

# Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE



Issue Twenty-five  
Autumn 2018

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[editor@heredit.com](mailto:editor@heredit.com) [www.heredit.com](http://www.heredit.com)  
@her\_edit

editor: Jayne Phenton  
Ann Clark  
Sarah Williams

our contributors

Emma Fielder  
William Flynn  
Allison Lindsay  
Laura Olley  
Sister Philippa Roth

thank you  
Karen McDonald  
Brix Smith Start

Front cover picture  
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Her Edit



## Welcome to Her Edit

**F**ive years. It can feel like a moment or a lifetime. This year marks five years since we first started Her Edit and what a delight it's been. We have met and talked to some amazing people and it's been an honour to have been able to share their stories in our past 24 issues. I have constantly been amazed by the generosity of people who have contributed and supported us and they have my heartfelt thanks.

I am especially thrilled that we have Brix Smith Start on our cover. I first saw her perform over 30 years ago when she was with The Fall, one of my favourite bands. Her autobiography illustrates how from some of our darkest moments, we can move forward and find joy and has been especially inspiring to me this year.

In keeping with our five year 'theme', each of the Her Edit team, Ann, Sarah and I reflect on our last half decade, and I'm delighted one of our original founders, Allison Lindsay, has contributed.

Creating and producing this magazine have been huge fun, sometimes a little stressful and has frequently given all pause for thought and reason to debate. Our unsung hero is Karen, who manages our website, delivers fantastic tech support and always injects our meet-ups with enthusiasm and laughter.

If I take anything from the last five years, it is the enduring joy of friendship and love and following your passion. Hugely looking forward to the next five.

Her Edit

# Her Issue twenty-five



2 The Editor

3 Contents

5 Brix Smith Start

13 Laura Olley and  
Yarns of Anarchy

21 Emma Fielder

25 Maureen Younger

29 Allison Lindsay

33 Sister Philippa Roth

35 William Flynn

37 Ann Clark

39 Sarah Williams

41 Jayne Phenton



IMAGES

Clockwise from left: Brix and the Extricated, Laura Olley, Emma Fielder, Maureen Younger, Allison Lindsay, William Flynn.



HER EDIT 5

HER EDIT 6

Musician, song-writer and fashion maven Brix Smith Start joined Manchester band, The Fall, led by her then husband, Mark E Smith, in 1983. She also launched her band the Adult Net, founded the fashion boutique Start, and established a successful television career as co-presenter of Channel 4's Gok's Fashion Fix.

She has now returned to music with a new band, Brix and the Extricated, which includes three former Fall members. Her best-selling autobiography, *The Rise, The Fall and The Rise*, was published by Faber and Faber in 2016.

Interview by Jayne Phenton

## Kicking against the Brix BRIX SMITH START

**Post-punk band The Fall** spanned four decades from its formation by front man Mark E Smith in 1976 until his death earlier this year. I first saw them at the Astoria in 1986. On guitar was the achingly cool Brix Smith, her west coast American accent a counterpoint to her husband Mark's Mancunian gravel-pit growl.

Brix brought a fresh musicality to the band and albums like *Bend Sinister*, *Frenz Experiment* and *I Am Kurious, Oranj*, in the 1980s marked the band's most commercially successful period - some say critically their best.

Reading her 2016 autobiography, *The Rise, the Fall and the Rise*, it's clear this was a gloriously creative period of her life, which began with a love affair - 'I had met my soul-mate.'

Brix was forging a music career with her band, *Banda Dratsing*, when she serendipitously met Smith at a gig in Chicago. She played him a tape of her music, he said she was a genius.

Within weeks she had moved from sun-soaked Los Angeles to Prestwich to be with Smith as both guitar player in *The Fall* and his wife. She catapulted into a mid-80s Manchester struggling with post-industrial decline where shops closed at lunchtime on Wednesdays.

It's hard not to admire the spirit of a young woman from a rather gilded upbringing, adjusting to life where the milk sits on the window ledge, for want of a fridge, and there is no washing machine. Not least because the sheets occupied by Smith's previous girlfriend, just a few weeks before were still on the bed. I suggested to her that she must be very resilient.

'I used to not show my vulnerability, but I've since learned your vulnerability is your strength. I was just 20, barely been playing music for long; I was super vulnerable, super lonely, zero girlfriends, zero family and it was backward compared to where I'd come from.'



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'But at the same time, I was with somebody I loved. I was following my dream of being a musician and already I was in a band and making an album. You could take your mind either way.'

Many of the songs Brix and Mark E Smith created together, such as Hotel Bloedel, are considered classics in The Fall canon. She also had her own project, the band The Adult Net, but despite success she struggled with anxiety. Mark's intractable and unpredictable behaviour, coupled with his prodigious drug habit, led to the relationship crumbling.

The account in her book of him leaving her is heartbreaking, but Brix is ruthlessly self-aware of the instincts which led her into her relationship with Mark E Smith and, later, violinist Nigel Kennedy.

'They were both exactly like my father. That's the whole point; charismatic geniuses that had classic narcissistic personality disorder and just completely dynamic and mad. I allowed myself to be controlled and be the muse and thought their creativity and art was more important than mine. I never realised I was powerful and super creative in my own right. I just didn't have any value on myself or my artistic achievements. I just thought they were better than me.'

She returned to The Fall briefly in the mid-90s - Mark E Smith left a message on her answer phone saying, 'We need you', but the seditious orbit of the increasingly erratic Smith led to her quitting the band for good.

A chance encounter at Harvey Nichols in 2000 marked the beginning of her relationship with fashion businessman Philip Start. She says he is completely different.

'It's like here's McDonalds and over here is the healthy, organic delicious option, so I made the healthy choice to go with somebody who was not an emotional rollercoaster, not an egomaniac; someone who had a strong sense of himself whereby he wouldn't be emasculated by me.'

Together they founded the east end boutique Start and Brix's new career in fashion led to her co-presenting Channel 4's Gok's Fashion Fix. Gok Wan would scurry around the high street snatching at clothes rails and then pimp up chain store garments to elevate them into high-fashion looks with his £200 budget.

Meanwhile Brix would be seen salivating over the buttery leather of a Mulberry handbag or cooing over the cut of a Vivienne Westwood jacket, as she sallied around Bond Street with her beloved pugs stealing the show as they scampered at her heels. It was the break - in both senses - that she needed.

'All of it was still hurting. I mostly just focused on what felt good, which was reinventing myself and doing telly, which was really creative in the same way in that it was unscripted and it felt creative, and fashion is an art form in itself.'

The 'catwalk-off' at the end of the show inevitably led to Gok's outfits winning public favour, but Brix's energy, enthusiasm and personality shone through and as her profile rose, so did interest in her life story. She was approached about writing a book and, despite reservations, decided to 'give it a go.'

