The mayor of Reading on her special charities

Pam Warren on building a life after the Paddington rail crash

The artist’s mind with Edva Connor

Discover the taste and sights of Malta

Africa Fashion Week

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At Today Magazine we share positive stories from our communities. Many people are making a difference through their efforts and it is good to recognise them.

There is a theme of courage running through the articles in this edition. The Sikh and other Indian soldiers who fought in World War 1 showed great courage despite being ill prepared for their fateful journey. In ‘Legacy of Valour’ Inderpal Singh has created a project and exhibition where they can be remembered.

As a survivor of the Paddington rail crash in 1999 Pam Warren has found the courage to deal with her traumatic experience and rebuild a full life. We can learn lessons from how this near death experience informs the life she lives now. Creativity is another way to show courage. Singer/songwriter Brother B, Animator Shannel and Artist Edva Connor all have this in abundance as they offer their work to the world.

The East Reading Festival was a lovely opportunity to celebrate community talents. The pictures show how many people chose to come out and support local projects and performers. I thoroughly enjoyed the great weather, food, entertainment and community spirit.

This year we covered Africa Fashion Week London and the vibrancy and creativity leaps off the page. If you are beginning to think of your next holiday then see our review of Malta with Fiona Carney, who has lived there for a couple of years.

For our book review we look at The Gifts of Imperfection by Brené Brown. In it she encourages us to stop chasing perfection. Why should we do this? The gifts of imperfection are courage, compassion and connection.

We hope you find Today Magazine informative, entertaining and a refreshing change. We would love to hear from you so do contact us.

Enjoy!

Shirley Anstis, Editor
Mayor of Reading
Councillor Sarah Hacker

Talking premature babies, cloth nappies and performing arts with Councillor Hacker

Our current Mayor of Reading Councillor Sarah Hacker is by her own description a ‘young mum’. The role has seen a variety of persons, including Councillor Hacker’s dad Chris Maskell who was the Mayor in 2007. Councillor Hacker became active in electoral politics in 2010 and having a dad who was involved in politics did inform her early years. She has memories of helping to deliver leaflets and other activities. She was also a union representative for Unite when she worked at Prudential. Becoming a councillor in 2010 was the first step to becoming Mayor. Once the results were in Councillor Hacker, who was heavily pregnant with her second child, was happy and relieved. As she recalls, “the day was a bit of a blur”.

Her son arrived nine and a half weeks early and remained in hospital for four weeks. This experience brought her into contact with Babies in Buscot (BIB’s) – a charity that supports parents and babies in the special care baby unit at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. BIB’s is one of the two charities she now supports as she would like to see their work help more families. Her son is now 5 years old and very well.

So how does one become the Mayor?
The first step is to get elected as a local councillor in a specific ward. Councillors generally support a political party and respond to residents’ needs. Sarah was selected and won her seat for Battle Ward in Reading. Her regular enquiries from residents can cover schools, trees, bins, trains and council staff. She is on the Traffic Management Committee and Chair of the Arts and Heritage Forum. The route to mayor involves being deputy for one year - from May 2014 - until she became Mayor in May 2015.

What motivated her to run for Mayoral office?
One of the motivations for Sarah becoming Mayor is the opportunity to raise money for many good causes. Individuals and groups can donate money or fundraise for the selected charities. Many of the events are around performing arts.

The Mayor is organising a Let’s Sing Competition on 4th March 2016 at The Hexagon. Any amateur singers, choirs and groups can take part. There will also be a Masked Ball in February 2016 and a Dance Gala in April 2016. The dance gala is an opportunity to see costumes and dancing from around the British Isles and from around the world. In the run up to Christmas she is also running a Christmas Decoration Competition with Jelly at Jackson’s Corner.

If you have a look at the Mayor’s presence on social media you will see that she is very busy, attending many events in any given week. Although August can be a bit quiet, the many spring fairs, Christmas celebrations, charity fundraisers, religious and cultural days means that most of the year is busy. It is one year of intense activity.

Is being Mayor a full-time job?
Like many councillors the Mayor has a part-time job. She is an experienced pensions administrator and does that a couple days each week. More unusually perhaps is her other part-time job as the social media voice for a cloth nappy company. She loved their products when her children were in nappies and enjoys helping them spread the message and reduce waste.

The Mayor’s address is ‘The Parlour’ which sounds very grand. With all her roles and responsibilities, the Mayor is hardly there and often catches up with her diary manager once a week in person or by email. Like many of us she is required to do lots of juggling. It is not surprising then that she sometimes plays video games such as Minecraft to chill.

Being able to relax is actually a health supporting option too as Sarah has fibromyalgia. She had quite a bit of joint pain before it was diagnosed in February 2015. As well as joint pain sufferers can also have disturbed sleep, recurring migraines, pins and needles and low mood. Hers was almost misdiagnosed as arthritis before she met the right consultant. She is using this experience to raise awareness of fibromyalgia through the other charity that she supports: FAM UK. Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition and may affect up to 1 in 25 people but it is often hard to diagnose. Medication, exercise, therapy and de-stressing activities can all help to maintain health.

What are her plans once her term ends?
Going forward she will continue to chair the Arts and Heritage Forum which she has coordinated since 2011. Having trained as a ballet teacher and doing lots of dance up to age 28 the arts is close to her heart. She is really looking forward to what Reading can show the world for 2016 Year of Culture. She is keen to hear from all parts of our community so do contact her office with your ideas and plans. Check out http://www.reading.gov.uk/mayor for more information on how to contact the Mayor for your event.

Shirley Anstis
I first met Inderpal at a community meeting and his enthusiasm for the Legacy of Valour project made me want to know more. Many of us recognised that the history books only tell part of the story but we take it no further. When Inderpal saw a BBC documentary on the ‘History of WW1’ he was shocked to see that whilst one hour was devoted to each of Australian & New Zealand, Canadian and American soldiers only 3 minutes was given to the contribution of Indian soldiers. Nearly 1.5 million Indian soldiers served during 1914-18; one in six soldiers serving in WW1 were from the Indian subcontinent. Being Sikh and from India he chose to research this group of Commonwealth soldiers. Who were they and how did they come to be fighting in the war? He surveyed among the Punjabi community to assess how much they knew about their forefathers who came to fight for Britain a hundred years ago. He found that even the older generation knew very little about this part of their history. He thought that this forgotten story needed to be told and could serve to raise awareness.

