying to remember the name of someone in Global Member Care]*

RACHEL: So I’m on the Member Care… specifically responsible for missionary kids. But at the moment everything’s being cancelled left, right and centre. We should have had a training session for people in April, that’s been cancelled.

INTERVIEWER: The European Member Care conference was cancelled.

RACHEL: In Spain, wasn’t it? Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That would have been this week? Last week? Something like that.

RACHEL: And we have a camp usually at the end of July. We’ve just decided to cancel.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, my organisation, I’m a trustee now, and we have a conference at the end of July: we have a meeting next week to discuss… but you just can’t see people actually managing to get back to Britain.

RACHEL: No, no. Very difficult.

INTERVIEWER: We live in strange times.

RACHEL: Did I answer your question? I can’t remember what your question was.

INTERVIEWER: No, I can’t remember how we got onto that. Oh, we were talking about support, that was it.

RACHEL: Oh yeah. Understanding what “member care” is.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your experience of team-working.

RACHEL: I’ve done quite a lot of working virtually, which is interesting. So for example, when I first started working with the lady when we started Mission Organisation B [Country], I was living in one city and she was living in another city and we were 24 hours bus journey apart. So if I went to see her it took me a whole day on the bus to get there. And in fact the first year we were working together I did that three times or four times, it was exhausting. So, em, but we worked very well. We learnt to work… and that was fourteen fifteen years ago, so internet wasn’t that brilliant, but we were doing it. We certainly didn’t have as much as we have now. And then of course, once I got involved with Mission Organisation B and we were sending people overseas, well, you’re doing all of that virtually. So, em, working with who you’re placing people with, afterwards looking after them – it’s all teamwork, but virtually. Yeah, I’ve been used to doing that. Obviously internet helps a lot more. When we went to live in the mission school, then we were living within a team and working as a team. And at that point we were the only foreigners. Yes, we were the only foreigners. Yeah, we’ve always enjoyed being in a team and got on well. And we’ve actually been working together now – my husband and I – for a long time, you know. We’ve managed to do that. So we’re a team too. So yeah. Team-working is good, team-working is good. I think there needs to be a lot of willingness to listen to other people’s points of view; of asking for help: recognising when others do something better than you or know how to do something you don’t, being willing to ask for them to help you. One of the things I know I find difficult is saying to someone when they’re not doing it as well as I would like them to. That I find very difficult. That I could improve on. Yeah.

And now, working with member care, it’s all virtual. So I’m now back in the UK but I’m still helping them as we talk through what we’re going to cancel and what we’re going to do and how we’re going to handle it. Yeah, very used to doing that.

INTERVIEWER: A bit more difficult with the time gaps I imagine?

RACHEL: well, yeah, you get used to it. At one point with Mission Organisation B, I went to one of the international conferences for HR and, em, after we’d done some work on profile of candidates, we’d done a little bit… we’d done a “world café” – do you know the “world café” idea of discussing things?

INTERVIEWER: no

RACHEL: You’ve never used “world café”? It’s very helpful. It’s a technique for discussing subjects. So, em, you do an introductory talk about a subject. And then you break people up into tables where you put say five or six on a table and you give them a big sheet of paper and you give them a question relating to what you’ve been talking about. Each table has a different question. And you give them ten minutes, say, and they write on the paper their ideas about the question. And then you get them all to move round a table. And when they sit at the next table they read the question and they read the answers that the people have given already and they comment on that and interact with that. And then after ten minutes you move them again. And then depending on how much time you’ve got, sometimes you can throw in another question to each table. I’ve done it with people and they say they want to go round all the tables. Well there isn’t always time to go round all the tables so they get frustrated. They want to read what everybody’s put on all the other questions. Excellent way of getting people both to think about what they’ve been hearing and feed back on it, and also interact with one another as they do so. And lots of ideas come out of that. So we were doing this one on “what is the candidate we’re looking for?” And, em, what characteristics are important? And that was really helpful. So afterwards, they asked us to, well they picked up on some people and I was one of them, and said we want you to prepare a profile. And there was one girl in New Zealand, one girl in Indonesia, one guy in Hungary, one guy in the United States, and me in [Country]. So we had to meet together regularly to put together this profile. So the time zone difference was thirteen hours. It was great fun. But we did it. So, em, it was good and it worked. We got a lovely profile together: I am very happy with what we did. We produced an excellent profile. So there you go.

