**Interview 011 Pseudonym: Elaine**

*At time of interview, participant was in lockdown in husband’s home country.*

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

ELAINE: I am very happy to go ahead with the interview.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. Have you been evacuated? What’s your situation at the moment?

ELAINE: We are on our normal home assignment schedule.

INTERVIEWER: Oh. So you just happened to be…

ELAINE: Yeah. We’re supposed to be here. It’s just that we’re not supposed to be sitting around doing nothing. We’re supposed to be travelling around the province, visiting supporters and giving presentations at churches, but so far we’ve had two church presentations cancelled and we’re supposed to go to [country] to visit my brother and my husband’s sister who both live there but unfortunately that obviously got cancelled as well. There’s a possibility that my husband might have got through because he’s [nationality] and [national] border is in theory open to [nationality], but with me being a Brit there’s no way they’d have let me through. So that all got canned unfortunately. So we’ve been in [country] for two and a half weeks. We’ve only seen a few neighbours when they’ve driven past us on the road. But thankfully we have technology so we’ve been phoning people to say “hi! We are here! But we’re not going to come see you.” We’ve got quite a few supporters who are elderly folks in the local OAPs home and they are completely locked down, not allowed anyone in or out. So we’ve phoned a few of them just to say “hi – we are here!”

INTERVIEWER: It’s really hard. You wonder how many elderly people are going to just die of loneliness.

ELAINE: Honestly, if I was them in this situation. I might say, “Please come. If I get sick and die, then at least I will be happy whilst I am alive!”

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

ELAINE: I’m struggling with that. We saw a friend this morning – just dropped off some groceries for her. I haven’t seen her in two years and I couldn’t hug her. That sucks. As an extrovert.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Yeah, I’ve got a friend who’s a real extrovert and she’s got some massive health issues and she’s been just shut in her house for a couple of weeks already and she won’t go out. So people come and touch her window and talk to her through the window. But she’s not going to risk it. She’s had so many Zoom meetings she’s had enough. Yeah. Very strange.

ELAINE: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So, tell me about your faith history. What’s your background?

ELAINE: Oh, OK. Back to the beginning.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, way back.

ELAINE: Well it actually starts with my mum. My mum became a Christian at my christening. So I had a christening service back in the day when you had a christening service because it was the social thing to do. Basically an excuse for a party. And the Anglican church that they took me to to have my christening, the minister did an altar call. No idea why. But, and my mum tells me that her and my dad sort of did the nudge, nudge – they were 26 when they had me. They sort of said, “I will if you will, I will if you will.” Then they sort of said, “OK, I will if you will.” And then my mum stood up but my dad stayed sitting down. But she got up and she’d been spotted. So she went forward with the altar call, but it was a genuine commitment and, em, at that point she did become a Christian, started going to a church. So because of her I grew up going to churches. But because my dad hadn’t gotten up, I always had the choice to go to church or not. I mean, when we were very young my mum brought us and we didn’t really have a choice. But once it got to sort of teenage years then there was a definite choice. But when I was 8 I chose to be baptised. Actually my mum got baptised at the same, during the same service as me, which was quite fun. And through my teenage years it was still very much, you know, my dad stayed home and eventually my brother stayed home with my dad. I always had that option but I didn’t. My faith was real to me. And, er, went to university and then after university joined the [Forces]. And as a teenager, I think my… I had a wonderful church when I was a teenager. And I grew in my faith throughout my teenage years. But then once I left that church and went to university and then subsequently joined the [Forces], I think my faith sort of plateaued without having good strong influences, people I could really look up to as Christians. And sort of the accountability as a kid of living in your parents’ house. So my faith sort of plateaued at that point. I still kept going to church and youth groups and, em, and in fact when I joined what I consider now my home church, which is just outside of [UK city], I became a youth group leader there as well. And then my time with the [Forces] was coming to an end – I was with them for six years. And I started to look at what I was going to do next. I really liked being in the Air Force, wanted to stay there, but it was at a time when they were making a lot of people redundant so it was cheaper to end a short contract than it was to make someone redundant, so I was out with a large number of people. In fact, most of the people I joined up with had short contracts instead of long ones. And, em, so I started to look at various organisations. I met with some Christian charities. At first I thought I wanted to do a bit of short-term mission, like maybe a year overseas doing something. And I contacted one organisation – unfortunately I can’t remember the name of the organisation – but a guy who’s like the area rep or something, he came and met with me and was fantastic because he said to me, “don’t come. There is no point you coming for a year and being a bottle-washer when we can get local people to be bottle-washers and you’ll in effect be taking a job away from someone.” So their particular organisation there wasn’t a specific job I could do. He actually offered me a job organising a conference, but that would be short-term. But in the end he sort of pushed me to look at missions longer term. And then it was my mum who actually suggested [current organisation] to me, which was funny. I’d never heard of them before but their – they were started by a bunch of [Forces veterans] and engineers who then, who [detail of organisation omitted] saw the need in Africa, and said “we need to go back and do something other than drop bombs.” So they did. So that was – you know, it was ex [Forces] personnel that started [organisation] yet I’d been in the [Forces] and had never heard of them. So then I applied to them and I also applied to [other organisation] and I was actually being interviewed for a role with [2nd organisation] and a role with [current organisation] at the same time. And then one day I got [current organisation] called me and said, “OK we’ve got a job for you.” And then the next day [other organisation] called me and said “we don’t want you to have this job.” I was really stressing that I was going to get both jobs and how was I possibly going to choose! But God is clever enough to not offer me two jobs and leave it to me to decide, because I wouldn’t have chosen the one I’m on, purely and simply because [current organisation] requires full financial support raising; [other organisation] does not. And, you know, us Brits, we don’t like asking for money. So… I would have chosen the other one, no doubt. So got accepted by [current organisation] to go to [country] as a ground operations manager and have been there for six years now. I’m now in a different role. I’m now in a more of a supportive role. And after I’d been in [country] for about two years, I met my now husband, who’s [nationality] which is why we’re in [country]. And then after about a year and a couple of months of knowing each other we got married. And then signed on for a bit longer with [organisation]. So I’ve been there six years; he’s been there four years. And we’ll probably… we’ve just told them that we’ll probably sign on for another contract which means at least another six years. And that’s that.