With more than 30 years’ experience as a management consultant in the IT industry, Inderpal used all his project management, leadership, organisational and team building skills to initiate and follow through on this big project. He recognised the need to build a core team to drive it forward and acknowledges some 40 individuals and groups who have been instrumental in supporting the project.

Where did he start?

By joining the Berkshire WW1 project and visiting various war archives he could begin to get a feel for the research ahead. He says he wanted to understand the scale of their contribution, “what was it like in India at the time, why did they volunteer and what role did they play?” As I know from my own work it is the questions we ask that helps us to create something new.

Inderpal worked closely with many organisations including Reading Museum, Reading Library, Berkshire WW1 project, National Archives, Imperial War Museum, Royal Pavilion Brighton, National Army Museum and the British Library. With support from many community organisations and the lottery fund he could begin to get a feel for the research ahead. He says he recognised some 40 individuals and groups who have been instrumental in supporting the project.

Legacy of Valour

Inderpal Singh Dhanjal shows what can be achieved when career expertise meets a passion for social history

This idea to go behind the headlines of ‘Commonwealth Forces’ and explore in more detail, took hold two years ago, when he launched The Legacy of Valour project. His passion for social history was about to have an impact on a whole community.

Here are some of the questions he began to ask at the planning stage of the project:

- What are the objectives and how might these be achieved?
- What resources and skills will be needed?
- Who are the community leaders to speak to, how can they help and what do they need?
- How to bring in those other skills such as event planning, graphic design and event management?
- Who are the potential funders and partners?
- Where is the information held?
- Who will be interested in the outcomes?
- How to enthuse and inspire volunteers?
- How to structure the project organisation?

Where have these findings been shared?

These were shared by organising an exhibition, talks and trips.

The first trip to was to the Royal Pavilion in Brighton which was used as a hospital for wounded Indian soldiers. The group of 55 people also attended a commemoration service for Indian soldiers at Chatri Memorial, Patcham Downs where 53 Indian soldiers were cremated.

Wantage Hall when it was used by Royal Flying Corps as the School of Military Aeronautics.

“After war was declared 4 June 1914, The British War Council requested commonwealth help on 6 August 1914 and by 24 August the first contingent was ready to leave Bombay. They arrived in Marseilles on 26th September and were in the trenches by the end of October 1914. Inderpal’s research suggests that such a speedy response was a significant contribution to the war effort. They arrived at a time when both the French and British Armies were stretched to breaking point. But the Sikhs paid a high price as they had no winter clothes and were not trained in trench warfare or the new weaponry.

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A second trip took a group to memorials in Flanders and France. Memorial services were held at Neuve Chappelle and wreaths were laid at Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium. As you would expect these visits were an emotional experience for many. Inderpal shares that in one instance French neighbours at an Indian War Cemetery told the group that they were the first members of the Indian community to visit that cemetery. Also, three generations of their family tended the cemetery. It was a touching moment for all present.

Legacy of Valour – an award winning exhibition
Images from these visits and other collected items form the materials for the various talks and exhibitions. The Indian High Commissioner and the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire launched the exhibition at Reading Museum which ran from 2nd August – 13th September. The exhibition was highly successful with thousands of visitors and coverage in local and national press. Legacy of Valour was nominated for a Collections Trust Award and came second. A brilliant achievement for Inderpal and the project team.

What next?
So phase 1 of this mammoth project has been completed successfully and Inderpal has plans for phase 2. There will be many more talks and some mobile exhibitions. There are plans to publish a book in 2016 and develop the Legacy of Valour website.

Any benefits for other communities?
Inderpal will be working with Reading Museum to record the process so that other community groups and other museums will have a template on how these collaborations can be done, where the community and not the museum takes the lead. This ‘participatory’ approach and tool-kit will help communities to share stories from their cultural heritage.

Inderpal will continue to research and publicise his findings. This article should help inform many more people of the role of Sikh and other Indian soldiers in World War 1.

For more information contact: Inderpal Singh Dhanjal on paldhanjal@hotmail.com or visit www.legacyofvalour.org
Shirley Anstis
The Gifts of Imperfection, Let Go Of Who You Think You Are Supposed To Be and Embrace Who You Are

by Brené Brown

In the Gifts of Imperfection Brené Brown explores wholehearted living, what it looks like and how to live it. The key theme seems to be that we need courage to turn up and live our life despite any fear of judgement or shame. When we are ready to accept our imperfections then there are gifts waiting for us. These gifts are courage, compassion and connection.

She refers to the times when life overwhelms us and we sometimes dig deep and push through. Following her research findings Brené suggests making our D.I.G deep - Deliberate Inspired and Get Going. Be deliberate by using prayer, meditation or intuition. When we make an inspired choice, this can really nourish and recharge us for the task ahead. Once we are inspired then we need to get up and do it.

Whole hearted living is about living and loving with our whole hearts. By cultivating courage and compassion we know that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, cultivate what we need and let go of what holds us back?

As a researcher Brené wanted to find tools to help readers navigate into wholehearted living. She identifies various truths about what supports and what gets in the way. By practicing courage, we become courageous. By having compassion for ourselves we are able to find it for others. By understanding the difference between belonging and fitting in we appreciate our own worthiness and can build better connections. It is the opposite of being fearful, judgmental and alone.

Brené discovered the keys to wholehearted living - self compassion, acceptance and gratitude – but how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough. But how do we embrace imperfection, that we are enough.

On love, belonging and worthiness she wonders if we are stopped by the fear that we are never good enough or someone might say ‘who do you think you are?’ She encourages us to practice courage, compassion and connection. We are wired for connection; to be seen, heard and valued helps us to thrive physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The second part of the book offers a series of guideposts, with examples, stories and research data. The aim is to help us cultivate that which supports wholehearted living and let go of what does not. These are:

• cultivating authenticity, self compassion and letting go of perfectionism,
• cultivating a resilient spirit and letting go of numbing and powerlessness,
• cultivating gratitude and joy, letting go of scarcity,
• cultivating intuition and trusting faith, letting go of the need for certainty,
• cultivating creativity, letting go of comparison,
• cultivating play and rest, letting go of exhaustion and productivity as self-worth,
• cultivating calm and stillness, letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle,
• cultivating meaningful work, letting go of self doubt and supposed to,
• cultivating laughter, song and dance, letting go of not being cool and always in control.

