

Announcer: [00:00:03] This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen. [00:00:06][2.7]

Ian Grosz: [00:00:19] Hello and welcome back to Season two of *From the Old Brewery*, a podcast brought to you from the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture here at the University of Aberdeen...and for those of you who've listened before, you'll know that we aim to highlight the work of students and staff at the school.

My name is Ian Grosz, a Ph.D. research student in Creative Writing, and if you're sick and tired of my voice, fear not! Because I'm joined today by new co-host Shailini Vinod.

Shailini is an AHRC funded research student working towards an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in creative writing, but with a 50% element in sociology...just to make life that bit more interesting. Shailini completed her MLitt in creative writing at the University of Aberdeen and has worked as a civil servant, an assistant producer and editor in television post-production as well as a freelance writer.

Hi, Shailini, how you doing? [00:01:09][49.7]

Shailini Vinod: [00:01:09] Hi, Ian. I'm doing fine. How are you? [00:01:12][2.5]

Ian: [00:01:12] I'm good. Yeah. Welcome to the salubrious surrounds of the recording studio!

And we're both going to be talking today with Jane Hughes. Jane is also a creative writing student - we do get around – and she's joining us remotely from Barcelona, which is good...all right for some! She's been a magazine editor, a celebrant, and currently works as a psychotherapist while also studying for a Ph.D. in creative writing.

As a part time student, Jane is now in her fourth year of a six-year programme, responding to the topic of Exploring Creative Uses of Memoir in the 21st Century. Her work focuses on bereavement, attachment to place and life-writing around loss. Her essay 'Three Wheels on My Wagon' appears in *Essays in Life Writing*, published by Routledge in 2022, and that can be accessed by the university's primo library system for students here at the university. Her essay 'Nothing to See Here' was recently published also: on the online journal. *Elsewhere, a journal of place*. So, if all that wasn't enough, Jane is also joining the *From the Old Brewery* team as a new co-host as well, in future episodes, and next week we'll find her on the other side of the mic. So. Hi, Jane. How's Barcelona? [00:02:28][76.1]

Jane Hughes: [00:02:30] Hi. It's great. I hate to rub your noses in it, but I am delighted to be here. [00:02:36][5.7]

Ian: [00:02:37] I'll bet you are? Yeah. And we're joining from Aberdeen. So you live in Manchester, I believe, normally?

Jane: Yes, that's right. Yeah.

Ian: Yeah, so, we just wondered...there's two very good universities in Manchester – MMU and Manchester University – that do creative writing. So, we'd like to know how you came to study through the University of Aberdeen. [00:02:55][18.2]

Jane: [00:02:56] Yeah, it's not an obvious pathway for me, is it? I suppose I was looking for a way to combine my interest in creative writing with my work as a therapist, and I was scrolling around on a website called **findaphd.com**, and I saw this contemporary memoir project advertised on there, and I could see straight away that there's a link between therapy and life writing.

So, it was an advertised project, but it really got my attention because it was a combination of my two big interests that I hadn't seen before, and the fact that it was based in Aberdeen didn't faze me because I was always committed to carrying on working as a therapist in Manchester city centre, so, there was never any question of me going somewhere else to study full time. It was always going to have to be a part time distance thing and... because I don't drive, Manchester and Aberdeen both have airports. So, you know, although I don't do it very often, it's actually quite quick and easy for me to come up. And then of course, since the pandemic, we've all got used to doing everything online anyway...[00:04:09][73.1]

Ian: [00:04:10] So when did you start? Sorry. [00:04:11][1.3]

Jane: [00:04:13] I started in 20... Oh God, 2018. [00:04:18][4.5]

Ian: [00:04:18] Okay, so couple of years before...everything went...completely online. [00:04:22][3.6]

Jane: [00:04:23] That's right. Yeah. And then interestingly, when it did all go online, I was able to step up and do some tutoring and help out, which I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise because I couldn't sort of beetle up to Aberdeen twice a week. But the fact that it's all done online... actually it was a great experience for me to be able to do that. [00:04:45][22.3]

Shailini: [00:04:46] It was lovely to hear how it...how your PhD journey started, Jane, and we know that you are currently a therapist and we are going to be talking about how that might inform your work in a moment, but your time as a funeral celebrant inspired your early writings for the Ph.D., and we wondered if you'd like to share an extract of that writing for our listeners now? [00:05:07][21.2]

Jane: [00:05:08] Yeah. Thanks. I would. I hope this will give you a bit of a flavour. It begins shortly after I've trained as a civil funeral celebrant.