INTERVIEWER: Great! Em, you mentioned your faith plateauing at one point – what have been some of the challenges to your faith along the way?

ELAINE: All of those things that challenge every 18 year old when they leave home for the first time. Peer pressure, alcohol, social scene, new-found freedom. All of those things which, if you don’t have something or someone strong to lean on can lead you off the track. And I was trying to hold my faith in balance with my social life and doing it very badly and not in any way honouring to God. Even though I was publicly saying I was a Christian, attending church on a Sunday, attending Christian Union on a Friday night, volunteering with the Christian Union and all of that. But not, just not honouring God in the way I led my life in all aspects. I was sort of a Sunday Christian. And very happy to announce that I was a Sunday Christian. But it was more words than deeds. And then when I joined the [Forces] there was more of the same peer pressure and alcohol.

INTERVIEWER: So what do you think helped you kind of become stronger again in faith? What made it different later?

ELAINE: I think, I mean I don’t… We can never know the mind of God. But I have a theory that if I could have followed God wholeheartedly and been and led a godly life-style within the [Forces] then He might have made me stay because it is so important to have Christians in every walk of life, in every industry, in every job sector. But I wasn’t being his light that He needed me to be there. And so He sort of gave me the opportunity. I failed, and so He pulled me out and said “right [name], you need to sort yourself out.” And then after I left the [Forces], whilst I was applying with [the two organisations], that’s when I actually went to All Nations. I just did the En Route course – so just one term, ten weeks. But that really – I think that massively drew me back to God. Because it was ten weeks of intensive in his presence with other people who are walking in his path as well. My whole life was God: I couldn’t get away from him. And I think that really dragged me back. Which was great. And then that really solidified my faith because of course you face so many challenges moving to a different culture, a different part of the world, leaving everything you know and love, everything that’s familiar behind you. If I hadn’t had that time of strengthening my faith at All Nations I would have really struggled. And in fact when I, when I turned up, one of my neighbours later told me – he didn’t tell me straight away – he later told me that he gave me six months! And I think if I hadn’t had that opportunity to strengthen my faith and really deal with some issues, I think I’d have been lucky to make it six months. So, I definitely think the opportunity to leave my world behind me, soak in the presence of God for a while, and then just start a whole new life, really helped me to cling to God.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me about some of the challenges of living in a different place, in a different culture and moving…?