This book could help you to live a more wholehearted life. 

Shirley Anstis

Vox Pop

Opinions on social welfare...

What is your opinion on benefits?

Shanice; Age: 23

The benefit system is good when given to the right people. A lot of people that don’t need benefits have it and those that do need it get it but still struggle or some don’t get it at all. It also depends on the type of benefits.

Shanzia; Age: 39

I think they’re needed and should be freely available; people are entitled to benefits as some can’t work or be forced to work. They should be educated and trained as job skills are more important than forcing a job seeker to do something they hate.

Shanice; Age: 23

Benefits is not enough in my opinion. No person especially with children can survive just on benefits, even if they find a suitable job that will be flexible with hours so you can still look after children and afford children, it is still hard. There is no system in place that helps people come off of benefits.

Darren; Age: 36

I think it’s fair that they give all the working peoples tax credit to people on benefits. Once you have a certain amount of children, which I’d say 2, you should go back into work. They are getting strict but with the wrong people. I’m just confused.

Aaron; Age: 35

I agree that we need a system in place to ensure that those at risk from falling below the poverty line can be supported at the most difficult times.
BIG DEBATE

Every October during Black History Month local entrepreneur and community activist Keith Seville hosts a Big Debate. It is based on the BBC Question Time format where local people can get face to face with their political representatives, ask difficult questions and share opinions. Alongside Keith as Chair the panel saw local councillors Rob White (Green Party) and Jo Lovelock (Labour). Below is an extract from the evening’s discussion.

Jo: I think it is a disgrace that in the 21st century in Reading we have children living in poverty. We had an event at the Town Hall 2 years ago which we call ‘tackling poverty’ trying to look at the moment for many people in Reading. It’s phenomenal how quickly food banks in Reading have grown from just a few parcels a week. In Reading the council has always had a low pay policy which has ensured that people get a reasonable wage but there are more services contracted out by the council. We have around 10,000 people on the housing list, many people are struggling to get on the housing list or even to rent a property.

Keith: One of the things I think people perhaps would like to hear is not so much all the reasons why things can’t happen but the reasons why things should.

Polly: What concerns me is I know that there is a family living in a shed with children. The reason it hasn’t been brought to social services is because they came in as refugees and they are worried that their children will taken away. They are paying a monthly rent for a flat to the people that have put them in the shed. It concerns me that these things are going unchecked and it makes me wonder what are the hidden issues that we have in Reading.

The second thing is about the living wage. I’m all for a living wage but what is the point of a living wage when you have to pay a pension out of it? If you look at vulnerable adults who employ a personal assistant to help them with their disability they have to fund the pension for that person who looks after them out of the money they are given to be paid to care for, so actually you’re not getting a living wage. What concerns me is that there is no joined up thinking. The second thing is about the bedroom tax is that not only credits are in low paid jobs. They were talking about taking away these tax credits come April 2016. The sad thing about the bedroom tax is that not only does it force people out of their local community but also there isn’t enough accommodation for people to move to, so it moves them to the private sector, and it’s not economical either.

Rob: To start off with poverty, it’s pretty tough out there at the moment for many people in Reading. We tend to moan to each other but it’s pretty tough out there at the moment for many people in Reading. Some of the things that we speak about here we can follow up and make sure it is acted upon.

Keith: One of the reasons why we have these events is because it is really important that our voices are heard. We had an event at the Town Hall 2 years ago which we call ‘tackling poverty’ trying to look at the moment for many people in Reading. It’s phenomenal how quickly food banks in Reading have grown from just a few parcels a week. In Reading the council has always had a low pay policy which has ensured that people get a reasonable wage but there are more services contracted out by the council. We have around 10,000 people on the housing list, many people are struggling to get on the housing list or even to rent a property.

Keith: Just to expand on what Polly said - I know people in Reading who are over housed; living in a house by themselves. They would like the company, so are the council doing anything to identify those people and try to find a way where they could house some of the 10,000 people that are homeless or on the housing list? Jo: I think it’s just those sorts of ideas that people like you should come to conferences about because you’re right. I don’t think any government since about 1965 has had a good housing policy. I was heartened when the refugee crisis was very much in the headlines and we held meetings with local groups like Refugee Support. They and we were getting offers from people that wanted to offer rooms in their home or a whole house for people to live in. It’s not straightforward because of safeguarding issues but let’s look at creative ways.

Rob: Yes, I don’t think politicians do an amazing job but it’s really helpful for people with ideas to come forward - we would love to have you involved with the green party. The situation you described with refugees living in the shed and scared to do anything about it, that’s rubbish and one of the many symptoms of the housing crisis in Reading. We do adopt a family in different areas and I had a case a few years ago.

Jeff: How is multiculturalism going to be remembered?

Rob: I’m not an expert on what we can do but I have black history month and we have things like the mural on the Central Club and I’m sure everyone has other ideas that you could take forward. In terms of what the Council does to integrate communities - in Reading East we have a lot of Nepalese people that have come recently after the battle over the inequality Ghurkha soldiers faced. I worked a lot with these people and we helped get things like an advice organisation, events and a translation service.

Jo: I’m a great believer in talking histories where people who are still with us do give their history of why they came here. You could do it with a whole range of different cultures and have photos so we have a record to remind us; we do have a records office and a museum in Reading. I still talk to historical people and ask what it was like to see things in the window like ‘no Blacks here’, so it wasn’t all positive, there was nasty things happening.

Polly: I believe that in the council budget there is £32,000,000 for the Central Club.

Jo: We had a hope that we had a group that was working with the council and as Keith said we still have £220,000 which is still in the capital program for use around Central, but unfortunately the group came back and said they didn’t think they were going to be able to raise the money, which is sad because they put a huge amount of effort into it.

Jeff: As a Black person where do we have to go? What is going on with the Central Club? Where is the money?