'I was coming from a very vulnerable place, battered by the music industry, battered by my marriage, battered from everything and didn't believe in myself. I didn't know if I could write.'

She penned a chapter. Her mum thought it was fantastic. Her agent said it was so bad, they couldn't show it to the publisher. Three years later she had a book deal and her confidence in her writing grew.

'I felt really passionate about it and I could feel the energy coming through my body to the pen, almost like channelling the energy. You don't question it, or where it's coming from or get anxious about the words, just get it down with the purest of intentions. So people can knock you back, but they don't know you, they don't know what you're capable of. It's only an opinion.'

Around the same time her now husband, Philip, encouraged her to pick up her guitar. She hadn't sung, played the guitar, listened to the radio or gone to gigs for 15 years. She didn't tell anyone she'd been in The Fall or ever talked about it.

Does she close down painful experiences to cope? She says it's not about pushing it away, but about focusing on the positive. Her thinking owes a lot to meditation which she practises daily.

'So many people come to that crossroads and my advice is if it feels good, then do it. It's really just following your joy. That's why the next album is

called *Breaking State*, because when you have these thought processes and everything is just going around and around, you need to 'break state' and completely pivot your thought process.'

The *Breaking State* album is the second released by Brix and the Extricated, the five-piece with herself, three former Fall members Steve Hanley, Paul Hanley and Steve Trafford and guitarist Jason Brown. Their critically acclaimed debut album, *Part 2*, included some Fall songs. They aren't recording any Fall material again, but she says,

'I'm really proud of the songs I wrote - they are my songs as much as Mark E Smith's songs. Without me they wouldn't exist. I want The Fall to be remembered and live on, so I will do all I can to keep those songs alive and fly the flag with pride.'

The very different dynamic in which she works now clearly affords Brix more control and artistic freedom. The new album sounds more eclectic and nuanced in its musicality and we hear a greater breadth of Brix's voice. It's also saturated with connotations of renewal, hope and joy. Certainly her approach to her craft doesn't subscribe to the cliché that amongst the inspiration, there is much perspiration. She describes it as a process of sheer joy.

'It's important to get yourself into the right state before you write; no anxiety or anything blocking creativity; first thing in the morning when you're barely awake. Just have one cup of coffee, don't look at social media, don't allow the internet to infect your mind, then sit down...when you're asleep your resistance is down. It's almost like your brain is reprogrammed.'

As Brix and the Extricated embark on a national tour, Brix's happy place is writing songs, playing live and recording in the studio. She's ambitious

for the band, working on a solo album, on which she plays every instrument, writing another book, hosting a show on Boogaloo Radio (listen in on Wednesdays at noon) and has just produced a documentary for Sky Arts with Donovan about the Beatles.

Notwithstanding the lawyers who had crawled over it, I suggest she was very generous to Mark E Smith in her book.

'I'm really grateful for having had that creative partnership and we were madly in love in the beginning. I learned a lot from him and he learned a lot from me. It was meant to be; it was a magical thing. When we broke up, I was angry, but over time I realised everything was for the best. I look back and think if I was still married to Mark, how unhappy I would be and I would never have grown into the person I am. So I don't have anger anymore.'

Indeed the whole take-away for me from our meeting, is of someone who is at peace with themselves and their past, has no fear of the future and is extracting joy from every moment in the present. Brix's approach to life, and almost relentless positivity, is infectious and heart-warming and for anyone struggling with life, I would heartily recommend giving her autobiography a read.

'That book saved my life. It empowered me because I discovered so much about myself from writing it. People say it's cathartic, but in my case it was life-changing. I learned about doing what you love and following your passion.'

Brix and the Extricated's new album, *Breaking State*, is out on 26 October. Read our review on the Her Edit [website](#) and get the [album](#). They embark on a UK tour from 25 October; book tickets [here](#)



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## Telling a good yarn

# LAURA OLLEY

I'm **Laura Olley, an American** living in Tonbridge, Kent. Originally from Washington, DC, I married a wonderful man from Weald, Sevenoaks and, after living in Virginia for a few years, we decided to live here near family.

This year I decided to quit my day job marketing events and take on the world of fibre. I wasn't finding joy in commuting and working to make someone else money. The desk job wasn't cutting it for me so I decided to make a change.

As an avid knitter and crocheter, I have struggled to find a local yarn store that isn't more than a 40-minute drive away – so I'm here to change that. Although we're only online at the moment, the plan is to have a shop in Tonbridge where people can gather, learn and geek-out over some gorgeous fibre.

I think my favourite thing about knitting and crocheting is the yarn. Drinking in the colours and textures alights my senses and brings me so much joy.

When you are making something, you're spending hours and hours holding, moving and manipulating the yarn, so using a high-quality, natural fibre makes a huge difference. Not only will it behave differently, breathe better for garments and so on, but it makes the act of knitting so

Originally from the United States, Laura Olley is an avid knitter. Earlier this year she left her job to pursue her passion and alongside her new business, founded the Yarns of Anarchy knitting club. Here she writes about her passion for 'fibre' and Her Edit's Ann Clark visits the club to find out why fibre is a feminist issue.

Images courtesy of Laura Olley

much more enjoyable and creates a product to be proud of.

Sure, you can head on over to HobbyCraft and spend £2 on some acrylic yarn, but why would you want to? Firstly, it actually squeaks on your needles! To me this is like nails on a chalk board. Ouch.

Second, you won't get the range of colours or anywhere near the selection in materials. Finally, it is usually made from petroleum which is not a renewable resource – real wool from sheep is! You can call me a yarn snob. That's ok.

Since I started this business in March 2017, I have been running two stitch groups every week. The community that has grown out of these groups has been incredible. Every age and skill level turns up every week to share their passion for their craft. We share ideas, inspire each other to try new things and share each other's excitement over yarn, projects and crafts.

The group has even travelled to Unravel yarn festival together in February 2018. We have knitted for charities, the new mothers in our groups and even taken knitting on the road to local fairs and Knitting in Public Day 2018.



You can find Laura on Facebook, Instagram and on Twitter @yarnsofanarchy





'We share ideas, inspire each other to try new things and share each other's excitement over yarn, projects and crafts.'

**Ann Clark went to visit the club and takes up the story.**

I was in awe of Rita who is notorious in the group for knitting exclusively for charity, mainly hospices and the British Legion. She has knitted over 1,700 poppies, over 100 in just the last year, to commemorate various World War memorial events.

Some of the women had attended Laura's classes and then joined her groups. Sarah, sitting next to me, was knitting a pair of socks all in one go – very clever – though she told me they still wouldn't fit her despite having unpicked them once! Then Lauren piped up and told us about a long train journey during which she was knitting socks.