ELAINE: So before I arrived in [country] I was warned politely, nicely, but warned that I was younger than most of the other people there – I was in a position of leadership, I was on the leadership team, and I was at that point the only woman on the leadership team. And I was younger than anyone else on the leadership team. There was one guy who was maybe ten years older than me and then everyone else was twenty years older than me. And I was warned and the way I - you know you hear words and you don’t necessarily interpret it the correct way. I heard “everyone is twenty years older than you and no one will be your friend!” Which I instantly dismissed as a load of rubbish because I can make friends with anyone and didn’t have a … didn’t see having no one my age as being an immediate problem. I was in no way concerned about that. I was mildly amused that someone thought that because I was only thirty that fifty-year-olds wouldn’t like me. Just because of the fact that I was thirty. But I was sort of aware of that. Which probably made me go in with my eyes open and so for those people who were older than me, went in and tried to think right, I need to make sure that these people know that I respect them and want to be their friends. I don’t want to go in being hostile because then it will turn out true. And being the only woman on the leadership team, again that didn’t faze me having been in the [Forces]. My first job when I was twenty-three, I had as my sort of second in command of my department, he had been in the [Forces] longer than I had been alive. Yet I came in as his boss. So I … that, that didn’t worry me. I was used to being in the minority as a woman so didn’t bother me at all. And actually I was also warned or was aware that going into a very male-dominated culture in a developing country and being a woman placed in charge of men who were older than me, that that could offer some real cultural barriers. I’m young, I’m a woman, I’m white… and here are these locals who are being told “this is your new boss!” I was sort of warned, you know, be careful, that could be difficult. In the cross-cultural training that was a big, big red flag. But, God swept that aside because when I did my first visit to [country] before I moved there, one of the senior members of my department – when I arrived a was in charge of about forty [country-ans] – he said to me that he was really happy that I was coming to be his boss, because it had been more than four years since they had had a boss who had come to do that role intentionally, like they had been recruited for that role, they wanted to do that role and they were committed to do that role for long term. They hadn’t, they’d really struggled to find someone to fill the role so various people had come in… You couldn’t just gap the post. So various people had come and said, “I’ll do it for six months;” “I’ll do it for nine months;” “I’ll do it for a year.” Because it needed to be done not because they wanted to do that job. Whereas I came in wanting to do that job and they really appreciated that I wanted to be there, I wanted to be their boss. So again, that anticipated challenge of age/gender/culture was swept away. One of my first real major challenges was when I moved to [country] I was living on my own for the first time. So I was living in a compound situation with three other expat families and four national families on the same compound. But when I went home at the end of the day I would close my door and it would be just me in a house. It was a small house – just a two-bedroom house with everything I needed. But I’d never lived like that before. I’d lived in the military in, you know, combined accommodation where you have your own bedroom but the kitchen is shared, the laundry is shared, the dining room is shared. So you come home after work, go into your room, change, come out and see other people for dinner and go to the spa and have a few drinks. You were around people. You can knock on your neighbour’s door and say, “hey – do you want to watch that episode tonight?” You’re not disturbing them; it’s their evening too. You don’t do that when it’s a family next door. And also yeah, that was singles as well. You don’t necessarily do that with couples either – you’re interrupting their couple time. So, I did really struggle with isolation when I first got there. And, em, and some homesickness and had a few nights when I sort of cried myself to sleep. And the job itself was massively challenging. I tried to explain to my dad the challenge compared to what I was doing before in the [Forces]. My dad is not a Christian, so he doesn’t understand why I would take a job that is so much more challenging with so much less pay. But I explained it to him as, it was like taking two promotions in one go. And I wasn’t even quite ready for the first promotion. And I remember on day two in the office, because we had cultural and language training for the first six weeks. So I was being shown where the market was, where the supermarkets were, and having coffee with some of the locals to learn the language and … spending time figuring out how you prepare vegetables from scratch instead of buying a bag of ready shredded, ready washed, ready prepped vegetables. All of these practical things. For the first, yeah, six weeks. And then I got to… and I was invited to some meetings and I refused to go. I said “look, you need me to learn the language. You need me to learn the culture so that I will be present and engaged here long term. If I go to the office, if I start attending meetings, I will switch off from that learning and switch into office mode.” So I knew that I needed that segregated time. But that meant that when I got to the office, I’d been in country for about six weeks and unfortunately the second day – it was either the first or the second day in the office – the programme manager, the head guy in country, his wife got medically evacuated to Australia because they suspected she had [condition] – something quite serious, you know. Private jet come in, take them out… she was awake and alert and walked to the aeroplane and was completely fine – it was suspected, but it was suspected enough that the insurance company said “we’re sending the jet with the doctor and nurse on board.” So my second day in the office and the boss leaves, which makes the guy who was doing my job the boss. So my hand-over was “here is the email account. Read through it and ask me if you have any questions.” That was my entire hand-over. Because he had so much other stuff to do. So the second day in the office I was crying on the receptionist’s shoulder because it was so incredibly overwhelming. But she was lovely and she’s still a very dear friend! A [country-an] lady.

INTERVIEWER: It’s a good way of making friends, isnt’ it?

ELAINE: Yes, it is! Something us girls can get away with. Yes. So em, there’s nothing like being thrown in the deep end to learn the job. And, em, on one of my early base visits – so in [country] [organisation] has about ten bases throughout the country. I had staff at nine of those bases. So I got out and visited them quite regularly. So within my first few weeks I was doing my first base visit. And I met – as well as my staff – I met the other [organisation] expats. And one of the ladies – who’s since become a very good friend, who’s also a Brit actually – she took me to meet a dog. There was a family who was going to finish after eight years, and they couldn’t take their dog with them because the cost of, you know, importing a dog – it wasn’t practical. So, and I wasn’t looking for a dog, in fact, when I grew up we never had dogs at any point. But this dog was being discussed whilst I was there and I was like “can I maybe meet this dog?” And I met the dog and spoke to a friend who was an ex-vet, because there are a lot of people in [organisation] who did some very strange things in the past, and they became [organisation] folks. One is a vet. And got some advice from him. And in the end I got this dog. Who was such a massive answer to a prayer I didn’t pray. I was really struggling with loneliness and isolation and to be able to come home and have that little dog with a little waggy tail barking and jumping up and so excited to meet me. And actually the vet friend said he was amazed how quickly the dog bonded with me, from having been with his previous family for eight years, he you know, sort of let them go in the nicest possible way and bonded with me really quickly. And I think that’s just a God-thing. And he’s been my little dog… who’s fourteen now. He’s really old. He’s still around. And he was just such a provision from God. Because even after [husband] and I got married, we then moved out to one of the more remote communities and I thought, ‘oh, I don’t really need my dog’ - I mean, obviously I love him and I’m not getting rid of him, of course not. But I was just thinking, he’s served his purpose and now – he’s my baby – but I don’t need him like at first. But actually I discovered that I really do still. Because now I live in a remote community, I don’t have the constant interaction of expats and even [country-an] friends who – I used to be in the office where there was forty other people around. Being an extrovert, you know, on the way to a cup of tea, I could talk to half a dozen different people. Then, and that energised me more than my cup of tea in all honesty. But living in the remote community I work from home, from my desk now. And he is my only companion during the day. I do have friends that pop round and I have a very, very dear friend who’s also my gardener, so she comes round once a week. And I have a cleaner that comes round once a week. So they’re my connection to the community. But it’s not the same. So I’ve really struggled with isolation there. And having my little dog has been massive company and comfort during that new transition.

INTERVIEWER: I have cats – I was very isolated – I lived in Romania for fourteen years on my own. And I was very isolated for a long time. And I really found when I got these cats, it made such a difference, just walking in your front door and there’s a living creature to welcome you. Even if they woke me up in the night, which was annoying, they, it was still, there’s something to interact with. I totally understand that.