After the course, I joined a confederation of civil celebrants and got a nice badge and permission to use a logo. I set up a website featuring some mournful poetry and a photo of me looking respectful in a floral scarf. I bought a lot of books of funerary poetry, most of which was awful. I created a short booklet of poems that I didn't think were too dreadful to be read out in public to give to my clients. Funeral poets think they can get away with murder! 'Now I'm sitting on my cloud, I hope that you know that I feel proud'? Doggerel!

I got Gwil to design me some pale blue letterhead and some business cards featuring fluffy grey dandelion heads shedding their flying seeds and sent out a few letters and nothing happened, except that I was contacted a few times by people trying to sell me advertising space. Time passed and I started getting cold feet about the prospect of actually doing the job. I was feeling glad enough to pretend that I might have been up to it whilst consigning it all to the dustbin, when I got a call from a funeral director looking for somebody to conduct a non-religious ceremony at a big local crematorium.

Gwil drove me to the home of the bereaved, and he spent hours sitting in the car outside, feeling invisible and gradually getting angry with me while I drank tea and gathered information about the dead man from his brothers and sisters. He was a kind man, a bit of a loner, didn't really have a steady job, but was always ready to run errands for people in his community. Picking up shopping, helping people out. Towards the end, he had been suffering with pain, which made it hard for him to walk. But he didn't want to go to the doctors or undergo treatment. So he died, in his early forties, of cancer. I went home, felt upset about inconveniencing Gwil, felt upset about the strong but dead man and the alive sad people, wrote the eulogy and liaised with the undertaker and the crematorium to get the timings and the quirky choice of music planned.

Gwil reads this and disagrees. He says he enjoyed sitting in the car drawing. He recalls drawing angels with trumpets and he thinks that it must have been close to Christmas or the beginning of the New Year. He can show me drawings if I don't believe him. Just goes to show that my memory isn't necessarily accurate. Or maybe mine is clearer than his. Anyway, he's not peeved anymore.

On the day of the funeral, the turnout was far greater than expected. The medium-sized chapel that had been booked was nowhere near big enough to hold all the mourners. I wore a plain black dress and stood on the steps outside to wait for the hearse to arrive. But I hadn't expected that once the coffin was shouldered, it was down to me to lead the procession inside. It didn't really feel like my place to do it. On these occasions, people can feel quite lost and they tend to look for somebody to tell them where to go, where to sit, when to stand, whether to sing, whether to come forward to touch the coffin, when it is time to leave. I hadn't really realised that marshalling disoriented people was a big part of my job.

We entered the crematorium to the sound of Bohemian Rhapsody, which mercifully faded out before the lyrics about not wanting to die and Beelzebub having a devil set aside. The family wanted no singing. But we played 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother', halfway through, which goes on for 4 minutes and 20 seconds and seemed to last hours. I stood in front of the seated multitude without anything at all to do, trying not to fidget. Not being invited to sing along, they didn't have anything to do either. The dead man's brother cried noisily. I delivered the agreed eulogy and a secular poem or two, then invited people to approach the coffin to say their goodbyes to the cheery strains of 'I Was Kaiser Bill's Batman' by Whistling Jack Smith. You'll probably recognise it if you Google it. If you're as old as I am. No singing. No prayers. No watching the coffin disappear behind curtains or doors. We just left it sitting there and presumably it got burned when nobody who really cared was watching. The next day I went back to the office at the crem to pick up a small

brown pay packet containing £100, which was marked for the attention of the 'humanist vicar'.