Opposite her were two people deeply engrossed in business talk. Lauren realised that as she got to the heel that the pattern didn't match and so she needed to 'pull back' (unravel) her work. The man opposite immediately called out, 'No! You can't do that! You took an hour and a half knitting that'. He was really upset!

Others in the group interjected about how often they reknit things; one person deliberately reknitted a garment because it hung better with the yarn having been reused.

Then I heard the secret confessions of those with 'stashes'; Sarah said it's an addiction she's trying to kick and has resolved not to buy any more wool. She also showed me a photo of a beautiful shawl made for her grandchild, a vintage pattern from the internet. Then another knitter produced a photo of the shawl being used by her mother.

There are knitting groups everywhere, but this one seems to have become a real community of diverse ages and backgrounds with children and babes in arms in attendance too.

There are members of the group who work and even come when they're on leave. Sally has several jobs, as a yoga teacher, a conduct risk assessor and conflict resolution specialist, and she rushed out to take a call during the session. Some of the knitters attend her yoga classes too.

Charlotte's New Year's resolutions in 2014 were to buy a house, get a promotion, learn to drive and to knit. Sarah had a hysterectomy and was also made redundant; she found knitting in the group a comforting distraction from her woes.

Each woman said they feel a close part of this community which has given them a social life and an exchange of ideas and skills. In another corner I met Emily, her husband Paul and Katherine. As a novice knitter, Paul, had his head bowed and was in deep concentration. Emily and Katherine are both from the United States and they also attend other knitting groups. These women are hard core.

Knitting was a family tradition for Katherine and she started at 13, but then she read Debbie Stoller's book *Stitch 'n Bitch*. That book made knitting 'cool' again and aligned it with modern feminism. Knitting wasn't just conforming to a gender role. Katherine says there are plenty of men who knit as well as renowned designers like Stephen West.

During both world wars men in the forces knitted – they needed to sew and darn. In my generation, women knitted to provide clothes for their family. Now synthetic yarns and cheap imports make all clothing more affordable – knitting is no longer a necessity.

For Katherine, knitting is key to slowing down life's frenetic pace and she believes it can help with anger management. At school she tried to encourage people to knit and, as a Stoller devotee, presented it as feminism and in a positive light. She says it helped her overcome being viewed as a 'weirdo'. She's delighted to see it's become a very fashionable hobby for movie stars.

My real 'wow' moment was watching those who were knitting with variegated wool. There's a speckled ball of wool and you can watch someone produce a sock which looks as though some intricate pattern has been created with many different coloured wools, but actually it is from one ball and the coloured patterning effectively knits itself...now that's real magic!





HER EDIT 19



HER EDIT 20

Images above courtesy of Ann Clark

Originally from Norfolk, Emma Fielder has lived in London for 11 years. Having worked as a local newspaper reporter, she now works in PR and has headed media campaigns for national charities.

Emma's husband Dave is a Wing Commander in the RAF and has been posted to various parts of the country and internationally, spending six months on active service in Afghanistan.

Words and pictures by  
Emma Fielder

## Plus ça change EMMA FIELDER

I couldn't believe my eyes when I rediscovered it lurking in the depths of my bedside cabinet. I picked up the booklet of poems by James Joyce, which was a relic from a university holiday job in a second-hand bookshop, and opened the front cover. It was published in 1927 by none other than Shakespeare and Company, the Paris bookshop I could not wait to visit when I moved to the city. I turned to the back of the booklet and found that just thirteen copies of it had been printed.

As a lover of books since my childhood, I like to think that this long-forgotten little book somehow meant that I was destined to move to Paris, partly to unravel the history behind its pages. How much would the bookshop staff be able to tell me? Would they have some of the other twelve copies? I could only begin to imagine the journey it had made in the last 90 years...what adventures led it to a second-hand bookshop in Norfolk?

I tried to put these daydreams aside, and concentrate on packing for the next phase of my life. I did not know – and I still don't – exactly what

shape that life will take, but I imagine that it will be pretty different to the one I've led over the last few years.

I work in communications, and I have spent much of my time commuting from a small suburban town to a few different jobs in London. Although I loved my work overall, at one point it caused me a period of stress and exhaustion – something that I now know is far more common than I realised. I cried constantly, felt tense and anxious at my desk, lost my confidence and the ability to concentrate and make decisions. I simply felt as though I couldn't do my job any more.

Since recovering, I have been shocked to discover the number of people who have had similar experiences or feelings. Friends, family and I have pondered together why we hadn't spoken about this before. I hope in the future I will be able to recognise the signs in myself, or those close to me, so I can take steps to halt its debilitating progress.



I also experienced obsessive compulsive disorder, which has been an unwelcome companion a few times. At its worst, this often-mocked and widely misunderstood condition left me shaking with anxiety, with horrible thoughts and distressing images plaguing my mind.

It also forced me to carry out a range of compulsive 'checking' behaviours. Check the iron was turned off. Look over my shoulder to be sure I hadn't knocked someone over in the street. Look twice or three times at a baby in a pram to be certain that it was not choking. If I didn't check, I felt that serious harm would come to someone - and it would be my fault for failing to prevent it.

Every time I checked something like this and found all was well, my anxiety was slightly relieved. But to achieve that same relief next time, I had to check more times on the next occasion that I had a thought someone may be in danger.

This vicious circle became so all-consuming that I found myself being prescribed anti-depressants

and sleeping pills, having therapy, crying many tears, losing my appetite, and finding it impossible to concentrate or enjoy the things I used to.

But I'm lucky in that there have been many good times too. My husband often works abroad, so we are apart more often than not. But in 2016, we somehow persuaded both our employers to let us take some time off work unpaid.

We each packed a huge rucksack and took a one-way flight to Mumbai. As well as India, we hiked and adventured our way through Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Hong Kong and Australia, returning to the UK five months later fresher of face, leaner of waist and lighter of heart.

When my husband told me his next job would be in Paris in August, at first I felt sure I would not join him. I would have to leave my family and friends and a job I loved, working for an organisation which I truly believed in, for – I didn't know exactly what. I felt fairly confident I could secure gainful employment as a freelancer, but I didn't know



how to make this happen, and couldn't be sure it would be a success.

Financially, we were in the incredibly fortunate position where I could comfortably take a few months off work, but this knowledge brought forth complicated and uncomfortable feelings of guilt.

The scenario felt very different to our travels, when neither of us were earning. And as we don't have children, it is not as though I would be working in that sense. I also felt daunted by a future that I struggled to conjure up in my mind. And my GCSE French felt like a very, very long time ago.

But after endless conversations (with friends, family, and in my own head) I simply decided

that the chance to live in Paris for a while was too good to pass up, and I started to feel sure I would regret not going. After everything that had happened in the last few years, it seemed a wonderful opportunity to do a complete reboot and refresh all areas of my life, while also seeing more of my husband.