ELAINE: Our fur-babies are very important to us.

INTERVIEWER: I brought them back to the UK with me, my cats. …

Em…. Do you consider yourself a “missionary?” How would you define that term?

ELAINE: I do consider myself a missionary, but I consider everyone who calls themself a follower of Jesus to be a missionary. It’s just that their mission field may not be - like mine is on the other side of the world to where they were born – it may be to their neighbours. In fact, my mum is a missionary to my dad, because my dad is still not a Christian. Thirty-six years after she became a Christian. So I do consider myself a missionary. But in the traditional term of a missionary, erm, I often sort of half-jokingly say that some of the people we support in COUNTRY are the “real missionaries.” They’re the ones who build houses in the middle of the bush and move there with their families and plan to be there for the rest of their lives translating a Bible that generally takes at least thirty years. They’re the real hard-core ones, the ones that are totally isolated. We, you know, worst-case scenario… I am married to the pilot; there’s a plane. At the moment in COUNTRY because of Corona our planes are grounded because

INTERVIEWER: some friends of mine were at the airfield trying to leave and had to go home… yeah…

ELAINE: So we’ve got friends who are back in the community where we live and the plane is right there but they’re not allowed to fly it. But, if something, you know – heaven forbid – something really, really, really bad happened, she’s married to the pilot: her husband will get her and her children out. They will, you know, risk the wrath of COUNTRY management and government if it’s a case of, you know, true family safety. So you’ve got that safety net. But the Bible translators, they don’t have that. They don’t have a plane sitting outside their house. They may have … they may have a boat with an outboard motor – that’d still take them probably a couple of days to get down the rivers to a town. And they are literally committed for thirty years. I met one girl actually once, who was around about the same age as me and she’d just moved to a bush community. And she was the only one there. She was single. She was the only non-local there. And the nearest expat was about a twenty minute flight away. And I asked her how long she was going to be there, and she said, well Bible translation takes… to translate the entire Bible usually takes around about thirty years, so probably that long, maybe a bit longer…. Woah! I signed up for a four-year contract. And I’ll probably do another one. But that’s still not even a third of what she’s mentally signed up for. So that’s… that’s the definite difference. But I think that’s the culture of certain mission organisations. [detail about organisation omitted]. And that actually happens annually, at least, if not more frequently. So our mindset is much shorter term. Still not very short-term. I think we all agree that we’re not short-term missions: four years is no longer short-term mission. But I think we all agree that we’re also not long-term mission. Not when we have colleagues who are signed up for thirty years. I think we’d all call ourselves mid-term missionaries.

INTERVIEWER: It’s all about perspective.

ELAINE: It is.

INTERVIEWER: So tell me about your support structures, in terms of finance, prayer, practical stuff…

ELAINE: When we first join with ORGANISATION they do a whole bunch of interviews and checks and psychometric testing and various things to make sure that we are right for this kind of, for the pressures of cross-cultural work and all of that. Once they approve you, then they give you training in how to raise support. So ORGANISATION expects their missionaries to raise basically the entire cost of sending them. So the cost for rental of a house, cost for the flights back and forth every two years, salary, insurance, medical stuff, and a whole load of other things… and little bit of the home support team as well. All of the support, everything we cost, that’s what we’re expected to pay. They don’t… it’s not exactly that simple because we work on a pool system. So, for example, we in COUNTRY, our flights to get us from [husband’s country] or the UK (it’s the same cost either way) to COUNTRY is more expensive than flying from say [husband’s country] to [other mission destination]. So we cost more. But they’ve calculated what everyone costs and sort of figured out a rough average that sort of covers everything and then everyone, when we raise the money, it all goes into a pool system and then from that insurance is paid out, flights are paid out, the rental is paid out. Then we’re also paid our salary. So our salary is fixed. If we drop below 100% of our support target, our salary is not penalised. If we drop significantly below, then they talk to us about coming home, have an extended home assignment to raise support levels again. And if we raise more than 100% we don’t get a bonus. Shucks. So when we first arrive they give us a whole training session and the training is specific based on the country that you’re being sent from, so the initial training I got was UK based; the initial training my husband got was from the team in [husband’s country] so it’s slightly different. Each sending country figures out what training they think their staff need. And they have guidance from the ORGANISATION international umbrella. So after a week’s worth of training in the UK, I then spent three months visiting churches, sending letters, phoning people…

INTERVIEWER: is that churches you know, or do they put you in touch with people?