Keith: I believe that in the council budget there is £220,000 for the Central Club.

Jo: We had a hope that we had a group that was working with the council and as Keith said we still have £220,000 which is still in the capital program for use around Central, but unfortunately the group came back and said they didn’t think they were going to be able to raise the money, which is sad because they put a huge amount of effort into it.

We started a new process using Reading Voluntary Action who have been encouraging people to come forward and their Chief Executive has been inviting people to come in with ideas. The building is in a very poor state but the complicated but nice bit is that we want to save the mural. David: Central was raided by police and it was raided because there was an idea there was drugs on the premises. To this date no one has been brought to trial and no drugs found. Should the council not have handed Central back to the community once there was no evidence?

Jo: I can’t say I didn’t know about the accusations because I did but there was a very strong police
recommendation that we had to close it down and nobody regrets it more than me. There have been attempts that were optimistic about finding a way to get enough capital together. There are some people that thought we should just knock the building down and get on with something else there and we have resisted that, partly because of the commitment to the community and to preserve the mural as part of Reading’s heritage.

Contributor: I met this lady, Julia Titus, and she has put on a campaign to raise a pound per brick to contribute towards the renovation of the Central Club and its £220,000.

Erma: When the police raided Central they shut it down and locked it off to the Black community, so why is it that the responsibility for raising the money to repair the damage that was not done by the Black community is put in the hands of the Black community in order to get their building back?

Jo: I understand why you might think that but the sad fact is we are where we are and what we are trying to do is to find a way to sort it out. We are struggling to find money to provide statutory school places so there are a whole lot of groups that would like us to spend money that we just simply don’t have so we have to find a creative way of doing that and sort a solution once and for all.

Keith: I think people should take it on board that the council is not interested in opening the Central Club, so what we need to do is move on, forget asking them to open it or give us money, we need something for ourselves. If we want a space then let’s build a place.

Rob: I guess there is a feeling of real injustice burning within everyone against some of the history and some of that seems to be directed at the labour administration that have been running the council. I’m happy to work with anyone, I can ask questions for you, you can all do it yourself but I’m happy to help.

Angela: In the paper there was an article that said more young Black and mixed race children were being excluded from schools; can you tell me what has happened and what is being done about it?

Jo: They got someone from the outside to do independent work with the council and she was due to report back but that hasn’t come through yet.

Keith: The consultation took place and we are about 3 months behind with the report. I’ve emailed the councillors and officers that were involved and there was some hiccup with the report getting out and they are still pursuing getting it out.

Rob: I spoke to a manager in the area of education a few days ago on exclusions and he said that there was a separate piece of work a little while ago. They appointed a virtual head for the children who had been excluded. He told me the councillors reduced exclusions by one-third across all groups so exclusions have come down and I guess there will be a follow up in the action plan from the report.

Howard: What are the council doing about rogue landlords?

Jo: Just this week in Reading we had to fine a landlord over £20,000. I’m not saying all council properties are perfect but there is a program of replacing kitchens and bathrooms over a period of time in council properties. We do have some regulation and prosecute when we can.

Rob: It is a real problem. As a councillor I can pick up case work of any housing issues, council houses or private rented; just raise it with your councillor and they can pass that on and get someone to have a look and they have the power to take action.

As you can see from the above extract the meeting offered the chance for a lively exchange. A few people also approached the councillors with their personal challenges and these have been followed through.

Photographs: © Raj KC
Chair of the Paddington Survivor’s group she can pass on concerns to senior people in the industry. She recalls recently noticing that there were no safety cards in her carriage and passing this on because “if we tell them people won’t know what to do” if there is an incident.

Pam and I met for about an hour to catch up on what matters to her and how she spends her time given that crucial experience in 1999.

So how did you become a professional speaking?

I wanted to get back to work but my health stops me. I also wanted something flexible. I trained to be a project manager but then bumped into someone who suggested speaking. I don’t like doing things by half so took a year to be mentored by one of the best and he helped me to make my talk more relevant for my audience.

I recall when I heard you speak how surprised I was by the detail you shared regarding the rail crash. As a councillor I know that if you tap into any memory it could affect your emotional state, but you were able to deliver your talk with great composure. How have you been able to do that? What’s it like retelling the story?

Yes, that used to be hard then post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression could kick in but I’m too aware that life is too short not to do stuff. It is not feasible for me to slow down. It only happens about twice a year so I am prepared to have 50 weeks when I can do fantastic work and possibly 2 weeks when I’m not well. I came off anti depressants 5 years ago as it stopped me from experiencing not just sorrow but also joy. Once off the medication then I worked on my coping strategies. I still have a psychiatrist but I haven’t needed medication for 5 years.

How is your relationship with your family?

Family comes first. If work conflicts, then I’ll weigh up what is more important in life. The choice is not materialistic or about money but who matters most in the greater scheme of things.

How do you cope with stress given what you’ve experienced?

If anything stresses me now I ask two questions - (i) Has someone died? (ii) Is anyone injured?

Then I reflect and deal with the problem.

What’s exciting for you at the moment?

I can’t take stuff with me so I want to see the world and enjoy life. Travelling has become much more important to me and pushes me out of my comfort zone. I am genuinely interested in other countries and like to really get to know a place. I find when I am abroad I get adopted as a local. I sometimes connect with university students learning English and see a completely different part of the country than if I just stayed in the tourist areas. I like having a more global perspective.

Where have you travelled to?

I have been to France, Russia, Egypt, New Zealand, America, Canada and India and Tunisia. I am sticking pins in a map on my wall and it’s getting busy.

What is your family background?

My Mother is from Fiji and she left when I was a baby and came to England. My birth certificate said I was born here so it’s a little confusing and I explore it more in my book. I’ve grown up with my mother, sister and step-dad. My mum and step-dad are alive and I see them often although my mum has now remarried. I explored some of this in my book and when my mum read the first draft she was upset but we’ve since cleared the air. I am used to getting on with it and that’s how it feels with the crash. I have rebuilt my life. Teenage Pam experienced lots of angst from not knowing who her dad is but it doesn’t matter anymore.

Is it hard to be in a relationship?