I still cannot quite believe it, but now I'm here in Paris, and most of the boxes are unpacked. After conducting a conversation with a man who came to set up our internet solely via Google Translate, I am looking forward to starting a French course next week. And I now need walk for only ten minutes to be on the threshold of Shakespeare and Company, where I hope I will find much inspiration – as well as more about the provenance of my recently-rediscovered little book of poems.

#### IMAGES

Previous page: The Shakespeare and Company bookshop.  
This page, clockwise from left: Emma and Dave on the Eurostar to Paris,  
trekking in Laos and hiking the Dragon's Back in Hongkong.





©Annemick van der Kuil

Maureen Younger has been an acclaimed stand-up and MC for...many years... She has gigged across Europe and runs the highly successful MY Comedy nights in London and Birmingham.

Maureen has written several articles for Her Edit and here reflects on the changes in her life over the last five years.

Words and pictures by Maureen Younger

## The lighter side of life MAUREEN YOUNGER

**This last couple of months or so** changes have been afoot. For starters, after decades of trying, I've lost weight. I'm now down to a sylph-like 15 stone 7; so admittedly, I have a while yet before I give Kate Moss a run for her money.

Mind you, considering I was hovering around the 17 stone mark, that's definitely a shift in the right direction. It's even meant I've finally been able to get back into some old clothes that had been hanging in my wardrobe, neglected for years.

Apparently, the secret is – and don't tell anyone – stop eating rubbish food, don't eat a meal last thing at night and do some exercise. Who knew? Well, apart from almost everyone that is.

But why is it that this time when I've tried to lose weight I've only gone and lost some, when all previous attempts have proved such dismal failures?

I think it's mainly because this time, deep down, I wanted to make changes – and that's the catalyst. After all, we all moan about what we

should do or shouldn't do all the time; and as a general rule, we never act upon it. It is wanting to change – really wanting to change - that makes all the difference.

The first obvious sign I wanted to shake things up was when I threw away the bright green cardigan which my first ever great love had given me way back in 1984. I'd held onto it for over 30 years despite several house moves via various countries (Austria, Germany, France and Spain to be precise). That's a hell of a long time.

It had been knitted for him by his then girlfriend. I know, I know, I was theoretically the other woman. All right, I was the other woman. In my defence, no one among our mutual circle of friends liked her including, we all suspected, him.

Nevertheless, I admit it was perhaps a bit tasteless as a present, but leaving all thoughts of good taste aside, it had been hanging in my cupboard ever since I'd left Vienna in the mid-1980s.

Then in early 2018, on one of those rare occasions I decided to tidy up the flat, I noticed that though I hadn't worn it for a while, several moths or maybe one particularly hungry one, had found it of some use. This romantic souvenir was now replete with holes.

As an inveterate hoarder, and as someone who finds sentimental attachment in everyday items such as plastic bags, this normally wouldn't stop me from ignoring the sorry state it was in and hanging it back up in the cupboard.

But this time, I didn't. I threw it in the bin and in one fell swoop let go of an unhappy time in my life and a non-relationship which had given me little satisfaction, but done a most effective job at chipping away at my self-esteem.

Next, I pared down the jokes in my stand up set which were having the same effect. I'd written quite a few jokes of late that portrayed me as some kind of unattractive, sad, lonely woman.

I was in danger of painting myself into a corner. Is that really how I saw myself? Is it really the image I wanted others to have of me? It definitely wasn't the woman I wanted to be.

And as for my comedy career, I decided to do something about that too after more than a decade in the business. For years, I'd been treading water. I would often moan that comics I considered weren't as good as me were playing clubs that I didn't play.

What I used to fail to mention during these occasional diatribes was that I never approached these clubs for work. I'm not sure what I expected to happen: some booker of a successful comedy club tracking me down to beg me to gig for them, but I might as well have been that deluded.

So far, I'd been lucky in that enough people did ask me to gig for them that I had sufficient work to pay the bills and indulge me in my addiction of choice – books and copious amounts of pretty, if impractical, stationery. But rarely did I approach bookers or clubs who weren't booking me yet and ask them for work. Not surprisingly, you can't build a career like that.

Then in the spring of 2018, with the encouragement and help of two excellent comics who also happen to be very good friends

of mine, I started inching my way into various well-respected clubs.

I was also, for once, kind to myself and refrained from beating myself up for being so slow of the starters block. Yes, I should have been more pro-active a lot earlier than I was, but the advantage now when I was doing spots for these clubs was that I was a lot more experienced and a much better comedian than I would have been had I been trying out for them years earlier.

But what brought about this desire for change? That's a lot less clear. Maybe it was frustration with the status quo; fear that I was getting stuck in a rut and if I wasn't careful things would only get worse. Or there could just be more mundane reasons. I know the desire to lose weight was spurred on by the desire not to get diabetes, which I was in danger of becoming more susceptible to the larger I got.

As for my career, the catalyst there was twofold. I couldn't help noticing certain colleagues becoming more successful than me. Some of it might be down to talent; some of it down to luck; some of it down to the fact they fit what the industry is looking for (usually young, male and telegenic) and yes, the industry is sexist and ageist but, frustratingly, I also had to acknowledge that, unlike yours truly, for the most part they'd also put the work in. And let's face it, there is nothing more annoying than when you realise the main person you should blame for your predicament is – you!

Under such circumstances, you have two options: become bitter (an option favoured by many a comic before me) or try and do something about it. It's by far the scarier option, but definitely the more rewarding one. Here's to the new me then, a lighter and (hopefully) more fulfilled version.

**For details of gigs visit [www.maureenyounger.com](http://www.maureenyounger.com) or follow her on Twitter @maureenyounger**

Listen to her hilarious podcasts with stand-up Jen Brister [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4be1h8W5T\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4be1h8W5T_U) and <https://soundcloud.com/jen-brister/maureen-jen-talk-edinburgh-festival-barry-custard-and-droughtlander>



Allison Lindsay is one of the original Her Edit team. She is a business psychologist, Certified Transformational Breath Faciliator and Group Leader, Grief Recovery Specialist and Coach Training Institute qualified coach. She talks about some of the challenges she's faced in the last five years and, most importantly, her ambitious plans for the future.

Words and pictures by

And breathe...

## ALLISON LINDSAY

**Five years is a wonderful period** to reflect on. Long enough for things to have changed, moved on, developed, but short enough to feel you are somehow still in the middle and have time to make further changes.

A lot has happened for me since we first launched Her Edit. I have lost both friends and family, had to move my father into full-time care to cope with his increasing needs due to the onset of dementia, sold his house, battled with an injury that resulted from pushing through extreme fatigue and found life frankly difficult to juggle at times – between trying to do my best for Dad, running my own house, starting a business around my strong interest in wellbeing, and holding down a full-time job that requires what often feels like more than 100 per cent commitment.