ELAINE: you start with people that you know. When I came to the training programme they asked me to bring with me a list of 200 people and their contact details who I already knew. Which for me as an extrovert was not a problem. Apparently for some other people 200 can be an enormous, enormous list. I have 950 friends on facebook currently, so 200 friends and contact details was fine. And I’ve also, because of my military background, and also the fact that my parents were in the military so we’ve moved around a bit, so I already had contacts with several churches. They weren’t necessarily very active, but there were people who I still considered friends at several churches. So I was able to immediately reach out to two churches as major supporters, because there was a significant number of people there who knew me, who I could ask ‘would you support me?’ And, em, so I contacted those churches and asked to do presentations there. And also contacted people to ask if I could maybe do presentations at small groups or meet with them personally. I had lots and lots of cups of tea at people’s houses. And at my main church, my home church in London, I gave a presentation to their senior citizens group and to the youth group – cos I was a youth group leader – and to one of the Sunday School groups. And then went to the other church and contacted… I had lots of friends both Christians and non-Christians, who I knew from my whole life so I just contacted loads of people. I was really pleased actually, with a few non-Christians who agreed to support me, which I think is more a sign of friendship than anything. And a few of them have since dropped off with their support, but I still do have a couple of non-Christians who support me. So whenever I … and of course I’ve got some non-Christians who are very good friend through my Uni days, so whenever I write a newsletter I am always aware of my audience. I don’t just send a newsletter to Christians. Not that I don’t talk about God: I’m a missionary, you kind of can’t avoid that one. But just to try and not put too much religious jargon in newsletters and try not to get too over-spiritual. There’s a prayer corner and there’s usually a Bible verse, but that doesn’t mean you need to be too spiritual about it. And then, yeah, it was just amazing because we did the training of how you ask and they taught us how to do a presentation and how to try and make it personal about your own experiences, because I’d been to COUNTRY and taken hundreds of photos and had ten days there. And I tried to use that as a starting block for my first presentation. And shared that presentation with individuals as well as the churches. But I was quite terrified to actually say ‘will you financially support me?’, ‘will you become a monthly donor?’ ‘will you give money?’ Especially as, you know, we’re taught that when we go and give a presentation at church you should ask permission to ask that question before you ask it, because some churches really don’t like that. And you have to be sensitive to that. You are an invited guest. Even if you know the church, if you’ve been attending for years, to stand up in the front – in effect in the pulpit – and say ‘will you give me money?’ without having asked the leadership or the minister or something first, that’s, that can be very rude. And especially as my home church is I think our biggest single supporter, to then be saying to the people of that church to support me as well, well that could in effect take money from the church’s givings and probably, I don’t know, 60 or 70% of my UK donors come from that one church. And we’re very sensitive to that fact, because I have spoken to people who’ve said ‘I’m not going to support you personally but what I do is I give my tithe to the church and trust that the church will support the organisations and will give out.’ I don’t actually know how many missionaries my church supports: it’s a lot. I know they give a minimum – absolute minimum – of their income to mission, mission organisations and individuals, which is pretty cool. But yeah, so, I attended the course to learn how to do support raising, they also give you a book with loads of information about how to do it. And then I went to COUNTRY having achieved my financial target three months later, and was told that’s one of the fastest times that anyone has raised their target level. But that wasn’t because I’m so fabulous as public speaking, that was God. Because I was going to fulfil a role that hadn’t had someone dedicated in that role for over four years. And I think God had said, ‘right [name], you’re ready, now go!’ So He got the money so that I could go. Because they do have a policy before, whilst you’re in the pre-field stage and raising support, you don’t go until you’re at 100%. If you’re there or thereabouts – you’re at 96 or 97 – then fine they’ll send you. The only time they will waiver the 100% is if it’s a really critical role. But they don’t like doing that because once you’re there it is ten times harder to raise support.

TECHNICAL ISSUES! Had to switch to voice recorder app on phone which I had already downloaded in case of emergency!

INTERVIEWER: It’s going – it looks like a proper reel-to-reel tape.

ELAINE: [had been chatting about my research project while sorting the technology] I can definitely see a need – we’ve noticed, or I’ve noticed talking to friends of mine, I’ve been in COUNTRY for six years now – I got there when I was thirty. I’ve got some friends who are very, very good friends: they’re ten years older than me. And they have noticed a shift in attitudes of people coming on the mission field, probably in the last five years. I think it’s probably been more obvious in the last five years. But it hasn’t just been younger people, it’s been empty-nesters who have come to the mission field for the first time. The attitude – I mean, whether it’s linked to Millennials or not I don’t know, you’re the one doing a PhD – but it does seem that it’s the younger generation who are in the Millennial category but there’s been a few around my age or a little bit older, and the empty-nesters who’ve been another sort of twenty years older, so twenties, thirties and fifties. We haven’t had any in their forties: I think most would have school-age children and would have a routine and so don’t come to the mission field at that point. And the attitudes have been very similar of all of those groups. It’s their first time into mission now, in the last five years, and their attitudes compared to those who were first time in the mission field ten years ago is completely different. We’ve had some new people come in in that time who are of a similar age to one of those categories but who are not first time in the mission field: they’re either Third Culture Kids or they were, they came to the mission field fifteen years ago then left to do more qualifications and are coming back or something, and their attitude is more of the ten years or prior attitude. Which is much more flexible, much more willing to deal with things not working, being broken. Whereas I’ve heard of someone who was interviewed – they’re not in COUNTRY – they were interviewed for a role in COUNTRY and stated categorically that they would not go anywhere where they could not have access to high speed internet. And that was… Fortunately they said that during the interview period. If they were honest and open I respect that. Lay your cards on the table: this is what we need to survive. Me? I need a comfy chair and I need to be able to make pizza. If I can’t have that, then I’m going to struggle. Everyone has what they need. But to, to demand that of a mission who’s based in a developing country is naïve… at best. So there’s definitely, there’s something going on. Whether it’s just young people or just a general cultural shift, em, in the first world, I don’t know.

