**Interview 021 PSEUDONYM: Karen**

INTERVIEWER: So could you give me a bit of background about like, what is your faith history? How did you come to faith?

KAREN: Yes, sure. So I was brought up in a Christian family, em, and I gave my life to Jesus – like I always knew about God but I like properly like received the Holy Spirit and made a commitment when I was about 13 at Soul Survivor. And then, I think my, as I just experienced more and more of God I knew that I wanted to go overseas on mission. I don’t like using that phrase, “go on mission” because I think you know, it can be like mission wherever we are, right? But yeah. So I guess my parents have always been quite outward looking in that way so they’ve encouraged it. So the churches that I went to were all quite encouraging mission and yeah. I think like mission in the local area and overseas as well, so always really encouraged that. And people I think knew from a young age that was what I wanted to do. So, em. So then… I took a few gap years actually, because I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. But I eventually like, I was working a bit in that time and then God was like speaking to me about stuff and I decided to do nursing. I felt like God told me to do a practical, em, basically getting some practical skills that it’s like, you know, knowledge, so profession. And I thought nursing would be good because I felt like God made that clear, like he spoke to me through different people and just like, yeah it was quite amazing how he did that. And then, I studied nursing for a few years and I worked as a nurse for a couple of years and then I also, I went to [town in African country A] on an elective when I was a student nurse and I, I got to like experience a bit of maternity there and I realised that like it would be really good to do maternity because, you know, a lot of countries you aren’t just a nurse, you’re a nurse and a midwife. And then I did a midwifery course two years after I had become a nurse. It was a shorter course. Yeah, and then I worked as a midwife in the same hospital again in [African country A] for a year in 2016 and that kind of went… It was good, but I didn’t really feel like it was a place for me to stay. And then I came back to London. I came to London and I worked there for three years and then I was just like, you know, I think I need to go and just get on with it. And I had been in a relationship with a guy actually and it didn’t work out. I probably would have gone sooner. But yeah, you know how these things work. And then, em, yeah, and then like just started pushing some doors and this one opened to come. So I came for two weeks in 2019 just to scout it out a bit and it was like, yeah, it really resonated with what I really felt God put on my heart, but also their vision is like really amazing and like I felt like I’d really fit with the team here. So yeah, I decided that I need to come here, but then because of Covid that all got delayed. I would have come earlier but yeah. So I came in November last year, so I’ve just been here four months. It’s going well so far. I feel quite tired at the moment, but I think I just probably need a little break soon. But it’s really good. There’s amazing community and like. I’m working in a rural clinic as a midwife and it’s a Christian clinic and the vision is really to impact people through love in action. So like you know, they are really keen for you to share the Gospel with people in the clinic. People are quite open to it. It’s not like the NHS where you can’t like mention God or Jesus. So that’s really cool.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

KAREN: I don’t know if that’s enough information. I can elaborate.

INTERVIEWER: There’s a couple of things I’m going to pick up on!

KAREN: Yeah, sure.

INTERVIEWER: you said you felt like God told you to do nursing, can you elaborate on that a bit? Can you tell me a bit more what that looked like?

