**Interview 012 Pseudonym: Anne**

*Started the recording in the middle of pre-interview small talk when it turned relevant! Begins talking about return to UK during pandemic.*

ANNE: There were a couple of days when I realised it was now or never if I wanted to go back to the UK. There was this sort of … I could see everything was closing down and there was a sort of, you know, shall I go back? But I’d had, I’d had flu the week before that, em, and then I had a couple of migraines as well, which I’ve not had for years. So whether it was sort of stress or whether it was … I don’t know what it was really, it was really weird because I had two in a week and then I haven’t had any since, so…. So I didn’t feel great myself and I was a bit… and actually the whole point of what they were saying was “everybody needs to stay where they are.” You know. So I thought, well actually, I’m helping the world if I stay where I am. I’m actually adding to the problem if I get a flight that I wouldn’t have normally got and go back to the UK. So I sort of decided it was a lot easier to stay. And to be honest, I think because I was still a bit poorly, I couldn’t quite get my head around packing and getting everything ready. Especially not knowing for how long I’d be gone, what I’d do, and leaving my house empty and all that kind of thing. Yeah. So I just, well I actually felt quite a peace after that really. You know, just to – yeah it just felt quite like, yeah it was the right decision. And I’ve been busy trying to – I’ve learnt how to use “Garage Band” and i-movie and all this kind of thing. It’s not very great but well, you know, putting a few songs out for church and different things. It’s actually been quite nice having my space and – because I was aware my grandma was really poorly and I was thinking, you know, if the worst does happen I won’t be able to get there, whatever. I felt peaceful.

INTERVIEWER: and you’ve seen her recently as well…

ANNE: Yeah, yeah. And I think even then, you know, like Christmas Day, I mean she just slept the whole day, which is really not like her. And I think we all were quite concerned about her then, you know. I think there was that sense of ‘is this the last Christmas?’ you know. You kind of knew that she wasn’t looking great then. Yeah, so, it’s been interesting. But I do feel for my mum mostly, but, you know, even if I was there I couldn’t really do an awful lot to help, apart from be there. You know, she calls me an awful lot. She goes out for a walk and calls me then and she can tell me everything, you know. Yeah, anyway….

INTERVIEWER: right, well…. I should get to the official bit of the interview… Firstly, can you tell me a bit about your faith history.

ANNE: OK… So, em, I grew up in a Christian family and em… So I think, I mean although I think probably at some point my mum and dad prayed with me a sort of prayer of accepting Jesus into my heart, I actually don’t remember that. But I think growing up I just knew God. I don’t know. There wasn’t like a sort of Damascus Road experience of any sort. But I just, I don’t remember a time when I wasn’t aware of God. So I think that was… yeah… And then as a teenager… well, when I was fourteen I got baptised. And I think for me that was a real solidation [sic] of, em, of what I felt really. But in a way it was just a natural step, I don’t think there was any kind of big deal. So yeah…. And then, I think sort of getting involved with music and stuff in the church I think helped kind of to link me into the church more and feel part of it and stuff like that. And so then, kind of, when I was looking for universities and stuff, I was a bit kind of, what shall I do? What shall I not do? But I think kind of when I saw the course at [college] as it was then, with music and worship and theology all together it just seemed perfect. And I think for me then it was kind of a way of, I don’t know, I suppose developing my own faith for myself by being able to study the theology side as well and to really understand what I believe and why I believe what I believe. Not just stuff my parents had taught me, but actually kind of deciding for myself, OK, yeah, I believe that because of this or that or the other. Or I don’t believe this because of this, that and the other. And I think it did help me a lot to feel like it was *my* faith and not just something that was, you know, given to me by my parents kind of thing. So I guess it was just sort of a gradual sort of steps really of … but like I said I don’t think there was really a time where… I don’t feel like there was a time when I didn’t really know God or I wasn’t aware of God in my life in that way and a sort of personal relationship as well.

INTERVIEWER: have there been any areas where you’ve felt that your faith has been challenged?