INTERVIEWER: You gave that example, but you were saying that there’s differences, are there other differences that you could kind of put your finger on? With new people coming in, you were saying there’s a definite change in attitude…

ELAINE: Yes, the differences between those who are coming to the mission field for the first time now compared to sort of ten years ago, there seems to be an expectation of lifestyle. So although they’ve given up their home country and they’ve given up their family and their close friends and their Dominos Pizza, they still have a certain level of expectation. They expect their house to be in good working order; they expect to have 24/7 electricity; they expect to have their 3kw kettle work 24/7 on that electricity; they expect to have hot and cold running water; they expect to have good internet; they expect their furniture to be of a good standard, their curtains to be relatively new… It’s all little things, which one on their own you’re not going to say: oh? You want new curtains? How dare you! That’s shocking! That’s terrible! No, when you hear that, you think, well actually, your curtains were a bit ratty and very sixties faded kind of style, yeah, that’s not an unreasonable expectation. But when they come in with that whole attitude of “I expect all of these things to be nice.” So, “I’m willing to come and serve, but I don’t want to lose any of my luxuries.” Nevermind that our neighbours just down the road are living in a mud hut with a grass roof. But I have to have my 24/7 electricity. You know, we have power outages quite frequently. And just in the last, er, two years, less than two years – maybe just a year and a half – we’ve had solar installed on probably about 80% of the expat houses in COUNTRY. Which is amazing, absolutely brilliant. We had some donations from someone in the Netherlands or some groups in the Netherlands and that paid for solar, it’s wonderful. And someone who lives in a remote community who used to have a generator that would run for three hours in the morning and three hours in the evening, to have solar, which means you have power 24/7, is incredible and it’s wonderful. But you do still have to manage it. You know, you can’t put on your 3kw kettle at 7 o’clock at night after it’s dark to make a cup of tea, because that will kill your batteries and you’ll then have no power for the rest of the night until the sun comes up. So it’s that… So before we had the solar, in the remote community where I live it was three hours in the morning, three hours in the evening: that was your power. There were batteries, so you could have lights throughout the night, but that was it. In the main town, where there is town power, the power sometimes would go off and it might be off for several days. It didn’t do it all the time but it did it fairly regularly. So each compound had a backup generator but it wasn’t a big back up generator so it would just flick on and then everyone’s houses would work and would turn everything on: we didn’t have that set up because that’s quite an expensive set up to have a generator that’s big enough to run six houses, fridges, freezers, kettles, fans, whatever else you’ve got… washing machines, water pumps (they’re a big one actually). So it would be a little generator that could run a house or maybe two houses, but not even the whole house. You could plug in a couple of fridges or maybe the fridge and the washing machine, or the fridge and the freezer. Keeping fridges cool is the main issue. And we would have these hilarious days where the generator would be put on one house for an hour, and then moved to the next house for an hour, and it would just work its way round so that everyone got an hour which was long enough to get the fridge back down to its normal temperature. During that time you pull out everything you’re going to need for the day and use it. And then the fridge stays closed and if you don’t open the door again it will stay cool for a good 8-12 hours. So as long as you got that once during in the day you’d be fine. And then you’d get it the next day if the power wasn’t back on. But those kind of things now... And that’s what we did. That was the norm when I first arrived six years ago. And you’d do that, not very often… maybe only once every three months or so… but regularly enough. And that’s what you did and that was life. And then you have people coming in recently and to do that – some people can cope with that and some people, again, it’s personal management. I’m not saying it to criticise, it’s different levels of expectations, different levels you can cope with. And when you’re giving up so much, there’s a point where you can’t give up any more. So that’s the kind of thing that’s really challenging. Or maybe the sofa in your living room is actually quite uncomfortable because it’s just a wooden frame with just a foam cushion on the bottom and a foam cushion on the back. It has no lumbar support; it doesn’t have snuggly arm-rests or anything like that. And that’s a problem. I mean it’s so much of a problem that I brought my own armchair all the way from the UK to COUNTRY so I would have a snuggly armchair. If you hadn’t done that or if you didn’t have the resources, the means to be able to do that, you’ve got just an uncomfortable armchair and that’s your only place you can sit to be comfortable. And it’s, can you cope with that? And some people can’t. And it does seem to be those who have come more recently don’t seem quite so adaptable. But maybe it’s because they’ve come in and they’ve had a better set up. The solar is already in. They’ve recently done up the houses, some of the houses. They’ve bought new furnishings, new fittings. They’ve been painted. And then when something goes wrong they say, well hang on, we came in at this level and now it’s dropped and now I can’t cope. Whereas six years ago I came in at this level, so when it drops… their drop is still an increase for me. It’s perspective as well. Maybe it’s just that we’ve had an upgrade and they’re more used to a better standard than those of us who came in before.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, having not been through the previous situation.

ELAINE: Yeah, if you’ve been without power, to have it for just a few hours a day is a blessing. Exactly. I bought my own backup battery so that I could be guaranteed to have light in the evening when the power went out. And that was a battery that ran one light – a lamp in the corner of my room – and I could plug my mobile phone in or my laptop. But that light meant – having a proper lamp instead of a head torch – meant that I could cook in the evenings. Because before I got that battery, when the power went off in the evening and I still had to cook dinner, I had to do that all with a head torch. Which is really, really annoying. But I’d been through that; I’d learnt how to do that. And then I got myself a backup battery and went wow! I have one lamp in my house – that’s the only power I have – this is amazing! And then to go from that to wow, I’ve got solar! I’ve got light throughout my house continuously! Wow that’s amazing! If you’ve come from the UK and gone straight to that level of solar 24/7 power, you’ve never experienced how bad it can get.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. So tell me about working in teams. What’s your experience been of team?