INTERVIEWER: What’s your experience been of the younger generation coming in?

RACHEL: The X’s and Y’s.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of differences have you observed?

RACHEL: Very much so. I think one of the things that we noticed was the [pause] the X, Generation X, who are now sort of thirties, mid-thirties, aren’t they…. How much they think they know it and therefore want to take initiative, but on the other hand, want you to coach them or mentor them. And it’s an interesting, er, difference. Our generation were much more inclined to look at a situation, think about it, study it, plan for it, and take it step by step. The younger generation, they are very quick to jump in with both feet. And then they stick their arm up and shout “help!” So you have to be very prepared to allow them to make suggestions of ideas that they have, listen to them, be willing to listen to them, have patience because they have some crazy ideas sometimes. But also, encourage them by being willing to let them try their ideas and stand on the sidelines ready to help when it doesn’t work and they need help to get it to work. Sometimes it does work, which is great, but not always. Yeah, I think that’s what I feel about the younger generations.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting.

RACHEL: And I think we’ve seen that with our own children too. And I think as a parent I – I’ve always said this and I will go on saying it – I think you teach your child between 1 and 7, you spend a lot of time teaching. You then train a child between 7 and 14. You help them put into practice what you’ve taught them. And you encourage them in that. And then after they’re 14 you step back and wait for them to come and ask for your help. And it’s no good trying to give them advice and tell them what to do because they won’t listen. But the amazing thing is, after they’re 21, they come and they ask! And they want your input and they want your contribution. Yeah, it’s amazing. We’ve seen that in our kids and I tell other people that. [to me personally] So work hard now at teaching because this is the time that you need to be teaching them.

INTERVIEWER: yeah. OK. My last question really is just how and how much do you use social media, which I think we’ve touched on a little bit.

RACHEL: Quite a lot. I’ve never gone into Twitter and I’m not on Instagram. I just felt I’d reached a limit. And partly because, so, em, I use Whatsapp a lot. I mean, when we first went out to [Country] we didn’t even have a computer and I used to write to all our supporters by hand. In fact, our son, when he was at school was asked “what do your parents do?” And he said “my mum writes letters and my dad does the finance.” So, having a computer then learning to use email and then learning to be in Facebook a little bit – I only really went into Facebook so that I could see my kids’ photos and posts. I didn’t really use it that much. But when Whatsapp came along, I started to use Whatsapp quite a lot. It was a bit strange when you began to realise that people were using Whatsapp instead of emailing. That took a while to get used to. At first I didn’t like it. I think I’ve now accepted it. But occasionally I will say to someone, “This I would like you to write in an email. I think it’s important.” I have got used to it now. And Skype was an absolute god-send and really helpful with family when they moved away. And now in fact we use Zoom quite a lot – do you know Zoom?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah

RACHEL: So we use Zoom certainly for meetings of larger groups. And in fact I’m now doing, I’m supporting families of “mish” kids in our, in Mission Organisation A, using Zoom, a monthly meeting with them. It works very well, yeah. So, em, it’s very helpful. I think, as I said I didn’t go into Instagraming. Partly because I… this might sound… I have … well, the people that I’m involved with with Mission Organisation A, that I’m responsible for as a Member Care person; I have all the people that I placed on the field with Mission Organisation B, that I feel a responsibility even though I’ve left it; and we have seen over 150 students go through our mission centre in the years that we’ve been there. So there’s an awful lot of people and it gets a bit much sometimes. Plus friends, you know, and family. So, em, I felt I don’t want to go into Instagram as well. I’ve got enough happening with what I use. But obviously it is very helpful.

INTERVIEWER: OK, that’s all I had to talk to you about.

RACHEL: So what is your research objective?

INTERVIEWER: I’m looking at Generation Y, who are roughly 20-40 at the moment, and their involvement in mission. Part of it is saying, why are people still going? Because it’s obviously not… so I’m doing it from a UK perspective… so growing up in secular Britain, why would you still choose to become a missionary in the traditional sense? So, the question I’m asking is, are they different from other people in their generation and more like older missionaries, or are they like their generation and, I guess, changing what “missionary” is? So that’s kind of the question that I’m looking at.