KAREN: Yeah. So I was a bit resistant to go to university for different reasons. I didn’t feel like I was intelligent enough and probably like low self-esteem. But you know, God was really working on that. I went, I was in [African country B] actually, with [Christian organisation]. I was there for two months and in my – it was a really amazing time. It was kind of like, kind of like a discipleship thing but a really short one only two months. The morning was worship and the afternoon there was like teaching and stuff. So the worship sessions would go on forever which I really love, cos that’s like. Anyway, I really felt God like, like, em, kind of, speaking to me about – it came into my head kind of during the worship quite a few times about doing nursing, but I was like, ah, God really? I don’t know. One of my sisters is a nurse and I was like, I don’t want people to think I just copied her. And, but in many … I pushed that thought aside, I was like I don’t think that’s God. But it just kept on coming back, like during the worship sessions. And then I was like, ‘OK, God, if this is really you, I want somebody to ask me like this day if I’m in a healthcare profession.’ And I like went, there’s like – how many people are there? – about a hundred people doing this two month thing. And like I went and talked to some people I hadn’t met before, you know, they were like, oh do you work in healthcare? Or something like that. And I was just like, what? I can’t believe that they asked me that and I just thought, ok. And I think I said the same thing another day, asked God to, like, somebody else to ask me. And they didn’t ask me but asked if like somebody in my family was. And I was like, ok, that’s interesting. And then I had the big question about the actual like academic side of things because I didn’t really think I could, I wasn’t university material. And because you can’t do nursing unless it’s at degree now, since like, for quite a few years. So I was just like, ok God, I understand. I don’t know about the whole university thing, I really need you to show me that you want me to go to university. And then I think like the next day there was a question and answer session with [leaders’ names] and they’re like – I don’t know if you’ve heard about [organisation leader], she’s one who like set up [organisation] in [African Country B] and kind of global thing now. This was back in 2006 as we that I was there. And Lesly Ann is a lady who’s done lots of mission. And they’re like running the school in [African Country B]. And there was a question and answer time and what do you think about getting training and people going out with professional skills and she was like, she said that, in her experience, she said “I wouldn’t be allowed to do what I’m doing in [African Country B] if I didn’t have a doctorate” you know. Because she, I think she explained that it would look really suspicious from the government of [African Country B]’s point of view. At that point they had 2000 kids under their care – they have more now. But she said it would look really weird if this like white American woman had all these kids and you know she’s not got any credentials herself. So it actually gave her a lot of credit. And then [name of other leader] who has worked a lot in [Asia] she said, well you can’t go to lots of places that she’s worked in without being a doctor, you know, a teacher or a doctor or a nurse. So then that just really answered my questions. I was like, oh wow, yeah, it is like a passport, you know, having these skills. Like God used those people to answer, like he knew that I needed that convincing. And I was like, OK. So that’s how God spoke to me about it.

INTERVIEWER: So, em, you’d taken yourself off to do this course in Africa… so what was the process for doing that? How did you end up doing that?

KAREN: Yeah. So it was 2006. So I’d finished my A-Levels I think in 2004 and I took an initial gap year which was planned and everything. And I, yeah, I went to [Asian Country] and [African Country C] and then I realised during that like gap year…. So I was meant to do sport science at university, actually, but it was a very practical degree so I wasn’t too worried about the academic side of things, but I realised it’s not something I was passionate about so I felt God just say like “don’t do it” you know, “do what you’re passionate about.” I was like, but I don’t know what I’m passionate about! And then it took me… I worked. Well, somebody from my church had been – like a friend of ours had been out to [African Country B] six months before at the same school and he just told me ‘oh it’s so good, you would love it.’ Like he was really, you know, following Jesus and still is, and he just really encouraged me to go for it. He was like, I think … And I knew his heart, like he’s very missional and yeah, really good heart. So I was like, I think I’ll take his word for it. And I kind of prayed on it a bit and I did feel it was the right thing to do. So I just went. Because I was working just really informally in you know restaurants, waitressing, bars, random things like that. So I was at a point where I could just get up and go and do different things. And when I came back, I thought I’d better get into a nursing course straight away but it was December and the courses were closed for January, because obviously it was really close. So I waited until September 2007 and that’s when I started my nursing.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I was quite interested that you mentioned Soul Survivor at the beginning. Did you go to that lots of times? Was, would you say…?