Well I am self reliant. I am open to relationships but not yet found ‘the one’ to complement my life in a meaningful way. If they can’t add anything to my life, then what is the point?

How does it feel to be a role model?

I am delighted if people see me as a role model. I was very aware to stay in life and in business. My book From Behind the Mask is available from all major shops and online. For more info, check out www.pamwarren.co.uk

Shirley Anstis

Today Magazine
Photograph: © Monika Schaible

Photograph: © Dáyó Ake

Mary Martin, London

Nigeria, Eyota Backstage

Fashion
Angola - Soraya de Piedade Backstage
EAST READING FESTIVAL
June 2015

Photographs: © Raj KC
I had not expected to interview Grenadian singer/songwriter - Soca King - Brother B until I bumped into a contact of his and the possibility presented itself. We met in Reading to talk about his song writing, his passion for what he does and representing his island on a world stage.

NAACP image award nominee (2013) Brother B is based in Grenada but like many musicians he travels the world to perform to his fans. He was nominated as a Role Model in the World Music Album category for his album ‘Diversionary’ alongside our very own Estelle and her album ‘Wonderful Life’. He often performs at Tudor Rose in London and various other venues during the lead up to Notting Hill Carnival. This year was no different and he performed with the well-known Trinidadian musician Machel Montano.

How long have you been in the music industry? I was passionate about music since age 11 (1995). I was influenced by Jamaican music and listened to dub music in the early 1990s. I was influenced by reggae stars like Capleton, Lucky Dube and Bounty Killer, and Grenadian performers like Papa Jerry. I am all about the lyrics – like Papa Jerry. I am all about the lyrics –

What's helped you to come from this tiny island and represent Grenada on the world stage. You remind me of Karani James who is representing the island too through his Olympic acceptance gave me encouragement. This created a momentum.

What came next? In 2008 I launched the ‘More Fire’ album and it was nominated for various awards. Two tracks won awards in the UK. You have to write cleverly for Soca – ‘stoop before you conquer’, I just wanted to get my music into peoples’ hands and the hard times at the start has made me who I am today. I began with just putting stuff onto blank cd’s and then eventually would put my face then more images.

Where do you record your albums? After many years of hard work, I now have a recording studio in Grenada and there is space for others to write and record too. In 2014 I managed my first young talent and it was a wonderful indescribable feeling. We need to look after the roots for the tree to survive.

Do you sometimes look back on what you have achieved? I tend not to sit and look back because I know where I want to get to and don’t want to waste time on that. I am always getting ready for the next thing. If you look back, you don’t see what is ahead.

Where else have you performed? As well as Notting Hill carnival I’ve also done Soca Frenzy in England. I travel to perform in Toronto, Montreal, Miami, New York, other parts of the UK and other Caribbean islands.

What sort of lyrics do you like and write? I like realistic lyrics that are positive and I write about things people can relate to. I’ve finally realised that words have power. I take time and care to compose – when you become a role model you can use music to teach

Tell me about the music of your youth I’d hear it playing from the street corners and wanted to go out but my mum was strict so I couldn’t go far from the house. As I got older I started to dance at events and would take any opportunity to perform. At that time, I would perform for a snack. When you love something it finds a way to love you back – the passion you put in comes back to you.

When did you start to compose? I started to write for the St. Mark’s day event in Grenada. I was 21 and started to compose Soca (social commentary) songs. I took part in lots of singing competitions to keep improving. I believe in myself. I have drive and momentum.

How did you get the stage name or nickname ‘Brother B’? I was the second child and therefore was a brother. The ‘B’ is for brave.

When did you launch? I launched my first album ‘Explosion’ in 2007. I was just trying it out before then and kept getting a positive response. I am grateful to God for that – peoples’ acceptance gave me encouragement. This created a momentum.

Do you sometimes look back on what you have achieved? I tend not to sit and look back because I know where I want to get to and don’t want to waste time on that. I am always getting ready for the next thing. If you look back, you don’t see what is ahead.

Where else have you performed? As well as Notting Hill carnival I’ve also done Soca Frenzy in England. I travel to perform in Toronto, Montreal, Miami, New York, other parts of the UK and other Caribbean islands.

What is it like for you to perform? I pray before I go on stage. I am passionate and I really get into the performance. “By the sweat of thy brow” it says. I am relatable to fans and they can see and feel my energy. I always want to give a good performance. I only sing what I feel and I write all my songs.

Would you like to work with others? Yes, I am open to singing a song written by someone else but it hasn’t happened yet. My thing is “stoop before you conquer”, I just wanted to get my music into peoples’ hands and the hard times at the start has made me who I am today. I began with just putting stuff onto blank cd’s and then eventually would put my face then more images.

Where do you record your albums? After many years of hard work, I now have a recording studio in Grenada and there is space for others to write and record too. In 2014 I managed my first young talent and it was a wonderful indescribable feeling. We need to look after the roots for the tree to survive.

I understand you are very generous and give back a lot to your community Yes, I donate books and stuff to local children and schools. This was there from the beginning in 2008 and every year I do something. I present graduation certificates and try to organise various singing competitions and talent shows to keep the kids away from gambling and the drugs.

More Info: You can find out more by following Brother B on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ Brother-B-68874487984/ or on twitter https://twitter.com/reabrotherb B

Shirley Anstis
Edva Connor

“Green is the colour of healing”... Edva gives us some insights into the life of an artist

Can you tell us a bit more about what you do?
My name is Edva, I’m classed as a multi-talented artist because I do more than one type of art, for me it’s not that much of a big deal because my energy leads me to a range of things. I've done fashion designing, shoes and clothes design, paintings, ceramic sculptures, clay sculptures and a few pieces in wood.

Where did it all start from, what inspired you?
My dad inspired me. He was one of those people who liked to take his time “Green is the colour of healing”… Edva gives us some insights into the life of an artist
He would sand everything down by hand before painting it. I would help him and watch him; I liked the way he brought detail to everything. My mum inspired me on the sculpture side; she would buy me things that you had to build and design so I learnt from there. This all started when I was about 6 years old.

Do you remember the first bit of art work you did?
I don’t actually remember but I know my first gift I got for doing art, it was cream crackers. Every time I did a painting my uncle John Hodge would give me some money for it.