ANNE: oh definitely, yeah. I mean, I think…. I mean, I don’t know that I’ve ever actually sort of doubted God as such. But I think in terms of what’s really true and is that right or not. I did have… I had a boyfriend when I was about fifteen who was, he was a bit older and he was studying theology and he was very, very academic in the way that he approached God and stuff. And I think that challenged me a lot. He was very much into philosophy and stuff. And I think it challenged me to really think about the existence of God and stuff. But I think even through that, I don’t think I ever doubted God, but there was a kind of like “how can I explain this?” And I think in a way… I think he did then go on afterwards did go on to doubt God and I don’t think he went on with his faith. So I think, I think because he was coming at it almost from a negative view, I think it pushed me to be more positive and to really seek God, to find the answers, to try and help him in his search and his faith. So I think that was kind of, it was a challenge but I think, you know, it was good. And I think, also like with other things like with my dad being long-term sick and struggling with sort of depression and stuff like that. I think there was a sort of, “well where is God in all of this” kind of moment. And, em, particularly because I was a teenager at the time when he basically had a sort of nervous breakdown, em, which they know think was the onset of the [long-term illness] back then, but they didn’t know that then, so it was just deemed a nervous breakdown. Of course this was before all the kind of help with the mental health issues and stuff, so it was really hard even getting any help. People just misunderstood it at the time. So I think as a teenager going through that, em, and seeing your dad like that, you know, that for me was quite a challenge. But again I think it kind of pushed me towards God and towards seeking the answers, rather than “oh well, God’s clearly not here, I don’t want to know or have anything to do with him.” I think, you know, those things pushed me towards God rather than away from God in general. And actually then looking back I then see the benefit of those experiences.

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

ANNE: Definitely my mum and dad, yeah. I think, I don’t know really… just in who they are and the way that they always, always prayed for me and just that kind of knowledge that they were always there. And I think, even my dad, you know, certainly in his latter years when he couldn’t do as much physically, you know, whatever I needed prayer for he was always praying for me. You know, it was a really big thing. And I think that meant a lot to me.

I think also, when I was a kid, the church we went to there was… it was like a little family really, there weren’t very many of us. But there was one lady in particular who ran the children’s Friday club thing. And I think, you know, a lot of my sort of Bible knowledge and stuff comes from those days. And I think just the way that, that she… she just showered love on us. And she’s not, you know, she’s not particularly well educated lady, she’s not particularly academic or you know, she’s very simple in her faith in many ways, you know. She’s not sort of studied at any higher level of Bible, she takes it a lot at face value. But you know, for a child growing up, knowing that she kind of – the amount of effort she put, and the way she kind of invested in us as children. And the sort of … you know, it was pure Bible stuff that we were learning. So I think that had a big impact on me as well.

And I think as well just Bible college in general. It’s not sort of any one person but I think the lecturers and the colleagues in my class and just that, that kind of for me was a huge kind of benefit of people who really kind of helped to shape my faith. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So, what’s the main kind of focus of what you’re doing now?

ANNE: Well, I mean, I’ve been here ten years and I think the focus has changed in the last couple of years. So right now my focus is more on church, so [name of church]. So I kind of am doing lots of different things there really, but I’m on the leadership so just generally helping out where I can, so in charge of the worship team. But then also kind of more sort of admin-y things, so trying to get… I’ve sort of got a welcome team together and then set somebody else off to organise that. I’m co-ordinating the children’s work in sort of more of an admin role rather than a hands-on role, but just sort of trying to organise who’s doing which weeks and that kind of thing. Yeah, and sort of, just trying to help people communicate better. Yeah, with notice sheets and stuff like that. So it’s kind of church work but I think sort of, yeah, a lot of that’s pastoral as well. Just trying to kind of have relationships, develop relationships with different people. There’s a lot of women in the church; there’s a lot more women than there are men. And all the other leaders are men. So it’s actually quite good I think, you know, to sort of… So certainly in this lockdown period, I’ve really made an effort to ring people individually, some of the ladies in the church, and just try to sort of….

INTERVIEWER: do you think that’s because you’re a foreigner, that…?