KAREN: quite a few times. So as a family we went to New Wine. Do you know New Wine? It’s a family thing. And yeah, so we went to that pretty much every year. But then when we got older – I’m one of [number of siblings] and then there were quite a few like young people around who [interruption]… Yeah, we went to New Wine every year and then there was quite a few young people and then like some adults who said they would like look after us and well you know, like kind of supervise us. We all went off to Soul Survivor. Yeah, we all got really impacted actually. I think we were all a similar age, maybe two or three years older. I was one of the younger ones. We actually got so fired up that we decided to set up a youth group when we got back to our little town in [county] and we called it Flame and, yeah, so we did that. And that was a really amazing time. I think we were just really on fire for Jesus. We had a youth camp every August bank holiday for like four years after that and yeah, and we were all leading that at like, we led that when we were like 17, 18 years old. Not really knowing what we were doing. But yeah, it was a really amazing time.

INTERVIEWER: yeah, that sounds amazing.

KAREN: And then we did go to Soul Survivor like years after that, you know, subsequent years. And each time I think it really impacted me, definitely. Like really affirmed my faith, really affirmed who I was. You know when you’re 13, 14 and you’re kind of discovering who you are, you know. I struggled at secondary school, like socially and things. And it was really an amazing time to meet God. Yeah, it did definitely impact me in a positive way.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say there have been times when your faith has been challenged?

KAREN: yes. Yeah. My faith has been challenged you asked?

A; Yeah, like different ways. Have there been things that have maybe shaken you sometimes or….?

KAREN: Yeah. I think, yeah definitely. Probably like the thing I’ve struggled with most in my faith is just like not, like caring too much what people think. But I think that’s a very Millennial thing actually, that we’re too conscious what people think. Or maybe it’s just a thing of your like 20s, late teens, twenties, now that I’m like mid-forties – not forties, oh gosh!

INTERVIEWER: no, that’s me!

KAREN: mid-thirties! I’m kind of like maybe not caring so much any more. But I still do care, but that’s really not a hindrance to you being free to share your faith, you know to people who are not a Christian. And I’ve always found that a massive challenge to, em, not be afraid, or not be ashamed of the Gospel. But lot of the time I have been ashamed of it. But like being here, it’s actually probably easier to be a Christian outwardly, because it’s just more accepted than it is back in the UK, because we are such a secular culture now. And people don’t want to hear about religion do they? They’re like, kind of got their backs turned up against it a bit I think. Em. And so that’s one thing I’ve always, that’s always been a challenge to me – that’s probably the biggest challenge I’d say. I think I do, you know, I do struggle sometimes with the inequalities in the world. But I do also, I don’t know, I think, I don’t struggle with that as much as what I hear other people talking about it and that becomes a big… I think we’re also called as Christians to like be the answer to that, you know. Not that one person is going to solve it all, but you know like we are God’s ambassadors and inequalities often exist because we let them. But I’m not… obviously there’s so many factors that influence all of this and, em, poverty and suffering. But that’s not like, to me, that’s not a big challenge, although it is, you know. OK, it’s a challenge; it’s hard to see. Seeing it here every day, and it’s hard not to get hardened to it even. But the thing in my faith that is the hardest is like to speak up to people who don’t get it or who have different views. I think I’m too worried about what people think about me and having a different view and am I going to be accepted or not, that kind of thing. Which isn’t always good.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that’s interesting. How did your friends and family react?

KAREN: To me going?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

KAREN: I think, I think like a lot of them, like, know… So my family have all been pretty supportive, like really supportive. Even… so I’ve got a sister who’s, she’s not a believer, and she’s very, she’s really good because she does make me think about what I’m doing and she’s not afraid to question. Em, but she’s got a very different view and she studied like social anthropology and things like that, and she’s also a little bit anti – I don’t know – people going somewhere and using kind of like thrusting religion upon other societies. I think she doesn’t agree with that. So I think she, she hasn’t said it openly, but I think she doesn’t…. I think she likes it that I’m like doing healthcare stuff, but she probably doesn’t like it that my aim is to like share the Gospel and stuff cos she doesn’t think that anybody should be doing that. So, but, she’s not been really anti me coming, like, she’s, you know, she’s quite supportive. I think quite a few of my friends who aren’t believers would just think it’s a bit… they know that I’ve wanted to do it for a long time. A lot of them know it’s been on my heart for at least ten years. But they, I don’t think they get it. I think they think ‘oh, it’s something you’ll get out of your system.’ People do think you’re a bit crazy also like not to be paid and you know to actually pay to be somewhere, they do think that’s a bit mad. And I think especially now that my friends are like in their thirties, you know, where you actually can make some money. And obviously that’s what people value: having things, making money. And then it’s like, I think a lot of people just think like “are you stupid?” or something for doing it. They’re not necessarily saying that to you but they do, people question, oh how will you support yourself? And stuff like that. And em, yeah, I think it’s just like such an opposite direction to a way a lot of them, like what they’re doing, they do think it is quite weird, I think if I’m completely honest. But most of them have been supportive. Some of them I think are also a bit fearful, like, you know, you could be unwell, you could get sick, or take care of yourself. They’re scared of the unknown I think. I think our society’s become so risk-averse as well that people, yeah, that really affects what people are willing to do.

