

... with Sonia Livingstone

## 'have and appreciate one's luxuries'

### One place

I'm tempted to name the Cornish village where I go most years to clear my head, reset my balance and remember what I value – I first went with my family when I was nine and now, decades on, I take my own family there and everyone loves it. But in truth, the one place is my study at home. It's small, it's arranged exactly how I like it, it looks out onto my garden, and it's mine. It's where I think, write and dream. Virginia Woolf's recognition of the importance of a room of one's own is so true.

### One children's book

This one is easy – *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. My dad read me from this (and many other books) when I was little, referring also to *The Annotated Alice* (Martin Gardner). So I often have its wonderful aphorisms – and their deeper philosophical

meanings – in my mind.

I suggest there's an Alice quote for every occasion and these tend to find their way into my published work. Favourites – 'You are old, Father William' (an appreciation of the madness of age), 'When I use a word ... it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less' (Humpty Dumpty – often relevant!), 'Curiouser and curiouser!' (ditto), 'Off with their heads!' (Queen of Hearts – from my days as Head of Department) and "'Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?' ... and sometimes, 'Do bats eat cats?' for, you see, as she couldn't answer either question, it didn't much matter which way she put it' (a sentiment with which I am often in tune!).

### One revelation

Ah well, this is a bit embarrassing. I was brought up as a middle-class child of academic parents. I read *Middlemarch* before I watched television. I could talk to a poet fleeing the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia but not to my neighbours on my own street. But until my life-partner challenged me to watch a soap opera 'because that's what ordinary people do and value', I had no real idea how people lived. It was a

moment of revelation. My PhD then centred on research with people about why they enjoyed soaps, exploring how they used them as an opportunity for interpretation, moral reflection and shared deliberation. And I have tried to attend to and prioritise the experiences of voices of 'ordinary people' ever since.

### One regret

Of course I make mistakes, and there's many things I could have done differently, doubtless better. But I don't see the point of dwelling on what they might have been. I do periodically imagine myself retired (oddly, sitting on an American front porch watching the world go by) and wondering – did I make good decisions, did I do the right thing? I hope I will think I did.

### One visit

When I finished my PhD I won a scholarship to study with anyone anywhere, as long as it wasn't in the UK or US. As a non-linguist, that was a challenge but it turned out brilliantly. I went to visit Elihu Katz in Jerusalem – a pioneer in taking social psychology into the interdisciplinary domain of media and communications, a scholar committed to public values in research, media and society, a man who loves the collaborative process of imagination, deliberation and debate. It was a wonderful few months – I wrote my first book, made research contacts that lasted through my career, and gained the support, energy and inspiration to drive me forward in those difficult years of early career, juggling family and work, finding an intellectual direction.

### One radio show

I am a big fan of the BBC's

World Service, which often forms the backdrop to getting up and going to sleep. It has many merits, but one programme really catches my imagination every time I hear it – *World Have Your Say*. It's partly because it's expressed as an injunction (come on world, tell us what you think!), partly the very idea that anyone anywhere might actually call in and express an opinion (yes, I know the programme is produced, but still), and partly because it simply yet imaginatively captures the idea of what I have written about as the increasing 'mediation of everything' – the world is all mediated and the media can capture the deliberative potential of the world. Maybe.



My PhD research was about why people enjoyed soaps

### One album / one luxury

I've combined these two, since they take us into the territory of *Desert Island Discs*. It's many people's fantasy, and in odd moments I do try to get my music into a playlist of eight. But I'd be so unpopular – Mozart, Brahms and Verdi Requiems, Beethoven late quartets, Chopin nocturnes, Schubert songs, Russian folk songs and the Beatles (any). This tells my story, but would anyone listen? The luxury is ever changing (my cat? my laptop? *Pride and Prejudice*?) so perhaps the point is always to have and appreciate one's luxuries, whatever they are at the moment.



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