ANNE: I don’t know… I mean, I think it might be… but I think my pastor is much more open than most [country-ian] Baptist pastors. So I think, yeah, because I asked him first of all when [UK pastor] asked me if I wanted to, if I could preach one week. And I said to my pastor here, just so you know, the pastor in England has asked me if I want to preach and I just want to run it by you because obviously I’m a member of your church, I’m in the leadership team, and I don’t want to do something that will then get back to you and you’re not happy with it kind of thing. And I think that impressed him, that I actually asked his permission in a sense. And he said that he doesn’t… I don’t think he believes in women being pastors, like being sort of solely responsible for a church kind of thing. But he said, if I’m the pastor of a church and I offer you my pulpit to say something, then I think that’s ok. So he’s kind of happy for me to preach, I think, in principle. But he doesn’t do it because he doesn’t think other people in the church would accept it. And it’s not something that I ever… I never wanted really to preach. It’s not my kind of principle gift or anything, so….. But then, this Sunday actually, this month we’re doing the book of Leviticus and he asked me – ages ago, before all the lockdown stuff – if I wanted to do a sort of ten, fifteen minute part of the sermon to sort of bring in the idea of worship and stuff. So yeah, so I did do it, it was online and a bit different anyway, so I think people will accept it even more because it’s something different under the circumstances really. So yeah. So I think he does believe in those things and I think he does give me quite a lot of free reign, I think just because he can see who I am and can, you know, and because he does kind of think that women in leadership and stuff is ok. But I think, there are some… you can sometimes play the foreigner card, and I think sometimes it can, people do sometimes accept you better because you are a foreigner definitely.

INTERVIEWER: I should have asked before we got onto that, how did you come to be in [country] at all?

ANNE: Well, I was working in a church in [UK town] and there was an older couple there who were involved in [charity name] and they, they came out here and built a camp [location]. When they went out as a church we supported them, we prayed for them, and we were very much sort of involved in building this camp. So when it had finished they suggested that a group of young people went out to sort of do one of the camps. So I did that in 2004. And, em, came back and back to my life, thank you very much. And then the same again the next year. We just did sort of a week’s camp and did a couple of extra days, because I was with some other boys who really liked climbing up mountains and stuff, so I did that. And then came back and never ever thought about mission, never thought about, I don’t know, it was just never ever on my agenda really. I think… and then I got to know the leaders of the camp, who were leading a centre in [town] and they came over to England, I think it must have been 2008 in the May, and they… I just sort of, you know, showed them round London, and spent some time with them because I knew them from camp. And whilst they were there, he asked me, he said, “I don’t know if this is like, you know, a thing from God or not, but would you come out and work with us for a year or two and do music and stuff at the centre?” And I just laughed. I was like, yeah, right! It’s cold in [country]! I don’t do cold! So I had no idea. I don’t know… I just didn’t think about it. I think, like, there was sort of in the back of my mind I just couldn’t let go of the thought, the idea of it, the sort of …. I think the challenge was, you know, if I say I worship God with everything that I am, that means that actually if God calls me somewhere else, I need to do that. Otherwise when I get up and sing a song on Sunday morning and lead people in worship, then I’m really hypocritical. And actually, worship is more than just a song; if I’m not willing to give everything that I am then it’s kind of pointless anyway, it’s worthless really what I’m doing. So I kind of decided to work it out and sort of see… just sort of, I don’t know, think about it and whatever. It took me ages. And it was about two years later when I actually came. And I came – I decided I’d come for a year. That was my er, yeah, so I’d kind of… I’d organised it was going to be just a year out kind of thing. And then obviously, yeah, ten years later… I’m still here.

INTERVIEWER: So why did a year become ten years?

ANNE: [laughing] I think, I think the relationships with people was definitely a big key in that. You know, you kind of get to know people. I think, just seeing… I think the way that [country-ians] kind of welcome you. I mean, especially the context where I was in that centre. I mean, the kids are just, they love foreigners. They want to spend time with you, want to be with you, and everybody… you kind of become a bit of a celebrity. And I think, you know, although like… I don’t mean that in a kind of proud way but, actually I think that was the first time in my life I actually felt popular, you know! There was a kind of sense of people wanting me and needing me as well. And I think seeing that actually I could do something and actually influence their lives and kind of invest in particularly the young people that I was working with at the time. I think, you know, that for me was kind of a big thing. And just, I guess just feeling God was saying that I should stay really. Just that sort of sense of assurance somehow. I just felt like it was the right thing to do and that God wanted me here.