Yet at a time in life when some of my close friends are already planning how they can slow down and ease their way into retirement, I seem to be ramping things up even more.

I have recently abandoned being employed by others and taken the leap into entrepreneurship which is both daunting and exciting. I feel I am

on a fresh journey, one of self-discovery and self-development. It's amazing how having finally taken the leap, opportunities and offers seem to be coming my way. I have no idea which ones will prove to be successful or which will lead me down a rabbit hole.

What I am clear on though is that life is feeling a lot more vibrant and exciting than it has for some time, and I am very happy to have finally embraced the freedom to try new things and possibly to fail - knowing it's only myself that will be impacted - as well as the freedom to meet new people, try new partnerships, and see where I can go if I am flexible in my approach.

What is interesting to me in this journey is my new reliance on the bodymind to guide me. This has been a relatively recent change in my life, but one that I really feel is making a massive difference to how I love my life.

In 2014 I discovered breathwork (conscious connected breathing) and am now a fully trained breathwork facilitator and group leader. I have been a life and career coach for some time and recently have been exploring the use of



IMAGES

Above: Allison with her dad, xxx  
Over the page: Allison, the School for Wellbeing website





Resilience: The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; the flexibility to see alternatives; the ability to adapt easily to change.

embodiment to help me coach clients as well as to make my own decisions - literally using the body's intelligence (that gut feeling as we often call it) to help understand what is going on for us, make decisions and guide choices.

It's so easy to simply see the body as a 'brain taxi' and only focus on what's going on in our heads. However, I have come to realise that being disconnected from our bodies is a sure-fire way to make poor decisions, as we lose touch with our own intuition, and instead make crucial decisions based solely on 'logical' thinking.

Whilst this can be helpful, it's certainly not the only way, and means we are missing out on a large amount of the information available to help us make the best, most well-rounded decisions possible.

The neocortex (our 'thinking' brain) is millions of years younger than the ancient part of our brain

which governs our emotions and our survival mechanisms – the fight or flight response. Sadly, the development of our bodies and brains has not caught up with the evolution of our environment.

Things that our logical brain 'knows' are not a threat to life can still trigger those ancient survival mechanisms, bathing our brains in stress hormones with the result that we feel constantly exhausted, anxious and stressed, as the rate at which these stimuli come at us means we never have the chance to go into relaxation mode.

To redress this balance, we talk a lot about self-care. However, I am not so sure that we are all that clear on what we actually mean by the term. A simple scan of most women's magazines finds us talking about many things - relaxing baths, candles, eating well or treating yourself with chocolate, cake or ice cream, the importance of a good night's sleep, being out in nature versus a city break, having a massage or going for a run.

Whilst all of these may have their own place in our lives, what self-care looks like for each of us at any particular point in time is actually really individual.

I recently tapped into that when I bodily tried to make the 'shape' of what self-care meant to me. What came out was a (self) hug, but with my feet planted as wide apart as possible. Confusing to say the least. The two parts of the shape seemed at such odds with each other.

I had a bath that night, which always meant looking after myself, but got out after about 15 minutes rather than my usual hour-long soak. It just wasn't doing it for me. That prompted me to take some time to reflect on the self-care shape I'd made. It suddenly made sense...self-care for me, right now, is about space. Physical space, emotional space, mental space. My body was telling me exactly what I needed, I just had to take the time to recognise what it was saying.

Paying more attention to our bodies – whether that's harnessing the power of our breath for relaxation or stress relief, or becoming more aware of how we physically are in the world, can change everything – how we view the world, how we interact with it, and how it interacts with us, literally changing the pathways in our brains at the same time as we change our physical presence.

I know this is going to be a critical insight for me as I go into the next five years. I have no idea what my life will look like in 2023, but I am confident it will be very different to how it looks now. The last five years have been a journey of discovery and I am looking forward to learning more and seeing what shape my life takes on now.

**If you'd like to find out more about breathwork or embodiment you can reach Allison at [www.schoolforwellbeing.com](http://www.schoolforwellbeing.com)**



ad componendum et indocta ad scriben-  
dum ea die scribitur in sedis of boni-  
tatis nec sedis intellectum humanum ad  
immortalitatem nec sedis voluntatem huma-  
nam compositionem huiusmodi sed quod ea in  
quibus desuper in mundum dei videtur et au-  
ditur ea sic ostendit per se quod ad hunc  
dum et audire verba scripta sui populi  
et in sedis tenent locutionem illi quod vo-  
luntate ostendit et scriptura populi. Sic  
quod in homo dicitur ea quod videtur et audire et le-  
bere non sedis tenent sedis alii boni-  
tatis huiusmodi voluntatem locutionem videtur  
et dispositionem magis in secretis myste-  
riorum locutionem. Et verum audire videtur  
de celo magis dicitur. Sic quod videtur  
habet scribere in hoc modo edicta et dicitur.



Et in quadra-  
gesimo tertio  
temporalis cur-  
sus mei ante  
cum quibus visi-  
onibus magis re-  
novare et tremu-  
la intentione in heretico iuda mpa-  
mum splendore in quo facta est vox  
de celo ad me dicitur. O homo scrip-  
ta et cum ceteris et potendo potendo  
nisi dicitur et scribitur quod videtur et audire. Sed  
quia timida est ad loquendum et simpliciter

**F**actum est in millesimo centesimo  
quadragesimo primo filii dei ihesu  
incarnationis anno cum quadraginta duobus  
annis sepe quod videtur cum magis magis  
nomen ignis huiusmodi quod videtur et  
ardere meum videtur et non est magis  
potest meum videtur flamma si non ar-  
det huiusmodi ita inflammantur ut sol-  
tem aliquam caliditate. Sed quod non  
et factum potest. Et repente intellectum  
compositionis libri videtur plures  
evangelii et alii catholici non ve-  
rent quam non videtur videtur  
non scriptum. Et tunc interpretatio  
sua videtur. Et tunc non videtur

Sr Philippa Rath OSB, born in 1955, has been a Benedictine nun at St Hildegard's Abbey in Rudesheim-Eibingen (Germany) for 28 years. She obtained an M.A. in political sciences, theology and history from Bonn University and worked as a journalist with various German media before entering religious life.

In her community her responsibilities include being a board member of the "Foundation of St Hildegard's Abbey", liaising with the "Friends of St Hildegard's Abbey" and being in charge of the Abbey's public relations. She has been studying the life and works of St Hildegard of Bingen for 25 years. In 2011/12 she served as a postulator in the process of Hildegard's canonisation and elevation to Doctor of the Church.

Having studied logotherapy and existential analysis in Vienna and Tübingen she regularly serves as a counsellor to people who encounter crises and conflicts.