INTERVIEWER: That’s interesting.

KAREN: But a lot of my Christian friends have been supportive, yeah, so they’ve been really good. So yeah I’ve got good support. I think it would be a lot harder if my family – especially my parents – you know, if they didn’t think it was very… you know, I think it would be really hard to be here without that support.

INTERVIEWER: yeah. You said earlier you don’t like the phrase “going on mission”

KAREN: yeah. [laugh] No, I do. OK how do I explain this? I think, em, ok, and I should also… the phrase “going on mission” I think like, you know, God doesn’t call it… what I don’t like is that the term “missionary” can be a bit, I don’t know, like, as if you’re some kind of saint, it feels like you’ve got to be some kind of saint really. I don’t necessarily like being called a missionary. But, you know, I guess essentially I think my view is that we are all for mission, wherever we are: if it’s a place that you have lived and never moved away, where you were born and brought up, that’s a mission field you know. Just as much as it is to come here. Just as long as you’re doing what God has put on your heart, I think that’s the most important thing. So sometimes I think, I don’t know, we glamorise it, don’t we, in church as well? And we maybe put people on a pedestal – oh, them, those people on mission! Because they’ve gone somewhere, but actually the people in like staying also are just as important. Yeah. I don’t know. I think I would support that a little bit, that we should all be missionaries. But then saying that, living in London for like three years, I guess I didn’t always live like a missional mindset. I mean in some ways I did. You know, my work – I viewed it as God’s mission. But I guess it was, em, I don’t know – maybe it’s just like when you are you think where God wants you to be also a bit more. I don’t know. Like looking, thinking, what he wants you to do and that more. Whereas I wasn’t – I was also like in this place of like ‘should I be in London or not?’ And I did think like I’d be there for a year, but I actually ended up being there for three years. But I definitely had a great time – I learnt loads. I think God really used it. Yeah. So I don’t regret that. Yeah. I don’t know if that answers your question.

INTERVIEWER: So would you call yourself a missionary? Do other people call you a missionary?

KAREN: I think people DO call me a missionary. I’m ok with that. I mean, I guess I don’t, er, I wouldn’t normally call myself a missionary but… I, yeah, in a broad sense I guess. And I guess here, yeah, the leaders of the organisation who are [North American], they’re very open, they’re like “how would you like to be called?” And I was like “maybe call me a volunteer.” Yeah. But, I’m ok – I’m not opposed to being called a missionary. I guess I would just feel like I’m not a very good one. I don’t know how, what classes as a good missionary. But not like – I don’t know – like maybe I’m not the traditional missionary who’s going to be like staying my whole life in this place. I think mission has changed quite a bit as well, you know, like with the fact that travel is a lot easier (apart from during Covid of course). Pre-Covid it was a lot easier you know – you can get on a plane and come back easier. I think there’s more flexibility and maybe that’s just me copping out and like, being like oh maybe I don’t know if I will be here for long or not, but…. But I really want to follow what God has, like what God wants for me. What God wants. Yeah.