It was a very strange experience to be in the pulpit, presiding over a group of mourners which spilled out of the pews and filled the space at the back of the chapel and even the corridor outside, where they peered anxiously through glass panels at me. They were people I didn't know and would never see again. For their sake, I pretended to be in charge and refused to be noticeably nervous. Everybody seemed to be satisfied, except perhaps Gwil, who pointed out that it had taken me hours and hours to prepare for and manage the event, not to mention making the fair point that the hours he had spent in the car waiting for me outside while I met the family were not recompensed. £100 didn't really cover it. I argued that it felt altogether wrong to ask for more. After all, these were people in need. I couldn't make money out of them, could I? I felt a bit unsupported and I felt a bit of a fraud pretending to be the vicar, when I was just a random woman in a black dress with a badge. Who on earth did I think I was, masquerading like that, intruding on a family's intimate grief?
[00:10:56][348.1]

Ian: [00:10:58] Thank you, Jane. What I loved there...and I was trying hard not to sort of snicker and laugh out loud a few times while you reading that...
[00:11:03][5.6]

Jane: [00:11:04] You're welcome [laughing]. [00:11:04][0.1]

Ian: [00:11:04] ...because the use of that slightly irreverent, irreverent sort of humour there, I think is really effective. It adds to the...to the poignancy, and there's a line that...I really love that line about 'the alive sad people' that really...you know...that encapsulates it I think. You know...funerals *are* about those who are left behind. But, yeah, it's a lovely reading. Thank you.

But just to go back to your, ehm...to how you draw directly from your experience as a writer, I wondered if you could tell us something about your process, the process of writing. Do you write immediately through...through the experience, as a way of kind of processing that experience? Or do you allow time to sort of process it first internally before beginning to write? And where does the editing process come in for you? Where does that end...where does it begin and end? [00:11:57][52.4]

Jane: [00:11:58] I think I've always used writing in quite an immediate way. I find it useful to get my thoughts and feelings down on paper. So, for example, when my mum died, I just started writing about that straight away and I just wrote everything down. I was in the middle of a six week stay in Barcelona when I got the news and my brother and I decided that I should stay there rather than rushing back. So I didn't have much to do other than sit with my thoughts. And so, yeah, I wrote it all down as a record, but also as a way of kind of getting through it. And what I've ended up with is a really raw piece of work and I like that. I think it's unusual.

I mean, that's not to say that as a memoirist and a life writer, I don't write about things that aren't so immediate because sometimes things from the past resurface and demand a rethink, and sometimes something new reminds you of things from

the past, and you can string life experiences together in a different way. You know, I guess you never really know where writing about yourself is going to take you.

But in terms of the editing, I think my process is that I tend to start each writing session by reading over what I wrote in the last session and doing some polishing. And I guess that helps me to get into the flow for the next stuff to come out.

[00:13:22][84.1]

Ian: [00:13:23] You mentioned that writing about your mother's death, it's quite raw, you say; but that piece you read out is very, very polished. It sounds very, very polished. It's very crafted, if you don't mind me saying. It's very expertly rendered, and...but you said you liked that rawness. I wondered if... [00:13:41][17.6]

Jane: [00:13:42] It's a very... what I've ended up with, because of the circumstances, is a very kind of broken-backed kind of piece, and I think it really reflects my genuine life experience that I started writing about my past career as a celebrant, and then I kind of started writing some quite black bits of fiction to intersperse with it, mostly about terrible funerals.

And then suddenly the universe did something very, very surprising to me, and my mother just dropped dead. And, you know, suddenly I was having to organise a funeral, and it wasn't quite as funny as it had been. And I was able to record that in a memoir, which I think is unusual. [00:14:24][42.0]

Ian: [00:14:25] It is. But, sorry to be going on, but just going back to the editing thing – I've got it obviously in my head [laughing] and I need to get it out – So, are you going to keep it in a sort of...raw sort of state then: as a sort of piece of experimental kind of writing? Or are you going to go over that and kind of polish it in a similar way that you've crafted the piece that you read out? [00:14:45][19.6]

Jane: [00:14:46] I think I probably need to make sure that I'm happy with the overall result. You know, I probably need to kind of file off any edges that are really rough, but as far as possible, I think I'd like to keep it as a genuine kind of representation of what was just falling out of me at the time. [00:15:10][24.3]

Ian: [00:15:11] Yeah, the state...the emotional state that... [00:15:13][1.6]

Jane: [00:15:14] Mmm. [00:15:14][0.0]