RACHEL: OK. Which is quite interesting. I, em, the week we got back from [Country] was my mum’s 90th birthday and we had a number of family members came to spend the day with her and we went out for lunch together. And I have a niece who is thirty or thirty-one. And the mission centre where we’ve been working for the last fifteen years is struggling at the moment with low numbers of students. And it’s been struggling now for two years, nearly three years. And she said to me, why is it struggling? And I said, well, there are a number of reasons that we think have contributed. One is that [Country] is going through an economic down and has been for a number of years which obviously affects it. Secondly there are a lot more mission training centres that have opened: we were one of the only ones and now there’s a lot more. Thirdly, there are a lot of short courses that are offered that people think is an appropriate training for mission, but we feel probably isn’t sufficient. And then she said, “well don’t you think it’s probably because people don’t think that, you know, you don’t send missionaries any more. Why do you send missionaries? You know, you might go overseas and work, but why would you send missionaries?” And I found that quite a challenging view, and I thought, I need to go back and talk to her more about that because that was quite a shock.

And then we went to spend time with some friends who were missionaries that retired. And they commented on their church and they said, oh no, our church has got lots of youngsters getting involved in mission. And she showed me a bookmark. But on that it said, you know, there were some that were overseas, there were some that were working in projects in the UK and there were some that were very local. But they can, their concept was that they were all missionaries. And I thought that was great because it basically said “there isn’t the one idea of what a missionary is.” And I thought, I think my niece thought that a missionary was that person who packed their bags and their coffin and went off to darkest Africa and planted churches. Well, I did say to her, you know, most of the people we’ve sent with [ Mission Organisation B] are either professionals who are working and then who are evangelising or discipling or encouraging the local church in their spare time. Or they’re working in what we would call here NGO’s, you know, they’re working in social projects and giving hope to people in very desperate situations. So, what people describe as ‘mission’ maybe we need a different terminology, em, because their understanding of the word ‘mission’ perhaps is that old-fashioned vision of what a missionary does.

INTERVIEWER: yeah

RACHEL: So it’s an interesting one. And certainly we do need to understand what their concept is because if we’re going to keep attracting them to go we need to find the right buttons to press.

There’s an article that I thought was very interesting, but it’s not about the Y generation. I’m just looking for it. Let me find it. Did you read the article which was… oh, have I got it in English? I translated it.

[laughter… pause as she searches]

It was in Christianity Today in 2015 and it was, I think the title was something to do with the influence of.. I’m going to find it because I do think it’s interesting. It was the influence of missionaries today. Here it is: January February 2014, Christianity Today. ‘They’ve been called racists, imperialists. The world missionaries made.’ Because that’s what my niece was saying: oh, it’s very colonial. And I understand her. But when you read this article, it basically, the person that was doing the research which was a lady – there you go, another lady. She basically said, when you look at what they did, they did not just bring people to Christ and establish churches. They established schools, they established hospitals, they changed the dynamic of developing countries incredibly. And that’s what mission does. It doesn’t just bring people to Christ. I found it quite interesting because it says to us: OK, you might have that view that mission is old-fashioned and out-dated. But it had an incredible impact and it can still have an incredible impact today. So… helping youngsters to see that. I mean, when we place youngsters overseas with Mission Organisation B, they’re doing such diverse things. None of them are what you would have called, you know, the pith helmet missionary. And I get very excited about what they’re doing. So, yeah, how do we excite them?

I think one of the things we recognise with youngsters is that sometimes they need to go and experience it in order to then say yes, I do want to do this for longer. They quite often need to go for a short time. Sometimes they’ll go for a short time and then say, I don’t want to do that any more. Which can be sad. But, yeah… I had one girl last year, no, the year before last now who, she works in financial development *[detail of past work removed]*. She decided to take a year out: well actually she said to me six months. So she came to me and she said can you place me for six months? And I said yeah. And I found a, it’s called Business as Mission, do you understand Business as Mission? In [Asian Country]. And this guy set up this business [detail of business] in [Asian Country] using local products. Fantastic project. Giving work to local people. And using local products. And exporting them. [*detail of local culture removed*]. So he wanted somebody to help him with his financial system which wasn’t working. So she went out. She actually started working with him beforehand. Went out. Was there for three months and said to me, “I need to stay longer, this is marvellous. I want to stay longer.” I said OK. And we arranged for her to stay longer. And then sadly it had to be cut short because [*personal circumstances* *removed*]. It was a fantastic experience. And she then said, that was good, I think I want to go again. She’s still thinking about it. [*detail of person’s situation removed*]. Yeah, finding the right opportunity so that they say, this is good, therefore I want to do it for longer.

Good. Well, God bless you …