Did you go to art school or study art?
I was a very late student and that’s where it started going wrong actually. When I became an adult student in college I found out that they couldn’t handle me, they would tell me things that I already knew so it caused a bit of friction. I had a lot of trouble at college.

Have you had any highlights so far in your artistic work?
Unfortunately, because I’m a very private person the only highlights I’ve had is in myself and people who know I do art. I’ve never really showed my work to people so I’ve not had outside interest. When I do paintings or music or something it’s really enjoyable. The prize I get is to feel good in myself and what I’ve found out in my life is that nothing competes with feeling good on the inside, no one can take that from you and it’s yours to share.

Can you tell me one strength and a weakness you have?
One of my strengths is to never ever give up. I have an indomitable will mixed with a strict upbringing. My weakness is that I was born into society that has been using me for a very long time and I just wasn’t aware of it. I didn’t realise that although we get fobbed off in some sort of way people are secretly learning from us. They keep us out of something but use our stuff. So my weakness at first was not seeing that and I didn’t know how to price my work and that sort of thing, but I’ve woken up now.

How do people in the community respond when they see your work?
I've had mixed comments about my work, people seem to be shocked when they see my work because I use the colour green quite a lot. At first it felt like a bit of a put down. I was showing people the world, this is the foundation for all life and we should respect it. Those who love nature find healing in my work.

What do you do when you’re not doing art?
Art as a whole is not a hobby for me, when I’m not painting I put my energy into music, fashion design, photography, sculpture, computer art or singing. It may seem like I do many things but I have to follow the vibe which expresses itself in many forms. I have been writing a short play for a film which I hope will bring all the elements together and show what I’m trying to put across.

I used to walk for miles in fields around Berkshire where there is no one. I don’t do it as much now because I don’t have dogs anymore. To me green is the colour of healing; I get fed with some kind of energy and it comes out in my art. In everything I do I discover new things and new ways of living. No limits.

Where do you want to be in the next few years?
I’m very much into peace and quiet, I’d love to be somewhere hot and would love to be somewhere that leans more towards nature, less concrete and more green. If I could achieve that I would be happy, some sort of art shop or gallery would be nice to sell other art work as well as mine.
What would you like to be remembered for?
One day my son brought a puppy home, a very naughty one. He started to get out of hand so I took him to the fields with me to give him space to express himself. After a few weeks I noticed the dog had changed, this kept me going to the fields more often than I would normally. It didn’t just heal him it also had a good effect on me too. It was from there I began to pick up wood and take photographs, I wanted to capture the essence of this good feeling. I want people to look at my work and feel what I’m showing them, explore it. Art is only the copy of the real thing, go out there and explore your world and find your expression.

Do you put a value to your paintings?
When I started painting it had nothing to do with selling, it was just me expressing the private things I was feeling. What happened is I put a lot of time and effort into it and society was watching and came into my life. First, Mrs Marva Small encouraged me to attend university. Time becomes energy and energy becomes money, you have to pay rent and bills, so that’s where the clothes and shoe design came into play. This is the commercial side to my art. When it comes to making movies this is the department I will be pushing forward. As far as the art paintings and sculpture are concerned it’s not about the money, this is where I am inspired.

Is there anything else you would like to add?
In this town called Reading there is something really wrong, I am not the only talented person here. Reading needs a permanent art and music outlet. Art is that element that lifts the soul of the community. Let’s put the love back in Reading.

For a short period of time I will be taking on some commission work. If anyone is interested in having some work done please contact me on 07526884007.

Shanice Medford
Today Magazine discusses animation with Shannel Joseph

What is animation?
Animation is moving pictures; you do art work and make pictures move. It’s basic cartoon.

How did you get involved with animation?
My youngest son spent a lot of time watching TV; so I used to say I want to make my own. It inspired me to make my own.

What is your role with animation?
I do workshops at schools so it’s teaching the children to create their own animations. They would do their own drawings and I’ll teach them the basics of putting it together and then they get a DVD showing the work.

How do you juggle your work life with your personal life?
I prefer to work in a team I think, but at the moment I’m independent. I’m on my own at the moment because I feel the passion and someone might not feel it, so when I do invite people on board they might not feel it or see it as seriously as I do.

How are you promoting Animation Expressions?
At the moment I take a booklet and a DVD to the schools and tell them I will come back to them once they have watched it, then they usually sign up. I started Facebook a few months ago and I’m getting used to how to use it.

Tell us a bit more about the booklet and your DVD?
The booklet and DVD show the basics of putting it together and then they get bombarded with so many outside mail, so that’s why they didn’t get back to me. Later on I eventually rang my children’s school and told them what I do. They personally got in touch with me and I had an interview. They now recommend me to other schools. It really helps to get to know lots of people who also know you as well.

Have you undertaken any training for animation?
I did an animation course while I was at university – it was a challenge being a mum at the same time - but I got a B.A. in Animation anyway and I’ve done a short business course for 10 weeks.

What did you do when people say ‘no’?
When I first started I actually wrote letters to different schools saying what it is that I do. I had no letterhead, no business name nothing. I just said this is what I want to do. None of the schools got back to me so I started feeling a bit down because that was the first time I approached any schools but apparently they get bombarded with so many outside mail, so that’s why they didn’t get back to me. Later on I eventually rang my children’s school and told them what I do. They personally got in touch with me and I had an interview. They now recommend me to other schools. It really helps to get to know lots of people who also know you as well.

What has been one of your biggest highlights so far?
I did an Olympics 2012 series for Slough, Langley and Britwell libraries. We were in the newspaper for that because it was very successful.

Have you any challenging experiences?
No, not really, only when people say ‘no’.

Do you prefer to work in a team or independently?
I prefer to work in a team I think, but at the moment I’m independent. I’ve always liked writing poetry from a child’s viewpoint when their mother is having a new baby. It is to help the siblings understand or get excited about the arrival of a new baby. I would like the book to go through Sure Start and be in libraries. It is quite an innocent and universal book.

Do you recommend the Animation Expressions as seriously as I do.
It’s basic cartoon.