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

KAREN: Hmmm. I think, yeah, I was really impacted by [organisation leader] – her and her husband set up the organisation in [African Country B] [organisation name] and like she’d come to the UK most years and I’d usually like go and hear her speak and I just thought yeah she’s an amazing example of how it is to love Jesus and love people. So I definitely would say that she’s my model. Is it like a person? I guess ultimately Jesus is!

INTERVIEWER: yeah

KAREN: but yeah thinking right now, somebody like that yeah.

INTERVIEWER: so how have you found living in a different culture?

KAREN: em… yeah… I think I’m… I feel like I’ve adapted alright, adapted OK. I think living in [African Country D] for a year also really helped, and I’ve done other short-term trips in a lot of places in Africa as well. So I know, I guess I know like a little bit… and obviously each African country is different. Definitely like that year in [African Country D] has definitely helped because there’s a lot of similarities between where I am now and where I was in [African Country D], like even the language is a little bit similar. So, yeah. I mean there, the challenges are dealing with like people’s expectations you know being white and single and what they expect from you and what they want from you and yeah they seem to expect a lot at times. And yeah, and also like showing – I don’t know – trying to decipher what’s genuine and what’s not. Because obviously you’re looking through your cultural lens and what, so it’s really like trying to, yeah, understand how people think. And that takes time. I’ve only been here for four months so I’m really a baby, or inexperienced of all of that. So I don’t really, like… I’m living with a [European] lady and she’s lived here for almost four years so she’s explained some things and it’s really helpful that she does that. And people, so there’s a [North American] couple as well and they’ve lived here for 12 years and you know they’re really good at explaining cultural things well. So that’s been really helpful. Because otherwise I think you do offend people. But also I think … yeah being mindful of the culture but trying to find compromises. Like how, I don’t know, how to say this without it sounding wrong, but not, like feeling like you’ve got to be exactly like a [country-ian] because essentially I’m not [country-ian], I don’t know if people would actually expect me to behave exactly like them. But, yeah, what was your question?

INTERVIEWER: yeah, how have you found it?

KAREN: emm

INTERVIEWER: how do you think Britishness is viewed?

KAREN: sorry, say that again?

INTERVIEWER: how do you think Britishness is viewed? The fact that you’re British.

KAREN: ah, being British. Like from a [country-ian] point of view? Or from…?

INTERVIEWER: yeah and you said you’re with a [European] person and [North Americans], so…

KAREN: and then there’s another British friend who’s out here – [personal detail omitted]. Yeah, being British. I don’t know, I think… I think it’s actually… Most people view it positively. I think a lot of people, they have had other British people here, they’ve had Australian as well. So they do know a little bit about British culture. But I think it’s hard. [Country-ans] that get to know you well, they do get to know that there’s differences between different like white people, but for a lot of the people – I work in a rural clinic where people, a lot of people have only like managed to do a few years of primary school cos like really difficult life and all that, and I think they just lump all white people together in one box and, you know, like they’re all the same. And we do that probably for them. So I don’t really know how they see being British. But I do know that from my point of view, obviously when you go to another culture you learn a lot about your culture. Yeah, definitely realised how British I am. Definitely like realise that loads in [African Country D] as well. There’s actually a lot of similarities, some similarities to the culture here and British culture. So, they’re very like, they’re quite stoic and they kind of suppress feelings a little bit, don’t necessarily… I don’t know. They’re kind of non-confrontational but maybe a little bit passive-aggressive as well at times, and I think that’s similar in some ways to being British, you know the stiff upper lip. You know, like, in some ways it’s sometimes good and other times it’s not. There’s good and bad about all cultures isn’t there? But yeah, they’re very – they will go around, they’re not very direct in the way they speak. So it’s hard to know what people are getting at sometimes. And even less direct than what we are in the UK. You know like if somebody asks you for something and you don’t really want to give it to them, you make up an excuse, but they will like, I don’t know what they’d do here, yeah. That’s not a very good example, but…. Interesting. I think people don’t want to offend and it’s very much a shame culture, honour and shame, so they do anything to avoid like shaming you. With family and friends and stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about your work/life balance?