Ian: [00:15:14] Yeah. [00:15:14][0.0]

Jane: [00:15:16] Yeah. And it's funny because, you know, grief isn't just about sitting there crying. I mean you can get very bitter; you can get angry; you can start to take the mickey out of yourself. All sorts of stuff goes on. [00:15:26][10.6]

Shailini: [00:15:27] It was really interesting hearing your piece, which is so poignant and you had your elements of humour. So, and it's also...just listening about your process of writing about other people's loss and your own loss, I just wondered: what have your experiences been of using life-writing and memoir as a therapeutic endeavour: of psychotherapy both personally and professionally? [00:15:54][26.3]

Jane: [00:15:54] I like bringing it into my work with clients, and I encourage people in my psychotherapy sessions to write - not actually during the session, but maybe they want to send me stuff, but I'm not directive about it. And sometimes people do send me longer pieces of writing just to get me up to speed with what's going on for them. But in the past, I've used writing techniques which are not structured prose, but things like family trees and mind maps and timelines where people's sense of their past has become kind of fragmented. And that's to do with helping them to create a coherent narrative that's meaningful for them.

I guess I also try to encourage people to use metaphorical language to describe their feelings. You know, sometimes people struggle to put things into words and I can say, well, what's it like? Which often yields some really interesting stuff, but ehm...lately, I've been getting interested in internal dialogues, you know, the way that we talk to ourselves, different parts of us, different characters and...I did a couple of workshops last year with third year medical students where we wrote scripts for four voices but two people. So, each person had an external voice, and an internal voice, and that was quite good fun. [00:17:34][99.9]

Shailini: [00:17:35] Do you...do you find at all that, you know, when you've written about your own experiences of loss and then perhaps gone and revisited it and...while your emotions evolve, have you seen a change for yourself therapeutically at all? [00:17:50][14.5]

Jane: [00:17:51] Yes, it's a strange process for me, because if I'm writing when it's all very 'live', then things evolve whilst I'm writing. But generally, I think I could say that when I go back to reread stuff, then I re-experience the feelings that I had at the time, but I don't feel the need to adjust it. [00:18:21][29.8]

Ian: [00:18:21] Is that hard? Is that difficult to... [00:18:22][0.8]

Jane: [00:18:23] Yeah, sometimes. [00:18:24][0.7]

Ian: [00:18:24] ...to go over, to go back: over and over in some cases...? [00:18:26][1.5]

Jane: [00:18:27] Yeah, sometimes, sometimes yeah. I've really made myself...I've really upset myself rereading some of this stuff, you know, and I guess possibly that's one of the reasons why I'm not that keen on editing it [laughing] [00:18:40][13.5]

Ian: [00:18:42] But I guess over time the more you've absorbed the writing around that experience, I guess, does a distance come? Does that help? Is that where the therapy comes in: allows you to distance yourself from the rawness of it and start to look at it more objectively? [00:18:58][15.7]

Jane: [00:19:00] Yeah, I think so. I think that's something that we do when we're working with trauma is to kind of - with care - get people to imagine stuff playing out in front of them and sort of take a step back, and see it as if it's playing out on a screen where, you know, you're not really in the thick of it. And by that way, I'm not an expert in the dynamics of the brain, but I know there's something that goes on

where you can move a very upsetting, traumatic experience, which is tending to kind of trigger big emotional responses, you can convert that into a memory. So it's not so... it stops being so real, it becomes a memory, and then it's stored in a different place in the brain, which is interesting. [00:19:53][52.7]

Ian: [00:19:53] Right...it just sounds a difficult process, especially around the subject material that you've got: being a memoirist, you know, having to examine your own life in this detail; your own emotions; your own feelings; your own responses. It just sounds difficult. [00:20:11][17.1]

Jane: [00:20:12] I think I just do it because...well, actually I don't know why I do it, but it's my job, you know, I do that with other people, I guess I do it with myself. Who is it that says something about the 'unexamined life', you know? I think I'm inclined to examine myself quite a lot. [00:20:32][19.8]

Ian: [00:20:32] It's certainly healthy, I would imagine. [00:20:33][0.8]

Jane: [00:20:34] Well, I just want to understand... I want to try as far as I can to understand my experience. [00:20:38][3.8]

Ian: [00:20:39] Yeah...