Dr William Flynn, Lecturer in Medieval Latin at the [University of Leeds](http://www.leeds.ac.uk) has a multidisciplinary approach to his teaching and research interests which mirror and blend his degrees in both Music and Theology. He is fascinated by the relationship of music, language and liturgy in the Middle Ages of which Hildegard was a key exponent.

## Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179

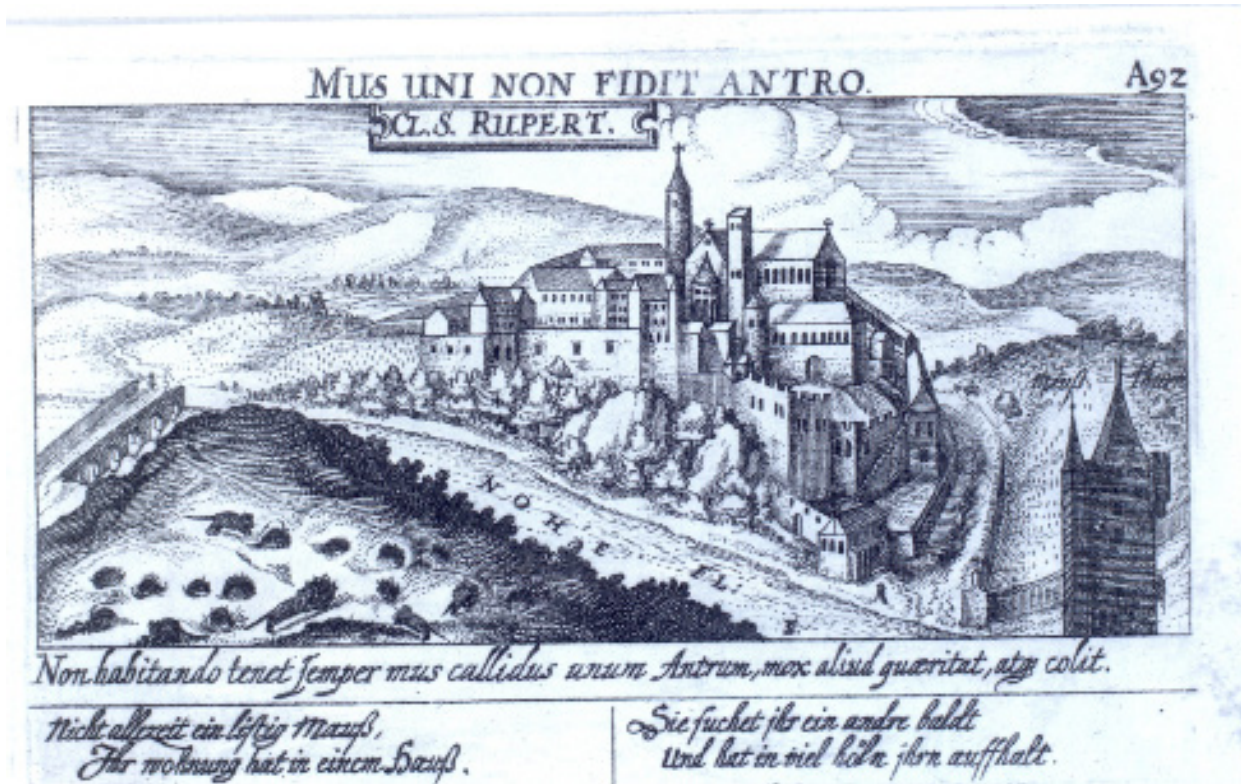
### *Introduction by Sister Philippa Rath of the Order of Saint Benedict, the Abbey of Hildegard*

**Each generation needs its prophets**, men and women who shed light on their time and life, people who are ahead of their generation, who are progressive intellectuals with groundbreaking ideas which are only understood centuries later. Some prophets outlive their time and their message remains vital for generations to come.

Saint Hildegard of Bingen is such a figure. She was born in 1098 and died on 17 September 1179. She was a nun, a Benedictine, a theologian, a propagator of faith, the founder and abbess of two convents, a counsellor sought after by emperors and popes, by people from all social strata and nationalities. Her correspondence, her travels and her preaching reached well beyond her native Rhine valley into many countries of today's Europe.

Even during her life time she was already known as "prophetissa teutonica" and she understood herself to be the voice and instrument of God. She galvanised her contemporaries into rethinking and changing their ways.

Although Saint Hildegard is of course a long way from today's social and political problems, her basic guidelines are still almost distressingly relevant. Thus, 900 years later she still offers us guidance for a dignified and successful life and a sustainable lifestyle. I am convinced that today we possibly require such guidance more than those living in the 12th century. Nowadays feelings of uncertainty and disorientation, futility and vulnerability, emptiness and frustration, depression and aggression, resignation and despair define our lives much more and threaten the social life of peoples as well as nations.



## WILLIAM FLYNN

### Hildegard of Bingen, 1098-1179

**Hildegard of Bingen** was one of the most prolific and arguably the most multi-talented writers of the middle-ages. Her creative life was prompted by visions that she received in light and sound, while awake and conscious, neither in dreams, nor in trance.

She received her visions as a 'living light' and was able to recall and ponder them in what she described as the 'shadow of the living light'. (The author portrait on the previous page shows Hildegard's head encompassed by red flames touching her ears and her eyes.)

Hildegard had to work out over many years to express what lay behind the inspiration, since what she saw and heard was 'not like words,

heard from a human mouth, but like a glittering flame and like cloud moving in the clear sky'.

Hildegard's vast visionary trilogy describes dozens of visions in such great detail one can readily imagine them. But we do not have to rely on imagination, since there are complete miniature cycles for two of her works stemming from her own convent, Rupertsberg.

Hildegard's mature visions came to her with the command that she make them public, but the experience of the visions was impossible to convey in words alone.

This may explain the creation of the illuminated miniatures as well as the production of over

seventy songs and a full-length drama in music. All of these were notated in a way that allows them to be performed today.

Hildegard's use of multimedia to convey her visions was not unique to the middle ages, but her ability to examine the whole of her knowledge in terms of them gave her a unique voice. Her own poetic imagery still seems fresh and the allegorical picture of the world she built up is strange and compelling.

Hers was a universe in which everything good, every virtue, was personified as a feminine form, and the virtues' role was to guide people on their paths. She names over twenty virtues in her play, providing a part for every member of her community at the time it was probably first performed.

Hildegard's visions incorporated the material world as intimately connected to the human being, made of the same elements, and so alive and in mutual relationship with humanity, and she incorporated into her allegorical world, writings on rocks, plants, animals, and the causes and cures of ailments.

On 10 May 2012, Hildegard of Bingen was formally declared a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. Her community had attempted her canonization as early as the 1230s, but the nature of her work, expressed in visual poetic, and musical imagery was unfashionable in a world dominated by the newly-rediscovered power of logical disputation that characterised the pedagogy of the universities.