KAREN: Yeah, I think I’m still working that one out. I think at times you feel, yeah, at the moment probably I feel like I need to get a bit more rest. Maybe like, then I’d be more effective as well. But also like coming in and being here for four months, I haven’t, like there’s still so many things I’d like to do. And then I’m like, I should have done this by now or that by now. So then I’ve like you know, ah I should have done this bit of admin or that, then there’s all the things I’m still getting used to. I think it’s a very good social life here. There’s always something going on and people to see and meet up with. But yeah our working days are quite long – you start at around 7:30 and then you end around 5, 5:30. But then it can be a bit later depending what’s going on in the clinic. Em, yeah and I’ve helped out occasionally at weekends but not too much. So I think, yeah, I mean in the NHS you normally get like a week off every two months, and I think, yeah, I probably don’t think…. I’m working out what’s, what works for me. So I think I’m still trying to work that one out. And there’s things that I’d still like to do here, you know, like recreational, that I haven’t got round to yet. But I’m hopeful…. Like riding… it’s really beautiful scenery and I’d like to get a bike and I haven’t got a bike yet but I’m going to try and sort that soon. Buying one. Yeah. Em, but yeah it’s hard like when, I think like also you can feel, everybody works in different ways and some people work a lot more hours and some people don’t and it’s hard not to like feel you’ve got to do what everybody else is doing as well. I think there is a bit of a culture as well in NGOs – like my sister worked for an NGO in [country] and she said it was like, she found it difficult working with people who, yeah, they might work evenings and weekends and then you feel like pressure and feel bad if you’re not doing that. I guess when you’re in that outside situation it’s very easy to say oh you shouldn’t, you should just like have… but if you’re perceived then not to be doing what you should be doing or, there’s a bit of pride sometimes isn’t there? When you are like that person who’s getting loads of stuff done and you can be like, oh yeah, I’ve done this. Not that people are like that here, but it’s kind of like, just that thing of, maybe it’ll seem like you should be doing as much as everybody else. But you shouldn’t really compare yourself either to people in that way, so it’s, I guess like going back to doing what you do unto God and like he’s the person who you’re accountable to essentially. But em, but it is hard sometimes I think there is a culture in lots of NGOs like people doing that and then people, you know, do burn out and get tired as well. So then it’s having that perspective that if you actually have a healthy work/life balance it probably is better in the long run.

INTERVIEWER: How do you maintain your faith? Or develop your faith?

KAREN: it’s really good here because there’s so much fellowship. So there’s devotions every day, which is like, there’s usually a song and then somebody shares. And then, and pray. And that’s like half an hour at the start of the day, every day of the week, apart from the weekend but I generally don’t work weekends. And then in the evenings there’s stuff going on, but I don’t go to stuff every evening. But on a Thursday night… so I decided this year that I want to like read the Bible in a year. I think the last few years… I have read my Bible like on and off but not really like got into it, just random like open the book and what page it lands on. And stuff like just reading what I know will make me feel good at that time. And I don’t think that’s really bad either; I think it’s good to read whatever you can, but like being challenged here like in a good way, you know. One of the [North Americans] has really been good at encouraging me to read the Word and we’ve been doing that. We meet up, there’s four of us who are doing Bible in a year. So you have to read like four chapters a day, something like that, and then we meet on the Thursday and we like talk about whatever we’ve read. Em, and then there’s, yeah, people coming over like we’re doing something tomorrow. Usually that involves… there’s a family night and it’s like a fellowship thing which includes food and sharing of stuff. So there’s, but I do feel like my faith has grown. I think also, like, er, yeah how do I say this without? Anyway, yeah, I’m conscious that it’s fairly easy to get complacent with all that and just, you know, hear something every day and it not actually impact you. Cause sometimes when you’re hearing stuff it becomes less, you know, on a regular basis, I don’t know, it just becomes normal and you take it a little bit for granted and you don’t, you know… I think sometimes hearing the Word and people talk every day is really amazing but also it can be a little…. I don’t know. And then there’s church like on Sunday, and that is like two and half hours, which is a short service here. And you’re, and it’s always through translation as well so that can be different, you know, hearing a translated version. Em. Yeah so I think sometimes I have been a little bit numb to, like, the devotions and stuff. Not always, you know, usually there’s something I take away but, whether I’m really like hungry for it all the time. Even sometimes being [*incomprehensible*]. You know it’s like, do we really need to do this every day? But actually it is good and it is, it centres everybody and it does remind people, so it is good. And you know, there’s people around the world who can’t meet publicly and don’t have this freedom so it’s amazing really.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about your support network? How are you supported?