INTERVIEWER: So generally how do you go about taking big decisions?

ANNE: I’m very bad at them I think! Even small decisions I’m pretty bad at. Big decisions. Certainly pray. And it’s not something I ever kind of do instantly. It’s a lot of thinking, a lot of research, a lot of trying to kind of weigh up different options. So working out, if I was to do this, what would it look like? What things would need to, would I need to give up? So like coming to [country] it was kind of like, well either I could stay where I was, or I could get another job somewhere else in the UK, or I could come out to [country]. Or actually if I’m thinking about missions, then I could think about somewhere else in the world, not necessarily [country]. But you know, just because that person asked me, doesn’t mean that that’s necessarily… So I actually got them all… I’m not sure if I actually wrote them all out on a piece of paper, but I worked through. And I did look into jobs in the UK. I also looked into other mission possibilities in other places and with different organisations and stuff. And it just, I don’t know, those things just didn’t feel right, I think. I spoke to one guy about doing some ethnomusicology type things in … but he was kind of working in [continent]… and I just felt like my heart wasn’t there really. And if he’d have said [other continent] possibly because I like the music there, but I think, actually when it came to it because I’d gone through that process of looking at other places it made me realise that actually [country] seemed more like a kind of place I’d want to go than what he was offering to me. And actually it became, oh ok, I’d rather do that. So when I was looking at doing other jobs or whatever, it just felt like, nothing felt like it fitted me as much as … So it was kind of by comparing I guess, is probably how I did that. With other decisions, I think sometimes I just feel like God kind of says that’s the thing. Like when I went to Bible college, I was looking at universities and all sorts of different options for courses and music schools and all sorts of things. And actually when the leaflet for the course at [college] came through my door, I couldn’t even read the details on it – you know it told you kind of what the course was about. When I saw it, I just knew that that was where I should be. But that’s quite unusual, I think, for me. Usually I have to think it all through and compare things and ask people’s opinions, ask people to pray for me. And yeah, particularly like my mum, my dad when he was alive. Yeah, their opinion and what they felt and kind of trusted them in terms of praying for me and seeing what they felt God was saying and that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Do you consider yourself a “missionary”? And how would you define that?

ANNE: Erm, it’s a word I’ve always struggled with. Always. I think especially for me because I came out to do a year out, that was how I’d kind of…. And so when other people here started referring to me as “the missionary from England”, I really, I almost butted against it, like rebelled against that. I don’t know, I’d never ever have put that label on myself. And I struggled with the label. I think, you know, to my absolute shame and horror now I think back, even when I was at Bible college we did like prayer meetings for different parts of the world and stuff, you know, and I was like ‘well I’m going to the UK one because, you know, people need God in the UK too.’ And actually, I think even then, I think my kind of image of what a missionary was was this sort of single old person with cats who nobody really wanted… nobody really knew how to relate to very well because they didn’t have all the social skills and they dressed dowdily and… I don’t know… it’s really awful. I feel embarrassed about it, but that’s what I thought of being a missionary. And I, I guess I didn’t want that kind of label really. And I think over the years I’ve kind of… you know, because other people have said that, I’ve sort of learnt to live with it a bit better. And I think certainly in terms of explaining what I do to people in the UK, it’s just so much easier to use that term because then they have some idea of what you’re doing without having to explain it all from the beginning. So yeah. So I have kind of taken it on board to use. Yeah. Have I covered everything in your question, I can’t remember?

INTERVIEWER: what do you think it means? You have kind of covered that with an image – has your understanding changed?