Going back to the PhD itself. We know you're a part time student and that's spread over six years, and wondered if, um... it gives you enough time to...to really, um, become absorbed by a topic, but we wondered also if that, um, allows space for change to come in and that, you know, what you started doing eventually looks completely different potentially: if there'd been any changes? Would you be able to talk about some of that? [00:21:07][28.3]

Jane: [00:21:08] Massively! A lot can happen to you in six years - as we've all discovered lately. Very unexpected things can come your way. And I'm going to quote John Lennon: 'life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans.'

I mean, the life writing project was always a flexible thing and the content was always liable to be affected by whatever life events came my way while I was working on it. I expected, I guess, the content to evolve and I didn't know how that would... you know...I couldn't see the future, so I didn't know what was coming. But what I didn't expect was the way that the style of it, of my piece, has evolved. I guess what I'm learning is that memoir as a genre at the moment is very kind of amenable towards experimentation and, what I seem now to be putting together is a kind of collage of all sorts of material, which I think is a way to demonstrate that life experience doesn't just happen in one long, thin line. It has thickness to it. You know, you need to be able to show depth as well as telling the story. And I think collaging stuff together, you know, bits of dialogue, bits of WhatsApp, you know, bits of poetry, whatever's there to come out, it's all welcome. [00:22:38][90.6]

Ian: [00:22:39] It's how we experience life, isn't it? We don't experience it in a neatly encapsulated story, you know... [00:22:44][4.3]

Jane: [00:22:44] Completely! And that's exactly what the life writer's dilemma is. You can't write everything that's going on - you'd need a lot of hands and a lot of pencils.

Ian: It's a continual editing process, then, in that way.. [00:23:02][17.2]

Jane: [00:23:03] Inevitably we're kind of curating. We're curating the experience, I guess. [00:23:10][7.7]

Shailini: [00:23:11] Yeah.

Around life writing and themes like place, movement and loss that you've been speaking about and nostalgia. These are themes that resonate for most people and feature in many different forms of life writing. So could you tell us about the piece you wrote for *Elsewhere, A Journal of Place* and how place features for you as a writer of memoir? Is it something that has emerged for you or did you set out to explore these themes from the outset? [00:23:40][28.9]

Jane: [00:23:41] No, I never set out to do that. The whole thing about attachment to place just really took me by surprise. It wasn't something that I'd ever planned to write about. I was born in the Vale of the White Horse in Berkshire. I don't know if you have ever seen that ancient white horse figure that's carved into the chalk Downs. But it was a kind of benign presence in my world, all the time I was growing up.

As a bit of a lockdown project, I did some work on the family tree and discovered that I don't think I'm ever going to be good enough, interesting enough, to get on 'Who do you think you are?', because evidently I come from a very long line of agricultural workers. Not that I'm dissing agricultural labourers, but in the census, there were so many of them, they just wrote 'Ag Lab' on it. [00:24:38][57.2]

Ian: [00:24:41] Most...most people in Britain do, don't they, you know. [00:24:43][2.0]

Jane: [00:24:44] Yeah, and there may be some more stuff to write about that. I might go back to it, but the couple of essays that I wrote were to do with losing my attachment to that area, and including an exploration about how Didcot Power Station was a big part of my world and has now been demolished.

But I think, at the moment, I have effectively used writing to deal with my feelings with that and I don't think I need to explore it more at the moment. I guess it's a good example of what we were saying about things emerging. It's emerged, and I think it was very big and demanding of my attention for a while, but I think it's now kind of fading away. I think the stuff about, sort of internal dialogue and some stuff about transgenerational trauma is starting to emerge, which is now snagging my attention more. [00:25:44][60.9]

Shailini: [00:25:46] Is this sort of exploration of memory within family, or...? [00:25:52][5.8]

Jane: [00:25:52] Mmm, yeah, yeah: kind of how things get passed down. The most recent thing that I've written was a script, which is a discussion between me, me-as-

therapist, my mother, my grandmother and my great grandmother. And you know, the way that I write takes poignant, difficult, sentimental, nostalgic kind of stuff and kind of covers it in a black humour, so I presented that recently at a conference on experimental life writing called Life's Not Personal, and it was quite demanding for me to pretend to be five different people! But I've turned my attention towards that now, and I'm trying to work it up into a journal article. So watch this space on that! [00:26:53][60.7]

Shailini: [00:26:53]: Excellent.