KAREN: Yeah, so I am, yeah. Er… I’m with [organisation], a mission organisation. So I went to a church in London called [name] and they’re like linked to [organisation] and so one of the guys, they told me about it and I got connected. They’ve been really good. I mean they’re not like, you know, in contact with me loads, but also I quite like that. I think if I reach out they’ll be on it. But I do send out prayer requests through them like every, there’s a thing you do every month and people pray. Em, so that’s like my main, I guess, like spiritual support. And then, financially I’ve been really lucky or really blessed and I knew that like I wanted to do mission for a while, like when I, before I started nursing. And my parents helped me to buy a house, yeah, so I guess I’ve been trying to like manage that well and like when I was in the UK I like saved a lot and managed to pay off quite a lot of the mortgage – well I’ve got like another 12 years of it but em. Yeah, so I get income basically from, I’ve got tenants in the house and I get, I have a mortgage but I get profit as well from the rent so I get more than half of the rent is profit for me, so that’s my main financial support. And I do have some financial support through like individuals who give via Stewardship which [organisation] helped set me up with. So yeah, I’m really, that’s an amazing position to be in. I don’t take that for granted.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that used to be quite normal a few decades ago, but actually like younger missionaries that’s really unusual now.

KAREN: To like own a house? I know. Yeah really amazing.

INTERVIEWER: I’m thinking of people I’ve known who have returned, so come back in their fifties and sixties and have a home to come back to in the UK. Whereas so many I know that are that bit younger that are saying, well I don’t have anything when I come back.

KAREN: Yeah. That makes it a lot harder.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have a plan for the future?

KAREN: Erm…[laughing]. Noooo. I mean, there’s things I’d like to do. Em. I think I’m kind of like committed here for like two years. And I, I don’t know, I am open to staying. Em, I think, yeah, I would really like to like meet a guy and get married, like that would be great. But it hasn’t happened. And I’m not going to let, that won’t be the reason that I – it’d have to be you know somebody who’s got a mission heart as well and, em, yeah, so, yeah I’d like to do that. You know, it’d be really great to collaborate with somebody who’s got the same heart and kind of doing that together. That would be really cool. But if not I think I will carry on. Yeah, cos I think if you compromise, you just, you miss out a little bit. I mean, there’s compromise and that’s ok. But maybe I think I’d be just like I know deep down that, probably that compromise won’t be good for me and yeah… there’s some things you can compromise on – aren’t there? – and some things like actually would ruin things if you compromise on them. [big pause]

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

KAREN: Good question. I think – I don’t – yeah, I take my time to make them. But also I guess I go with what I feel is peaceful and what maybe aligns…. I do put out those fleeces, like ask God to show me clearly. And you know he’s really faithful and he usually does. Sometimes things like… other decisions are not always clearcut either. Like with relationships, like I’ve been in a few relationships with guys, like I’ve never seen anything like writing in the sky or ‘stop this relationship’, you know, or like ‘continue’. But I think I’ve gone, in those instances, relationships are really hard because you’re so involved, aren’t they? And so difficult to see clearly. But I think I’ve gone with like what is, where peace is. And like, is the decision-making, does it align with like what God has said in my life even before this? Like cos God’s quite, I think God’s consistent. I’m not saying he can’t cause you to change, we shouldn’t be resistant to change, but actually like he, yeah, the thing he wants you to do, it’s often in line with like the thing he’s put in your heart and like, yeah, I guess it’s a combination of that peace and like knowing deep down, I don’t know how to describe that, that it is the right thing or not. I just knew that I was meant to come here. Yeah. And, and I think then there’s… yeah… I do speak to people I trust and ask their opinion as well, yeah. Like Christians who I am close to and Christians who know me well and people who I know are following God and that. And that really helps, that’s an encouragement to me.