ANNE: Yeah. Well, yes. I think as I’ve grown older, I think I’ve learnt to be more accepting of people anyway. So I think even, there are some people who I do know here, who are technically missionaries, who I would class possibly as “odd-bods”, whatever. But actually I’ve learnt to kind of accept what they bring and their offering that they’re actually giving to God and to the people around them. And I think, I think that’s helped in a sense. And I think also, just in terms of more of a theological thing, I think you know, it’s just really important that all Christians consider themselves missional and whatever context you’re in, you know, the idea of just sharing the love of God wherever you are in that place, whether you’re abroad or at home. And I think in the UK we’ve been very good at bringing in the term of missions even sort of at home and in your street and your book club and stuff like that. So I think that’s probably helped to form my perspective of what a missionary is. And other people’s. And I think also the way the world’s changed and stuff. You know, in the olden days a missionary like Gladys Aylward went off on a boat and never ever saw her family again. Whereas, you know, the whole concept of missionary is so different now when you can Facetime every day and so I think…. But I think the root of it is that desire to want to follow Jesus even if that means giving everything up and following him. So I guess sort of thinking of Nicodemus and, you know, what does it take. Not Nicodemus, the rich ruler, you know. Go away and sell everything you’ve got! And I think, you know, even if it doesn’t mean it physically, but actually to actually mean it even if God doesn’t require it of you. So I think it’s quite a broad term, I think. It can be quite specific in terms of abroad, overseas missions as such, em. But yeah. My understanding has changed quite a lot on that, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So how did you find living in a different culture?

ANNE: Well, I think actually the first sort of year or two, wasn’t that hard in some ways because I think your expectation is, it’s going to be different. You know it’s going to be different. I think also the fact that I didn’t know the language so well, well at all really at the beginning. It kind of, it means you don’t have an awful lot of responsibility either, because they can’t give you an awful lot to do if you can’t communicate very well. And so actually, I really enjoyed I think the first couple of years. I really enjoyed the differences. I enjoyed the – it was all new experiences. You know, trying new foods, going to new places, seeing new things. And I think, you know, that kind of experience of all things being new and it was kind of a real adventure. So I think even the kind of cultural differences that are harder to take, in that context were quite easy. But interestingly, I think it sort of, I think it’s been more this end, really, of the time I’ve been here, where actually the cultural differences have been harder to deal with, I think, in some ways. I think as well because people are people all over the world and there’s always some people that hurt you or, em, you kind of have difficult relationships with certain people or whatever. And that happens wherever you are in the world. But I think when that happens in a culture that’s different to yours, em, I think those differences are accentuated. Whereas I think if you, if you’re somewhere for a short time, the relationships don’t get that deep and you’re less likely to be hurt in that sense and those differences don’t come out quite the same I think. So I think, yeah, that’s been quite interesting. And obviously, in the lockdown and all that, you know, the way that they’ve responded in [country] has been really different from the UK. And in … it’s been really interesting to see that actually, to observe it and so on. So I’m kind of quite glad of the experience. But it has made me feel a bit home-sick, I have to say. But then, you know, it is a funny situation. And it’s probably the first time I’ve ever really felt home-sick. So… yeah. Home-sick in terms of the culture.

INTERVIEWER: how do you think you’re viewed as a Brit there?

ANNE: I think people like the Brits. The Queen features quite a lot in their news, in their English lessons at school. Everybody knows about the royal family in particular. And I think, you know, they really like the idea – it’s kind of quite a romantic idea – of you know, how things should be and stuff. So I think their image of British people is quite positive over all. And, you know, even sort of talking to somebody recently, they were saying, you know, in the news, that people in Britain were upset because they couldn’t go out drinking in the pubs and bars and stuff, and I think they were quite surprised that Britons would do that. They don’t see that as part of the British culture, you know. So, yeah, so I think that’s been quite fun. It is pretty positive. Even things like when I make mistakes in the language and stuff, they’re very forgiving, you know. Whereas I think if it would be, I don’t know, maybe somebody from the Roma community, it would be viewed very differently. Very negatively. So, yeah, so I think it works to my advantage in some ways, being a Brit.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about how you are supported? In all ways, all aspects…