Tell us a bit more about the booklet and your DVD?
The booklet and DVD about 2 years ago. The booklet I had to do for the children’s school when I visited them. I put it together myself and it explains what the business is about. The DVD shows a compilation of the children’s work. When I leave the booklet at a school, it gives the parents a chance to have a look through it as well as the website.

Have you any experience with working with special needs children?
Yes, I have lots of experience working with children with special needs. I’ve always liked writing poetry from a child’s viewpoint when their mother is having a new baby. It is to help the siblings understand or get excited about the arrival of a new baby. I would like the book to go through Sure Start and be in libraries. It is quite an innocent and universal book.

What is your next project?
I’m doing a 12-week course starting from this September. Each person pays £5 per session but you pay for the whole 12 weeks upfront. At the end of it there is an award evening at the Burnham Village Hall on the 23rd December. The children are split into 4 age group categories: -
1. Tiny toons which is open from 4.30-5.30pm on Tuesdays for 0-7 years.
2. Animaniacs which is open from 4.30-5.30pm on Thursdays ages 8-10.
3. Screenagers which is open from 5.30-6.30 on Tuesdays for 11+.
4. Older and bolder which is open from 11am-12pm on Thursdays for ages 60+.
I want to work with special needs children during the day as well, working with a range of diversity - it will be a very therapeutic session.

Contact Info:
Facebook: animationexpressions
Web: www.animationexpressions.com
Email: info@animationexpressions.com
Contact number: 07905664415

Shanice Medford
Visiting Malta

Today Magazine spoke to Fiona Carney to find out what it’s like as an expat living in Malta. Below is her insider’s view alongside some of her beautiful pictures.

The Maltese archipelago is made up of Malta, Gozo and Comino. The capital of Malta is Valletta. There are 359 Catholic churches on the islands. It was a British dependant until it gained independence on 21 September 1964, then joined the European Union on 1 May, 2004.

Geography
Malta is at the centre of the Mediterranean, 93 km south of Sicily and 288 km north of Africa – two very different cultures. It is the size of the Isle of Wight. It is quite arid but has its own beauty. You get used to the incompleteness of buildings when you are there. The northeast of the country is more densely populated with people and buildings. The north is affluent from business. The south is less affluent with more farming and fishing.

Community
There is a great sense of community in Malta. The Maltese are open and accepting of others whilst being protective of their own culture. Like many people from small countries many Maltese are in relationships with non-Maltese and live abroad so most people have families in other countries. Socially, families dine out together and it is usual to see children and their parents out in the evening. There are pubs but these cater more for tourists. People also like to be outside in the various squares or along the promenade.

Food
The food has several influences. There is an Italian influence with ice cream and pizzas. The local Maltese favourite is rabbit and you see a lot of rabbit meat in the butchers. Local produce includes goats cheese, green olives, honey and prickly pear. The latter can be made into alcohol or eaten as a vegetable. The locally brewed beer is called CISK. Favourites include Pastizzi filled with cheese or peas, or a bread called Fira which can be filled with tuna, beans and onion.

Transport
Since becoming part of the EU, the distinctive owner-driver yellow or orange bus has been replaced as part of a move to improve quality. The Spanish-run, Malta Public Transport, now serves Malta and Gozo. There are also ‘hop on, hop off’ tourist buses.
Language
Most Maltese are bilingual. English language is used in schools and in business whilst some young people learn Italian. The Maltese language itself is a blend of Italian, English and French on an Arabic base. Here are 3 Maltese words that show the different language influences:
• Hello = bongu (French)
• Thanks = grazzi (Italian)
• Welcome = merħba (Arabic)

Tourism
The Maltese population is very welcoming to tourists and the area is very affected by the tourist cycle. Many restaurants and shops that are open between April to November are closed over the winter months so the country can feel very different if you are there from one season to the next. Malta receives 1.6 million tourists per year – 3 times more tourists visit than there are residents!

Shirley Anstis

Photographs: © Eileen Fletcher, Equinox Photography
Reading Mencap

The local voice of learning disability

Reading Mencap is a local charity that has been supporting children and adults with learning disabilities and autism, and their families, for more than 50 years. The quality of life for people with a learning disability has greatly improved since the 1960s, however, they still encounter barriers to living happy and fulfilled lives, as they often face discrimination, isolation and poverty. Reading Mencap exists to help people to overcome these barriers.

What is a learning disability?
Despite the fact that there are 1.5 million people in the UK with a learning disability, many of us are not sure what a learning disability is and often confuse it with mental health problems. A learning disability is a life-long, reduced intellectual ability occurring before, during, or soon after birth, when the brain is still developing. In some cases it can develop in childhood. People with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate, so they often need support with everyday activities, such as reading a letter, catching a bus or preparing a meal. Some physical and genetic conditions, such as Down’s syndrome, can mean a person will have a learning disability as well. Every person’s experience of learning disability is unique to them. It is important to remember that people with a learning disability are individuals with their own emotions, opinions and dreams.

Supporting families with information, advice and advocacy
Reading Mencap has a specialist team of Family Advisers who provide practical and emotional support to families and individuals with any issue they have relating to learning disability, whether this is applying for benefits, finding suitable housing, accessing social care and respite, or managing health issues. Families can struggle on a daily basis, having to deal with fighting for the right special educational provision, balancing a job with caring responsibilities or trying to make ends meet. We also have multilingual, culturally aware Family Advisers for Black and Minority Ethnic families who may find it difficult to communicate in English and get their voices heard by statutory services. The Family Advisers will go out to people’s homes to give them tailored support for as long as they need it. People can also call our helpline or come to our drop-in centre on Alexandra Road.

“I’m not aware that there are other organisations that can give this level of support.”
(Liz – Parent-carer)

“The Family Advisers are non-judgemental, just lovely – there are not many places you can go without being judged.”
(Nina – Parent-carer)

Leisure activities
It is a shocking fact that “1 in 4 people with a learning disability spend less than one hour a day outside their homes” (Royal Mencap, 2012), making them lonely and physically inactive. Reading Mencap wants to support as many people with a learning disability as possible to get out, experience new things, develop their skills, participate in their community and meet new people. We run a regular programme of activity groups at our centre for different age ranges, supported by volunteers. These include monthly karaoke and disco nights, children’s drama and youth clubs and a singing club. Trips to the bowling alley, swimming pools and parks are made possible with our minibus. Family carers also benefit from the clubs, as they get a much needed break from caring while their dependant is having fun and making friends. During school holidays we organise trips for young carers aged 8 to 16, who are siblings of a person with a learning disability. Recent outings have included Portsmouth historic dockyard and trampolining at Gravity Force, in Camberley.