ELAINE: Well I’m an extrovert so I always enjoy working as part of a team. I don’t enjoy working on my own. It’s interesting being… I’ve worked in teams in the military and that faces [poses] certain challenges. But working in teams in missions, you can tell when people have been without a holiday for a while. We all function on a similar routine, working for the same organisation. Most of us go home on home assignment, so home for work, home to our passport country, once every two years. And in the intervening year we have a holiday. And most people agree to get out of the country once a year is necessary, to get out of the high pressure, cultural pressure, stress. And I remember working in some of the teams and certain individuals – again it’s all personality dependent of course – but certain individuals when they reached the point of being within a month of their annual leave or their home assignment, their stress level was very obviously higher. And you start to walk on eggshells around them. I would start to – if I was going to have a phone conversation that I knew was going to be more than just a quick few minutes, I would go to another room, in an open-plan office situation. I would take it outside or find a private room, just to not add another stress point to someone who is due their home assignment. And I remember it hitting me. I remember being in a leadership team meeting, being asked to do something, and outright in front of the whole leadership team, I said to my boss, ‘no, I’m not going to do it!’ And he said ‘well, why?’ ‘Because it’s a waste of time.’ And I could feel the stress; you’re asking me to do something that is pointless. And I just couldn’t… because I was due to leave within the month and I had reached capacity. And there does seem to be that we all…. I think it is the management of expectations. If you know you’re not going to leave the country for two years, you can manage yourself for two years. But if you know it’s one year that you’re not going to leave the country for, and it’s been eighteen months, then suddenly you’re really really stressed because you’ve been in six months longer than you should have been. And that really affects the group dynamics whenever you’re in meetings and working together and things: when people are expecting to be in-country for one year and they’re getting close, they’re on their way out. Even worse when they’re going finish. People reach a point of saying, I’m off. With the greatest will in the world and not with any kind of negativity, they don’t want to dump on anyone, but mentally they’ve already moved on.

PAUSE

INTERVIEWER: So do you have a plan for the future? Do you know what you intend to do?

ELAINE: As far as God lets us plan for the future. Provided the borders reopen…

INTERVIEWER: Well, yes, I was thinking about that…

ELAINE: We are… our home assignment is due to end in [month] and we’re heading back to COUNTRY at that point. So we have to see if they’ll let us out at that point. And also we’re looking at, well, we haven’t visited anyone. Do we – you know, if everything calms down in a month, do we then try and visit everyone that we were going to visit at that point? Which is not realistic – we’re reasonably well rested right not, having had two weeks of being able to stay put without having to do any long-distance driving, visiting people, doing presentations, all of this stuff, which is actually, a real blessing. Huge blessing. Because we were very tired. We had reached that point, very much so. The last year was very taxing for us. So to try and cram two months’ worth of visits into our last two weeks would be a terribly bad idea because it would undo all of our rest, just before we go back to do the work that is more important. We’re here to do the work in COUNTRY, we’re not actually here to visit people, that’s just a curtesy because we couldn’t be doing what we’re doing without our supporters. So, yeah. So we have to figure that out depending on… You know, if things don’t improve much, it’s just a case of, can we leave? We’ve got a job to go back and do. And it’s not only that: it’s our home. We, being stuck somewhere where we’re not doing anything… we’d actually much rather be stuck in our own home in the middle of nowhere with only two other expat families nearby. That is our home; the community there is our home; they’re our family. So, hopefully, we’ll get back in May. And we… so ORGANISATION works in four-year contracts generally. We’re in the middle of this one and we’ve already told our bosses that we’d like to sign up for another four years. Which will mean we’ll be in COUNTRY for at least another six years. But although they work in four year contracts, we, in our minds, are there until God says otherwise. You have to do technical paperwork, but God doesn’t require paperwork. So we’re just… we might be there for another two years; we might be there for another six years; we might be there until we retire. Only God knows that. But we’re there for as long as He wants us. So at the moment we live in one of the remote communities called [name]. So there are only three pilot families that live in [name]. Us and two others. The others are there right now. We will be living in that community for at least the next two years. But beyond that, where we will live, whether it will be still in that community or in a different community, will be up to the ORGANISATION COUNTRY leadership team – our bosses – to determine where they need people, where is the most effective use of their staff. And we are subject to that leadership. So as much as we love living in a community that we’re in and we have real ties there, we are subject to that leadership and we’ll go where they need us.

INTERVIEWER: Do you – you don’t have children, do you?

ELAINE: We’ve only been married two years. No we don’t.

INTERVIEWER: Do you intend to?

ELAINE: No, actually, we don’t. That’s just the excuse I’ve been using thus far. When you talk to COUNTRY-ans, you can’t say to them, “we’re not having kids”, they don’t understand that. I have a lot of old ladies who are very dear friends in [town] who say, “we’re praying that God will give you two children: a boy and a girl.” Thank you very much. I’m hoping God doesn’t answer your prayer. But they’re prayer warriors, so … I feel a bit nervous!

INTERVIEWER: They might pray harder than you. I don’t want to pry – but is that a decision you’ve taken because of work?

ELAINE: A variety of things. I wouldn’t say primarily because of work. If we happened to have met and married here in [COUNTRY] I think we would have taken the same decision. But obviously living on the mission field with those stresses and pressures was one of the many things that influenced that decision.

INTERVIEWER: Erm… where was I going to go? I was going to ask earlier on and I skipped over it – who would you say have been models for you in your faith, in your walk?