ANNE: Financially, that’s an obvious one. It’s just a few friends, family members who pay a bit each month. And that’s all. I kind of have a Stewardship account, so I get some of the giftaid back on that, which is nice. Yeah, so, that’s kind of … It’s changed over the years. The first year I was supported financially by the church that I came from, that I’d been working in before. But they’d sort of said from the beginning, this is for a year and if you stay, then you’re on your own. I ended up, I just had one person who gave me £30 a month at the time. And there’s been moments when it’s been really, “oh my goodness!” And I kind of was really living by faith and it just didn’t feel like there’d be enough to get through the month. And then, it’s kind of… and actually as the years have gone on, you know, I’ve got a very stable base, really, of people who give me every month. And it’s, and it’s great. And I think then there’s also odd people who’ve given me perhaps a bigger gift but once every now and again or something’s just come up out of the blue. And I think, because the money I get monthly pretty much just covers my monthly needs. So then when there’s something bigger, even just getting flights back to the UK or doing other bits and pieces that are extra to normal everyday living, or something breaks and it needs replacing, then it’s been lovely to have kind of extra bits and pieces. People, you know, some people have really been generous. And it’s been interesting that often the people who have got a lot more money often haven’t been quite as generous and it’s often come from people and you think ‘where on earth have they got that from? And why are they giving it to me?’ And just being amazed that people are being so generous. Yeah, so that’s kind of financial.

And then, in terms of sort of prayer support and stuff, em, I have…. I do do a newsletter every now and again. I’ve not been very consistent in sending it out. But I think I’ve been better more recently at that. And I’ve quite often asked people to sort of reply, which you get, you know, a few who do. And there’s some who’ve never replied at all, but I kind of have this sense that I feel supported, that people are kind of hearing at least what I’ve done and even if they’ve not actually replied there’s that sense of connection with people, keeping in touch with people, which is nice. And obviously sort of Facebook and stuff has just been a godsend in terms of keeping in touch with people that I wouldn’t necessarily write to but it’s nice to see what they’re doing and stuff like that, so there’s kind of a support in a sense there I guess. And then I have just a few close friends and stuff, so if I’ve got a real kind of a problem, then I tend to just send them a message and say can you pray about this, or what do you think I could do about this? Yeah, so I think that’s been helpful too. And here, as well, you know, the church here are all really lovely. When I had the flu the other week, one of the ladies from church came and brought me some soup and food and got me some shopping and stuff. So, yeah, there’s definitely support here too, I think, you know, at the church. That’s been good.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your experience of working in teams.

ANNE: In [country] specifically? Or?

INTERVIEWER: yeah, or…

ANNE: OK, not necessarily. Probably, before I came to [country] so the church I was in was an Anglican church, a big Anglican church, very wealthy. They had quite a big staff team of which I was a part time member in charge of music and worship. And for me it was a brilliant experience, learning experience in how teams should work. It wasn’t perfect and there were a lot of things that needed improving, we worked on it a lot. But it was great in terms of a learning experience, in terms of communication, in terms of organising stuff, and it, being a bigger church, you kind of got that sense of the wideness of different things that were going on, and even if it was things that didn’t really have anything to do with me, that sense of just, having an awareness, of knowing it was happening because the communication systems were really quite good. So I think that was a really good experience for me. And then coming here, em, yeah, [country-ans] have quite a different concept of teams and leadership I think in some ways. Or certainly, I mean like in the church I’m in now for example, I’m now on the leadership team. And even things like writing minutes, or having an agenda, just, it’s just not in their mindset at all. So when we got together they were talking about the football or, you know, they might talk about one or two things to do with church and it was just whatever happened to pop into their heads, and then we’d discuss it and chat about it like friends, rather than actually being any specific conclusions drawn from it. And em, actually I’ve felt that’s been one of my roles in the team has been to try and kind of direct a little bit how we do things as team, and I have a mentor in the UK who was from that church where I was, and he mentored me back then and then I asked him more recently if he’d mentor me again so that I could help the team here a bit more. And it is – it’s a slow process. But even just sort of getting a google document and writing down some of the things we’ve discussed in the meeting has been a real improvement. And what’s interesting is that if I’m not there they don’t do it. So if I write the minutes and I put it on the document… but they love the fact that I do it! But when I’m…. But it’s still interesting… If I say, oh I won’t, they’ll sort of say “oh, you’re not writing in the document” you know. So they kind of love me to do it and they see the benefit but they’re still not quite there in terms of actually doing it for themselves so much. But it, even that’s changing a little bit. But it’s really slow kind of progress in that sense, yeah. I can’t think of anything else on that particular….