Ian: [00:26:54] Cool. So can you tell us something about the different writers that you've drawn from while you've been working on the PhD? Does anybody in particular inform your work? [00:27:03][9.0]

Jane: [00:27:04] Yes and no. I mean, I have read a lot of contemporary memoir, and I've focussed it down on bereavement, which has not been a bundle of laughs, to be honest, and not something that I ever really set out to do. But it does help to sort of narrow things down a bit, to have that kind of tight focus. Three books come to mind that I would signpost people to if you're interested. One is Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*... [00:27:40][36.7]

Ian: [00:27:41] Great title. [00:27:41][0.2]

Jane: [00:27:41] Yeah. Do you know the story about what it is that she's saying? [00:27:46][5.1]

Ian: [00:27:47] NO, I don't, no: not all. [00:27:48][1.9]

Jane: [00:27:51] Joan Didion is just such a very cool customer. You know, she said at the hospital they used to call her the cool customer. Her husband died very suddenly. And she's got this persona. She was very kind of hip and writing about popular culture in the sixties. Cool doesn't even say it enough. She was massively cool.

And so she kind of appeared to take this sudden devastating loss of her husband in her stride, and it looked to the outside that her persona was continuing: that she was very cool. But the power of the book is the way that she suddenly exposes what's going on underneath, and it's really raw, you know. And she says that she's realised that she's been doing magical thinking because she's not given her husband's shoes away - because she still thinks he might need them, you know? And god - coming from somebody who is always kind of so 'together' - to have her explain what bereavement did to her usual kind of cool, calm way of thinking - it's really powerful stuff. [00:29:18][87.4]

Ian: [00:29:19] It's helpful as well because we're all a bit like that, aren't we? We all present a certain image on the surface, but underneath there's all sorts going on: with everybody, I think. [00:29:26][7.0]

Jane: [00:29:27] Absolutely. The other two that I want to mention really kind of speak to what you're saying about people being sort of layered.

I want to mention Dave Eggers' book, which is called *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*. Which is about his experience of both his parents dying very suddenly when he was in his early twenties. It's a really experimental, ground-breaking piece of work, it's massive. I mean, there is no stone left unturned in the way that he experiments with using the written word to explore his experience. [00:30:07][40.1]

Ian: [00:30:08] What is it that's ground-breaking about it, would you say? [00:30:10][2.4]

Jane: [00:30:11] I think it's very meta because it sort of turns in on itself, and he writes about the fact that he's writing. Do you know what I mean? I think it's really brave, as well, to offer your experience like that, as something for other people to share. [00:30:36][24.4]

Ian: [00:30:36] Yeah. [00:30:36][0.0]

Jane: [00:30:37] And then Max Porter's more recent book, *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* - have you seen that one? [00:30:44][6.7]

Ian: [00:30:44] I've heard. I've...I've read about it. I heard about it, but I've not read it, no. [00:30:48][3.7]

Jane: [00:30:49] It doesn't immediately strike you as a memoir at all, and could just be considered to be a work of fiction apart from, you know, if you delve you do find that it is autobiographical, really. And he creates a character, that's a kind of horrific, massive crow thing that that comes to live in his house while he and his two little boys are getting over - well, coming to terms with - losing his wife and their mother. [00:31:21][32.0]

Ian: [00:31:21] And so he names it and conjures it into, like, a totemic thing, really? [00:31:27][5.2]

Jane: [00:31:27] He does, yeah. And it's really interesting because it's obviously kind of part of him and yet it's not, and he's horrified by it. And it's horrible, you know, it's rude and it's violent. [00:31:38][10.6]

Ian: [00:31:39] Like an unwelcome visitor. Yeah. [00:31:40][1.4]

Shailini: [00:31:42] It's all such interesting stuff! Coming back to your PhD itself, Jane. Why a Ph.D.? Why not just write? And I just wondered, what do you feel your work brings to the topic: the Creative Uses of Memoir in the 21st Century? Could you tell us a little bit about that? [00:31:59][17.1]

Jane: [00:32:00] Yeah, it's a good question, isn't it? Why not just write?