ELAINE: My mum would definitely be the first person I would say. She was always – well, when I was a kid my mum was one of the Sunday school teachers and she’d always be going to small groups and Bible study meetings and stuff, whilst also trying to balance the fact that my dad is not a Christian and not wanting to be a nag or bully him into that or anything. But my mum’s always been someone that I can say, “can you pray for me?” I would say she’s a prayer warrior. She’s always been inspirational for me.

Do you mean specifically like Christians, or in mission, or generally in life?

INTERVIEWER: Well I was thinking as your Christian walk generally but…

ELAINE: There aren’t really any other people who stick out strongly.

INTERVIEWER: That’s OK.

ELAINE: There’s been a lot of people who’ve been positive influences who’ve been sort of aunts or surrogate parents along the way. My youth leaders when I was a teenager, who support us now. They were great encouragers. I had a few really good youth group leaders actually. In fact that was one of the reasons I became a youth group leader, is that I had such good youth group leaders that influenced me, that I wanted to do the same thing. In fact, the youth group leaders I remember the most, they can claim of their youth they have me as a missionary, they have a minister – two ministers of churches… and is there some other? Two ministers of churches and a missionary: that’s pretty good influence, from the Christian point-scoring perspective.

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

ELAINE: Far too much! I was actually, after I finished university I worked as a research assistant for a year at the university, in the same department I studied in, before I joined the [Forces]. And in that time, I was paid to join Facebook! Which I find hilarious. Because it had just come out, had just sort of hit the UK at that point and the … I did, computer science was my first degree. And the lecturer who I worked for wanted to find out if this new thing was a useful resource to, for him to be able to introduce to his new undergraduates as a collaboration tool. So I had to join it to see what it could do and assess its usefulness and give him a report. So I was literally paid to join Facebook. And, you know, I have it on my phone and I’m on it every single day. And I also have Whatsapp. I’m technically on Twitter but I don’t really use Twitter. When I joined [ORGANISATION] they told me that I had to be on Facebook and Twitter and have a blog, which I sort of resented, like “you’re making me?” If I hadn’t already been on Facebook at that point, ORGANISATION would have made me join Facebook.

INTERVIEWER: Do they still hold to that? Because a lot of people are now leaving Facebook.

ELAINE: Oh really?

INTERVIEWER: Teenagers now: a lot will do Snapchat and Instagram and not Facebook. It’s just interesting.

ELAINE: Maybe they’ve changed it to what social media you have. They probably still mandate that you have to have a blog and a social presence because that’s how a lot of people keep in touch. My Facebook – I set up my Facebook at that point to automatically forward all of my blogs, all of my Facebook posts, to Twitter. So I don’t do Twitter but I’m on Twitter and I think it still does that to a certain extent. And yeah, you could totally do that with Snapchat or Instagram or any… I’m not on any of those but I am fairly prolific on Facebook. And we do have a blog, which is a stand-alone website. ORGANISATION did start me up on that. It was supposed to be just have a blog so people could just go on your website, but also have that blog appear on Facebook for people who were on Facebook. So if you’re not on Facebook our blog could still be accessed. Which is a problem I have. My website needs to be sorted: it’s been on my ‘to-do’ list for the past two years. It’s a work in progress; it’s been a work in progress for too long. So at the moment, if someone is not on Facebook, they cannot actually see our blog. I post to it fairly regularly. Which is a problem. Because there’s a lot of stuff that’s in there that people could see if they wanted to. I was quite pleased with the number of people who have said “oh we’re following you… we saw your photos… saw this…. Heard about that you turned your ankle….” I sprained my ankle when we were in [other country] back in October and the number of people who came to me and said, “oh, how’s your ankle?” That was really nice. Oh! You do actually pay attention to what I post! That’s nice. It’s not all for nothing. But yeah, it’s still very much on there and it’s still very much encouraged. At one point ORGANISATION UK said that we had to do three or four newsletters a year that they sort of mandated that: that was contractually expected. And I had been very slack and I hadn’t done a newsletter in a year. And then I had a catch-up with someone from the ORGANISATION UK office, expecting to be told off. And they said to me, “oh no no – you post to Facebook, you know, five times a week at least” – not quite every day, but every other day or more than. And they said, “you’re keeping up with your supporters so much” plus I was sending Christmas cards, that they said “that’s fine. You don’t need to do a newsletter as well when you’re on your blog and your facebook posts so often.” Which I thought was very pragmatic. There’s some organisations that will say… the point is to communicate with your supporters, those people that have paid to enable you to be out there so they know what’s going on, they know what you’re doing for their gift. But that only works in an environment where people are prolifically on social media or online. Over here in [husband’s country], they’re not quite as up-to-date with that. There are a lot more people who don’t even have email addresses. So then, here in [husband’s country] the expectation that you do a quarterly newsletter is still very high. They say you have to do that. It doesn’t matter how much you post on Facebook, because that quarterly newsletter gets printed out for those people who don’t have email addresses, because there are so many people who live so very remotely, their internet if they wanted to have internet would be probably worse than my internet in COUNTRY, or on a standard. So the newsletter is the only contact they get. And it is very important to have some regular contact. You can’t just have people who support you, pay monthly for what you do and then hear nothing, or just one postcard once every couple of years. That’s not appropriate.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I think we will leave it there. Thank you for your time.

ELAINE: No worries. I hope that was useful. Felt like I was just telling you about me.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, that’s fine! We’ll see what comes out of it.