“Coffee Club gets me out of the house and stops me feeling miserable.”
(David – Adult with a learning disability)

“I’m really happy because I love coming here every week.”
(Sarah – Young adult with a learning disability)

The Mencap Enables Project
This is a day time activity service for adults with moderate and severe learning disabilities who are unable to work due to the level of their disabilities. The project takes place for three full days every week at Reading Mencap’s centre. Being able to have choices and be in control of what we do is something we might take for granted, but adults with learning disabilities often have little say in how they live their lives, so this project was set up in 2013 to empower them to make their own decisions and gain independence. Staff and volunteers, support the group to work together to make decisions.
about what activities they want to do. The activities they have chosen are focused on health and wellbeing: canoeing, yoga, Zumba, tai chi. These physical activities were previously inaccessible to them as they had never been able to do them before. As a result of trying something new and enjoying themselves these adults have gained in confidence and improved their fitness levels. The project has been so popular that we are planning to add a fourth day.

“I can’t believe I have been canoeing, it was so good. My family will be proud of me.” (Robert – ME member)

“I can’t believe the change in Sam, he seems so much happier and is very proud of his achievements on this Project.” (Jane – Parent-Carer)

How can you help?

While Reading Mencap is affiliated to the national Mencap charity, we are an independent charity in our own right and receive no financial support from national Mencap. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get funding to cover the costs of our work. We are the only charity in Reading giving holistic, life-long support to people with learning disabilities, so without us, many individuals and families would not be getting the support they so desperately need. Please get involved by coming to our fundraising events, such as our annual rock and indie music festival in April (www.areyoulistening.org.uk), volunteering at a club or joining our monthly 50-50 lottery where you will be in with a chance of winning a cash prize (see www.readingmencap.org.uk). If you would like more of a challenge, you could run the Reading Half Marathon for us on 3rd April 2016! Like our Facebook Events page to keep up to date with what’s on.

To enquire about using any of our services or to find out about volunteering with us, you can use any of the following methods:
Phone: 0118 966 2518
Email: office@readingmencap.org.uk
Facebook: www.facebook.com/readingmencapnews;
www.facebook.com/readingmencapevents
Twitter: @readingmencap
Website: www.readingmencap.org.uk

*Names have been changed
Horoscope - Autumn/Winter 2015

ARIES: (21 March - 19 April)
While you know it’s not the best time, you say how you really feel at an important meeting. Even though it adds to the tension, those involved respect your opinion. An evening out with friends gets a little rowdy. Try to stay calm and keep others under control. Virgo plays an important role.

LIBRA: (23 September - 22 October)
While you hate to be rude to others, it’s the only way you’re going to get people to stop bothering you. You have a lot to do, and people are counting on you. You need to do what it takes to be productive. That special someone calls you. Don’t be nervous; it’s nothing serious. Leo plays a key role.

TAURUS: (20 April - 20 May)
You end up being the bully when it comes to a family problem. No one wants to listen to reason, so you just take control of the situation. While everyone will be mad at you, they soon realise that you did the right thing. A close friend opens up to you. Be there for him or her.

SCORPIO: (23 October - 21 November)
While you normally don’t wear your heart on your sleeve, you just can’t help it this month. You meet an intriguing stranger. Be yourself and you’re sure to win his or her heart. A friend needs your help. Though it comes at a bad time, you have to be supportive.

GEMINI: (21 May - 20 June)
You’re in the right place at the right time at the autumn event. You're going to be bad. Libra plays a key role.

SAGITTARIUS: (22 November - 21 December)
Keep your mind on the task at hand this season. It’s very important, so don’t let your thoughts wander. Stay focused because others are relying on you to get the job done. A family evening doesn’t work out. Don’t get upset, there will be many more opportunities later in the season.

CANCER: (21 June - 22 July)
You end up being the bully when it comes to a family problem. No one wants to listen to reason, so you just take control of the situation. While everyone will be mad at you, they soon realise that you did the right thing. A close friend opens up to you. Be there for him or her.

CAPRICORN: (22 December - 19 January)
You're in the right place at the right time at the autumn event. You're going to be bad. Libra plays a key role.

AQUARIUS: (20 January - 18 February)
You’re in the right place at the right time at the autumn event. You’re in the right place at the right time at the end of this season. Your good nature impresses an influential person, who offers you a business proposition. Look into the facts before saying yes. Libra plays a key role.

CAPRICORN: (22 December - 19 January)
Don’t be shy when meeting an interesting person later this season. He or she can help you with a financial situation. However, they have to get to know you first. A close friend needs you to be his or her date for a business dinner. Say yes; it’s not going to be bad.

LEO: (23 July - 22 August)
You are the center of attention at a work function. You end up being the bully when it comes to a family problem. No one wants to listen to reason, so you just take control of the situation. While everyone will be mad at you, they soon realise that you did the right thing. A close friend opens up to you. Be there for him or her.

SAGITTARIUS: (22 November - 21 December)
Keep your mind on the task at hand this season. It’s very important, so don’t let your thoughts wander. Stay focused because others are relying on you to get the job done. A family evening doesn’t work out. Don’t get upset, there will be many more opportunities later in the season.

For solutions, please visit our website: http://www.todaymag.co.uk/puzzle-solutions-autumn-winter-2015
Devana Care is an independent provider of supported living and domiciliary care (CQC registered for the activity of ‘personal care’) offering services to all ages.

info@devanacare.org.uk
0118 380 0822
Shared your organ donation decision yet?

If you have decided to donate your organs when you die, join the NHS Organ Donor Register and tell your family. They may be asked to agree to donation taking place, so don't leave them with the burden of guessing what you would have wanted.

Join the Register, share your decision, save lives

To register and for more information visit: organdonation.nhs.uk or call 0300 123 23 23