I mean, I guess I've always aspired to doing a PhD because I really... from my personal point of view, my firm belief is that you only get one life. And I want to keep challenging myself to achieve as much as I can. I have spent my whole life wanting to write creatively, and I've allowed myself to be side-tracked in all sorts of ways,

including spending many, many years being a magazine editor and helping other people to write and, oddly enough, writing cookery books. I've done that. But life writing - creative writing and especially life writing - always seems to be a bit self-indulgent. I've always struggled with allowing myself to do it. So it's kind of helped me to have the rigour and the structure of the PhD. And also, in my mind, the whole project dovetails with my work as a therapist. So it doesn't feel quite so selfish to be writing about myself. [00:33:07][67.1]

Ian: [00:33:09] It's an antidote to spending time listening to other people. [00:33:13][3.7]

Jane: [00:33:14] Yeah, I get to do it too, now! [00:33:16][1.6]

Ian: [00:33:18] It's also about permission too, I think, isn't it? [00:33:19][1.3]

Jane: [00:33:21] Absolutely. [00:33:21][0.0]

Ian: [00:33:22] To write, you really need to commit to it, don't you? And it's really difficult to give yourself permission, especially like Shailini who has children in a busy family, and we've all got different commitments. [00:33:31][9.8]

Jane: [00:33:35] That's right, you have to try and insist that you need time alone to sit and gaze at your own navel... it's quite a difficult sell, really. [00:33:41][5.6]

Ian: [00:33:43] [laughing] Yeah. And so, what's next for you then? Do you know what will come after that. You've still got a couple of years left, of course. So, it's still maybe seems... [00:33:53][9.8]

Jane: [00:33:53] Yeah. Hopefully more than that! [laughing][00:33:54][0.8]

Ian: [00:33:55] Okay. Oh, okay. [00:33:56][1.2]

Jane: [00:33:58] I'm thinking about my age... [00:34:03][4.9]

Ian: [00:34:03] Oh sorry, yeah...[laughing]. That's your time as a celebrant colouring things, I think. [00:34:08][5.0]

Jane: [00:34:08] Yeah, exactly. Yeah. How many years have I got left? I mean, that is pertinent because I'm 57 so I'm one of the older students on the block and I will probably be 60 by the time I achieve being Dr Jane. And I would really love to write lots of books, but I don't know if anybody would really be interested. And I think trying to get a job in academia is probably out of reach for me because of my age, I think.

I still haven't learnt how to see the future. So, I guess I'll just probably keep on writing because it's what I do, and keep working as a therapist for as long as I can. [00:34:55][47.0]

Ian: [00:34:57] There are definitely worse things to do, Jane, I would say. [00:35:00][2.7]

Jane: [00:35:02] I feel like I'm useful, you know. [00:35:03][0.9]

Ian: [00:35:04] Giving back and time to do some navel gazing. Well, thanks. Thanks so much for coming on and talking to us. It's quite a thought...quite a thoughtful episode that. Shailini, what do you think? [00:35:15][11.2]

Shailini: [00:35:15] Yeah, I...in fact, I think every aspect of your writing work and your...even your work as a psychotherapist, it seems so interesting. And I've read your essays and I really loved it and loved speaking to you. And I look forward to being able to read more of your work. Jane, it's been really interesting speaking to you. [00:35:37][21.4]

Ian: [00:35:37] Yeah. So, Jane Hughes...watch out for more writing from Jane.

I think what's good about your writing is that it's very difficult subject matter, and, you know, you could easily become either over-sentimental about it or mawkish, but you don't at all. And your use of humour is just fantastic. It's just the right...it's just the right level of humour, I think. I think it's a great, great. [00:35:58][20.8]

Jane: [00:35:59] Thank you very much. I'll take that compliment and squirrel it away. [00:36:02][3.0]

Ian: [00:36:04] Okay. [00:36:04][0.0]

Jane: [00:36:05] Thanks very much for having me.

Announcer: This podcast is brought to you by the University of Aberdeen. [00:36:05][0.0]

[2058.2]