INTERVIEWER: Great. One last question. How and how much do you use social media?

KAREN: Ah. Em, yeah. Good question. I use Instagram a bit now, although I’m not like massively active in it. I use it to just like see what other people are up to. I’m a bit nosey. But I, I wouldn’t say… I think I post like once a month. And I don’t think I’ve posted on Instagram for a little while. But I use social media for connecting with people. And then you know, connecting with an individual and then privately messaging. So that’s what I use Messenger for, Facebook Messenger. Or I use it as a platform for people to have an update of what’s going on. So, I put some pictures up of what I’ve been up to here and I guess it’s an easy way that people can access and see what you’re doing. Yeah, that’s what I use it for, maybe once a month. But my plan was actually to use it more, but I, I’m not a massive like social media person. And I know it’s really great for things but also it can take up a lot of time and I guess I don’t always…. Cos I, one thing is like you know, once you get people commenting you’ve got to reply and all that. Sometimes it’s easier not to put anything. It’s just a bit of a lazy approach really. But em, I, yeah, I do definitely see how useful it is and there’s lots of good stuff about it as well. I was working in a [detail omitted] team in London, I was – we were four midwives – [detail omited]. We used social media quite regularly to promote, to promote it or like, lots of people knew about it, but hadn’t like realised stories and stuff. And it was really effective, I really saw how it helped. Obviously we would get permission off parents, we wouldn’t just … [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, you don’t just tell someone’s birth story

KAREN: Yeah. Whatsapp I use a lot, but I don’t know if that counts as social media.

INTERVIEWER: yeah, I’m never sure!

KAREN: but yeah, I’m on whatsapp pretty much, well definitely every day and for a good amount of time. It’s my main, whatsapp’s my main way that I keep in touch with people and you know, obviously like now it’s really easy to chat and you’re the other side of the world. Yeah, it’s really really good. And I’ve kept in touch with my family through whatsapp, friends, you know, you send pictures, videos, it’s really good. So that makes it feel actually not that I’m too far away.

INTERVIEWER: especially in Covid times when you can’t see people across town anyway

KAREN: yeah. I know. We’re lucky here because actually we’ve got all the freedom we want here, apart from it’s hard to leave [country A]. But within [country A] you can do whatever you like. You can meet in massive crowds, you can …. Whereas in the UK I think, I’d be so much more restrictive if I was back there. I know it’s been really hard. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Do you communicate with local people as well on whatsapp or whatever?

KAREN: yes, there’re actually, yeah, there’s quite a few healthcare professionals have smartphones so we, there’s a few groups in the clinic, so there’s like a group for the clinic but then there’s a group for people like choosing the family night thing, it’s not every Tuesday but….. And then there’s another group for, like, em, yeah varying different activities. But not everybody has a smartphone, but people that do, they’re on, they’re quite easy to contact via Whatsapp. We use it a lot at work. Yeah it’s amazing how technology is like really rapidly developing in Africa. They do bank transactions, like, people do it without cards. You have like special things through the different providers where you can send money to people and they go and pick it up from this like little wooden shack with a code they’ve received through their phone. You have to like be registered to receive money that way. But it’s really amazing, you know, it’s like they skipped that whole era of ATMs and it’s like, it’s really amazing. Yeah.

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

KAREN: that’s alright I hope I answered everything ok.