So it is all the more remarkable that on 7 October 2012, Hildegard was named the thirty-fifth Doctor of the Church, the fourth woman to gain that honorary title.

Further reading and listening:

On Hildegard's life, see the excellent sourcebook with a translation of both Hildegard's and her teacher Jutta's medieval lives by Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 1* (Turnhout: 1998).

It is worth visiting the [website](#) of Hildegard's successor abbey to see the full cycle of miniatures for Hildegard's first visionary work, *Scivias*, preserved because a twelfth-century

illuminated manuscript (lost in 1945) had been carefully copied by hand over the six years from 1927-1933.

All of Hildegard's music has been recorded numerous times and much is available via streaming sites and YouTube. Look out especially for recorded performances by Discantus and Sequentia.

Many of Hildegard's writings have good English translations; *Symphonia*, translated and edited by Barbara Newman (Ithaca and London, 1988 1st ed. and 1998 2nd ed ). This book contains the Latin and good literal translations of Hildegard's song texts, as well as Newman's interpretive poetic translations.

*Scivias*, translated by Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: 1990); *Physica*, translated by Priscilla Throop (Rochester VT: 1998). Finally, there are three volumes of *The Letters of Hildegard of Bingen*, translated by J. L. Baird and R. K. Ehrman (Oxford, 1994-2004).

Book of Divine Works, translated by Nathaniel M. Campbell, Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuations, (Washington DC, 2018)

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

On the previous page, Folio 1v of Hildegard's treatise *Scivias* (c. 1165) with an author-portrait of Hildegard accompanied by her life-long amanuensis Volmar of Disibodenberg.

The flames probably signify the Holy Spirit and they touch her ears and eyes, emphasising that her visions were experienced both in sight and sound (including music). ©Eibingen Abbey

Opposite: Hildegard's first foundation at Rupertsberg, before its destruction during the Thirty-Years War in 1632. ©Eibingen Abbey

Ann Clark is a co-founder of Her Edit. Her career has spanned all areas of the heritage sector as an archaeologist, an academic editor and policy consultant working with agencies such as English Heritage and the Society of Antiquaries of London and, more recently, Natural England. She is an active supporter of the All Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group.

Words by Ann Clark

Images by Jayne Phenton



## FIVE YEARS ON ANN CLARK

**Sourcing material for Her Edit** has been quite an adventure. In the earlier days, when we had themed issues, thinking laterally about who we could approach was a wonderful challenge with even perhaps a tiny bit of unspoken competition amongst the team.

It's quite a thrill sending out speculative emails for copy or an interview and never knowing what the outcome will be. There is an inevitable delight getting a positive response from higher profile contributors, but I feel that celebrating the achievements of all the women (and men) in our issues has given me the most pleasure of all.

Discovering something new for each issue is so satisfying and the campaigns we have followed and supported have been a real education. Our little team has been such fun and after the last meeting we decided team meetings were good therapy too! I feel our beautifully designed covers sum up our five years really well.

I think Jayne thought Her Edit would be a distraction for me after the death of my mother, the fourth close relative to die in a short space of time. It is no doubt a truism to say that there is a gap, not only left by the actual death of someone much beloved, but also by no longer having the responsibility of caring for them. Jayne was right

and Her Edit did go some way towards occupying me, if not filling the chasm.

During this period I learnt that helping too much can actually be seriously disempowering. It sounds so obvious, but when one dear aunt claimed that when I helped her at bedtime she was in heaven, it made the desire to do more for her too compelling. She soon lost the habit of being able to do simple tasks for herself.

However, I felt privileged to be with our relations at the ends of their lives. The terminology we use of 'looking after' or 'caring' sounds rather pejorative as though we are simply providing a service, but my experience was so much more. After a life-time working in archaeology and the heritage sector, the experience led me to try my hand at caring professionally.

My charge was a mother of three in her 40s who had lost language and mobility as the result of a stroke. Perhaps not surprisingly, she also had depression.

My responsibilities were quite extensive: cook the family evening meal, place the online shopping order, do the ironing, tidy up the children's bedrooms, make lunch for their mother, wash and help dress her, support her in her mobility

exercises, accompany her on numerous hospital visits and hair and beauty appointments and various other sundry tasks.

Although I discharged my duties capably enough, it seemed that my efforts never met her expectations (except my fish pie, for which I thank Jamie Oliver). I never felt any sense of appreciation for my efforts, no matter how much I tried or how thoughtful I was.

It was an extremely demoralising experience and prompted me to reflect on whether our desire to help is for the benefit of the vulnerable person we care for, or for ourselves.

As our population ages, the issue of 'care' and the value we place on it, and those that provide it, either in a professional capacity, out of love or out of duty, is an increasingly philosophical and socio-economic problem.

As a society, I suspect we ascribe attributes to caring professions - such as 'rewarding' or 'worthwhile' - because we actually value this work so little, both remuneratively and in terms of professional status.

We might imagine that these roles are 'rewarding' because people are appreciative and there is an

instinctive satisfaction in helping someone, but what if this is isn't the case and there is no 'feel good' reward?

My experience of caring professionally was so demoralising that I embraced the offer of returning to my former professional life this time with Natural England and then with Chilterns AONB. After my unsuccessful flirtation with a career change, I really appreciated the good camaraderie in the work place, my lovely colleagues and the best managers ever.

People occasionally ask me if I have retired. I am never sure if that's because they think I look old enough or if they simply think it's about time. I am fortunate that I love the work I do, so although I haven't been in paid employment for the last 18 months, I have been busy with pro-bono work advising a charity.

No-one trains in archaeology in anticipation of a huge salary, but I'm happy to say my work has been hugely rewarding in all sorts of other ways. So who knows? I don't feel retired, but I am at that stage where I am reflecting on how to spend any spare time I have - very exciting times with so many opportunities.

Sarah Williams has worked on policy campaigns in the third sector for over ten years for charities such as Parkinsons UK and ASH. She is currently a Tobacco Control Programme Manager with Public Health England. Sarah has travelled extensively and lived in Australia and Kenya. She joined the Her Edit team almost two years and here shares her last five, eventful, years.

Words by Sarah Williams

Images by Jayne Phenton



## Flat-hunting, finance and forever love... SARAH WILLIAMS

**One of the little Facebook reminders** popped up earlier this week, a picture of me and colleagues looking slightly sheepish in sombreros at a Mexican restaurant. It was taken on one of my several leaving parties before I headed off to Kenya.

At the time I'd been in an awful job for four years and despite more than ten interviews, I'd been unable to escape. So I decided on a slightly more drastic plan. I went off to Nairobi for six months to work as a Gender Strategist with the Kenyan Women's Parliamentary Association. I had a fantastic time, working with great people to try and find a way to get female representation in a third of the Parliament, which is a commitment in the Kenyan Constitution.