INTERVIEWER: Are your team there a similar age to you?

ANNE: A bit of a mix. The pastor’s the same age as me. And then there’s an older chap who’s, I think he’s about 65. And then there’s the younger guy who, I think he’s sort of late twenties, something like that. So it’s quite a good range.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have plans for the future?

ANNE: [laugh] Not really. I mean, em, I think since I’ve been here… I think because I came for a year and then it sort of, each… I don’t feel like God has ever said, “oh you’re going to stay for the next fifty years” or “you’re going to stay for the next three years” or…. There’s never been a kind of time limit and I think, I don’t know, in some ways that’s probably a good thing. It’s probably more helpful to me. But in some ways I’d have quite liked to have known. I’ve always said I don’t really want to grow old in [country]. So I, I think that’s…. I think I’m beginning to think a little bit that, sort of, this year I’ve been thinking, is this a long-term thing? Is there any more I can give to this place where I am right now? And I’m sort of feeling like it’s not quite…. It’s been great, but I’m not sure I want to do what I’ve been doing this last year for the next ten years or the next twenty years to be honest. So I’m kind of feeling like things, something needs to change a little bit, but I’m not quite sure what or when or how or…. Yeah, in what sense at all. I think, you know, I am feeling like I said particularly with the lockdown situation and everything else, a little bit homesick for Britain and I think – I don’t know whether that’s just because of the situation, or whether that actually it is something that it’s feeling like something in my heart’s moving. I think in sort of my earlier years in [country] there was just this sense of absolute pride of [country] and, you know, when I went back I was just glowing and wanting to tell everybody about how amazing [country] is. And I think I’ve kind of lost that a little bit. And it might be that that’s just, you know, the honeymoon period’s over and whatever. So I think at the moment I’m trying to work out, is that just a blip that I need to push through or is it actually God beginning to just move the waters a little bit and that actually I should be considering something different. So, yeah, but I haven’t got any other…. I kind of think, well if I don’t do this, what do I do? I haven’t got any other ideas about what I would do. I always said that I when I leave [country] I want to be called to something else, not just to leave because it’s not been great or because things have gone wrong or…. So I think, you know, I’m sort of, I guess seeking God as to, ok well what’s next? It does feel a bit like there needs to be something new. A new adventure or a new challenge or something a little bit different. And I don’t know, yeah, I don’t really know what that would be.

INTERVIEWER: Erm, what’s it like being single there, and how does that affect things?

ANNE: I mean, I think [country-an] culture, Christian culture anyway, is that if you get to 25 and you’re not married then you’re really seriously on the shelf. So to be 40 and not married is kind of interesting in terms of the way that people view you. And I think, but, having said that, because I’m a Brit, I’m somebody different anyway. And I, I think they almost excuse me from their normal rule on that kind of thing and that actually they see me as different anyway. And quite a few people have said things to me like “oh my goodness, she’s twenty-three and she’s still not married!” And I’m like, “yeah, you know who you’re talking to, right? I’m forty and I’m not married!” But it’s almost like they don’t see me in that same category somehow and I think that is because of the difference in culture.

INTERVIEWER: Sometimes I wonder if it’s also when you pass a certain age, they just accept that that’s just you.

ANNE: Yeah, that might be true too.

INTERVIEWER: I think people nagged me more before I was thirty, or certainly thirty-five, than after.