Volunteering with VSO wasn't the first time I'd upped sticks and moved abroad. I'd done something similar five years before which saw me off on an adventure for two and a half years. It's like a little life spring clean. Turn yourself upside down, give it a good shake and what falls out the pockets probably wasn't worth hanging on to. In this case, what fell out of the pockets was the four year relationship I was in at the time.

I didn't know it when I came back to London, but my boyfriend had decided it wasn't working out. Sadly he had neglected to tell me when I was away. I pointed out that, while it was a difficult conversation, if he had mentioned it over Skype I might have stayed in the Kenyan sunshine rather than returning to London. On the positive side, five years on and he's making good progress on paying back the money I lent him for his failed business venture.

Volunteering with VSO also lifted the gloom of seemingly the infinite failed job interviews I was experiencing. As well as emptying pockets, I've found that returning from a big trip is very good for getting me work. My first interview, that took place over a very shaky Skype connection, was successful.

I started a new job two days after landing in London. I'd forgotten that my Skype picture was Susie Bick, a super glamorous fashion designer who's married to my idol Nick Cave. They only looked slightly disappointed when I walked in looking a lot less glamorous, but considerably more cheerful.

The new job, along with no longer having an impoverished boyfriend, meant that I could get cracking on my next life goal of buying a flat. After mulling over ideal destinations I decided that Barking and Dagenham was the borough for me. Because it was the cheapest in London and the only place I could almost afford.

I spent a few months spending hungover Saturday mornings wandering around desolate housing estates and testing out the greasy spoons with Jayne. Not only is Jayne a great editor of Her Edit, but she's willing to spend an hour on the District Line to look at ex-council houses.

After putting in a couple of offers, it turned out that I couldn't afford a one bed ex-council flat in the cheapest borough in London. But, a lucky opportunity came up – a new build, first come first served and no one could put in a higher offer. And it was just within my budget!

Due to its glamorous location on the edge of an industrial estate, the flats were in high demand. I got a call from the estate agents at midday the day before the flats went on sale to tell me that people were already queuing. I got there a couple

of hours later and settled down for a 19 hour stint in a car park in January.

Ever the good friend, Jayne joined me armed with wine. After surviving the overnight storm and just before it began to snow, I put the deposit down on my flat. The 200 people behind me in the queue lost out. Ha!

At around the time I was buying the flat, I found out I was about to lose my job. This turned out brilliantly! As well as getting £2,000 redundancy payment, it led to the role I'm in now. And I love the role I'm in now. It has the perfect combination of a higher salary, excellent management, lots of autonomy and international travel. I know things I never thought I would, like how great it feels to go to Barbados on a work trip.

It's probably at this point that I should reflect on the lessons I have learnt in the last five years. There are three. One, always take on interesting opportunities, especially if it's a work trip to Barbados. Two, some things are worth spending 19 hours camping in a car park for. Three, love doesn't last forever, but it can feel like forever trying to get your money back afterwards.

Jayne Phenton has been masquerading as a PR and communications professional in the charity sector for about 18 years. Here she reflects on the last five years since the launch of Her Edit which she created.

Words by Jayne Phenton

Images: left, Ann and Jayne celebrate Her Edit's first birthday; right, Jayne and her mum, Patricia, earlier this year.



## Take five JAYNE PHENTON

**Like many women of a 'certain' age,** I have trouble remembering what happened yesterday, but September 2013 is an easy one as it was the month we launched Her Edit.

It has been a joyous journey from our first tentative, ambitious beginnings; late nights spent juggling text and pictures on a computer screen; our wine-fuelled 'editorial meetings'; the excitement of getting a positive response from someone we've approached. It's been an opportunity to meet some fascinating people and create some wonderful friendships. Most of all it's been enormous fun.

Having said to the rest of the team that we should each write an account of our last five years, I found myself struggling to recall anything that had significantly changed in my life over this time, but eventually came up with a few things which might not have changed my life, but have certainly changed me.

Four years ago I experienced a very painful period of depression. Not triggered by any particular event, just an accumulation of years of life experiences and an inability to process the

more traumatic ones. Lesson learned? Don't be sceptical about psychological therapeutic interventions. It probably saved my life. Thank you Lucy.

As I was recovering, I left a job which had begun to dent my last remaining shreds of confidence and, I realised, making me unhappy. I found another job. Lesson learned? There's always some fool out there who will employ you.

Next lesson? Don't suffer fools gladly. Don't assume it's you. Sometimes it's just not your fit. Sometimes they are just fools. I found a new job, my present one, which I love. A fantastic crew and an understanding boss who gives me her confidence and the eggs she collects from her chickens. Another lesson. Sometimes brilliant people recognise your talents and will give you the autonomy and agency to nurture them.

In the last five years, three much loved friends have died. Not too much to learn from that except that life is alarmingly short, appreciate the time you have with those you love and while it's painful when you lose them, they stay with you in your heart.

I am now officially post-menopausal. Physically, apart from some hot flushes and sweaty, sleepless nights, I seem to have emerged relatively unscathed. Mentally, with increased anxiety, impoverished memory and a woolly head, less so. And my memory is terrible.

But money saved on tampons can be usefully redirected to the gin fund, and I don't miss painful uterine contractions, backache or scrabbling around the bathroom cabinet in the middle of the night. Another lesson. We all need to look after ourselves. Time spent looking after yourself is always time well spent.

Two years ago I stopped dying my hair after thirty years and love it more now than I ever have in my life. Next lesson; if you're not feeling your most attractive, get some old photos out and see what you what you looked like in 1979 or 1981 or 1985. The flicked fringe, the curly perm, the black spikey crop are all part of the journey that have brought you to your current gorgeous self. Look in the mirror and be grateful that you may not acquire wisdom with age, but you can acquire a better hairdresser.

I love my mum. Like proper love when you love every bit of them, even the bits that irritate you, sometimes make you angry or sad, although you might not always say so. Next lesson, she loves every bit of me too.

Then last year I fell in love. Really, truly, forever-ever-after, rip-your-heart-out in love. For the first time in almost a decade I entrusted my heart; to someone who declared their love for me with such an irresistible intensity and passion, it was impossible not to succumb to.

No reader, I did not marry him. He abandoned me and my heart broke. I crumpled. So the final lesson? That love exists and I am blessed to be surrounded with it from the wonderful friends who brought me back to life. They know who they are and, hopefully, know I love them too.

In the words of Moll Flanders, life has been, 'a series of mistakes impossible to have been prevented.' I always think life's journey is on an upward trajectory. The last five years are always better than the five before. There is always joy to be found in life and every story we've ever featured in Her Edit is testament to that.

# Her Edit

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