ANNE: Yes, that might be. Yes, I think you might be right about that. I mean, I have moments, like anybody, when I think “I wish I was married”, “I’d really like that for myself” and … But I think, I always come back to, if God has chosen for me to be single right now, that must mean that this is his best for me. And actually what he thinks is best for me, is better than what I think is best for me. And so I’ve kind of then sort of relaxed into that. And I think, yeah, although I would still like to get married, it is something that I would want, it is something that I have prayed about, at the same time, I really don’t want to waste my life just wishing for something that isn’t going to happen. And so I’ve tried to really make the most of the benefits of being single. And I think, you know, it has been in many ways, it is an advantage when you’re in mission work. You know, I can’t imagine doing what I’m doing and having a family. People do it – hats off to them because I think it must be really, really challenging. So I think, you know, and I think the depth of relationships you can have with people is much deeper because you’re single, that you can’t do when you’ve got a family. So em, yes, so I really do try and see the blessing in it and see the, really work to the advantage that it gives me, rather than sort of sitting around and feeling sorry for myself because it’s not happened kind of idea I think. I find it hard, you know, in the UK especially, every time I go back. My nan always used to, when she was alive, every single time whenever I spoke to her: “have you got a boyfriend? Have you not got a boyfriend? You’re going to have to get on with it!” And I think, I think in some ways the culture in the UK I find harder to deal with in that sense than in [country], erm. Even my sister, “why don’t you go on a dating app?” or whatever. And I’m just like, I find that hard, when other people start putting those things on me. So, yeah. Or I kind of feel like they’re judging me or making me feel like I’m odd or a bit weird because I’m not married and there must be some reason why people have not asked me, you know, that kind of thing. So yeah, so it’s a bit of a mix. But generally, I’m kind of proud of myself for coping quite well with it really. And actually quite kind of encouraged by things like the single-friendly church stuff.

INTERVIEWER: I often… I think that thing of people constantly asking you about it… I can take it from other single people, because that’s a kind of mutual sharing, but yeah, people that have got married young and then start “why aren’t you married?” Well, it hasn’t happened.

ANNE: Or even worse, people who’re in really awful marriages, and they still kind of push it on you and you’re like, why would you want that for me when you’re really struggling?

INTERVIEWER: yeah. Erm… how and how much do you use social media?

ANNE: I use it quite a lot, and probably… I think before lockdown, because that’s sort of more everyday life, it was like a constant challenge not to go on it too much. I am typical of somebody in my age group in that I just don’t really do Instagram. I have got into Whatsapp a bit more, but Facebook is definitely the big thing. Actually, I think I’d only just turned 40 and I read an article about how people… no, I hadn’t turned 40, but it was about how people over 40 tend to use Facebook and people under 40 tend to use Instagram. So I … I have had an Instagram account but I still didn’t get on with it, so I was like, oh well, never mind. I’ve kind of gone in phases of sort of posting things myself. I tend to just forward an encouraging song or something. I had the things that are forwarded, I never forward them on. And I’m not very good at putting personal things. I think I sort of – when I first came to [country] I did quite a lot. I think I used it as quite a good way of updating people of what I was doing. It was easy because everything was new, there was always something a bit different to write about. Whereas now, I guess life just has become normal. So I guess it’s harder to write about. And probably also the expectation of – being single is quite hard again in terms of social media because people will often put pictures of their family or activities they’ve done with their family. And I think…. So I tend not to put anything. I don’t know, I feel like that’s a little bit of a … yeah, so I kind of look at what other people post and it’s nice kind of keeping in touch with people like my cousins or… that I wouldn’t necessarily really sort of write to them or call them, but it’s nice to know what they’re doing and what their kids are doing and all that kind of thing. So yeah…

INTERVIEWER: helps you remember people’s names!

ANNE: and birthdays!

INTERVIEWER: just as you were saying that it made me think, I wonder if part of posting less – when, certainly when I first went on Facebook it wasn’t big in [country I was in] and so I could share things, like weird things I saw happening, like “oh isn’t this strange?” Which once half your Facebook friends are [country-an],

ANNE: you can’t do that…

INTERVIEWER: so I wonder if part of it’s….

ANNE: yes, I think there is part of that. Actually sometimes when it comes up on my memories things that I posted in that first year, I think, “oh that was a bit patronising.” You know. I can see that actually my cross-cultural, you know, my mindset’s changed a lot and I can see that actually I’d written it from a very British point of view and that kind of thing. So yeah, I think that probably has had quite a lot to do with it as well, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: it’s a thought, yeah. Right, well, I think that’s covered just about everything.

ANNE: Oh that’s good. Well I hope that’s been useful for your research and stuff.