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START AUDIO

Interviewer: So the first thing I want to know is, how familiar you are with repairing and reusing things? Because from your email, I felt that you are somehow used to it, or at least you are interested in reusing things. Can you tell me more about that?

Respondent: I think due to my mum, really, and my dad, because my mum is a very avid fixer and mender of things. And you know, reuses, and uses many, many times over and adapts things just- so I've always watched her doing that since I was little, and it was normal.

My dad as well, he was very clever with his hands. More of a kind of, I suppose a bodger. But made things and created stuff for certain jobs. So I don't really do as much because I've got more money, I think, and it's sometimes easier to buy things. But as I get older, I'm gradually more interested in fixing things and things working for longer.

So yes. It's kind of in the blood, really.

Interviewer: Do you think that having more money is- is it one part of the equation, but on the other hand, do you feel that things are more affordable these days than they used to be?

Respondent: Some- yes. In one way more affordable, and quicker. They arrive quicker. You don't have to go out and- you know, you can have it brought to your door. So that kind of promotes a bit of laziness. Not laziness, but it's sometimes just quicker to go, "Oh right, okay. I need that now." Click, done.

You know, I suffer from quite a bad memory, so if I don't do things sometimes immediately, I forget. And the next time I go to use whatever this item is, I haven't got it because it's broken and I should have ordered it.

So yes. But also having, probably- I don't have kids or a very grand lifestyle. But I don't have many things to use my money on apart from what I want, if you know what I mean. So yes, I suppose having a bit more money and things being easier to get. But there's always a guilt aspect about that.

Also, I- because I work in film and TV props, I buy props. So I spend a lot of money for work and there's always stuff left over. So I always end up coming home with things. It could be furniture, it could be bedding, it could be soft furnishings. It could be all sorts of different things.

So I always have a lot of stuff around. I own a lot of items, so adjusting and adapting these things to what I need is much better than just buying it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about your work? What is it that you do for TV and how that relates with these objects? Just out of curiosity.

Respondent: I usually work on dramas or films. And I work with the designer and the art director and break down the script. You get a script and you break it down into what you would need to buy and

hire and make to create scenes in certain locations or in studios.

So it's my job to go and purchase or hire or just find these items specifically. So you basically spend a lot of money, but you also do a lot of research, and digging around and finding odd things. Going down rabbit holes to get to specific items. If one supplier doesn't have it, you have to ask, and he might lead you to somebody else, and somebody else.

So you can go down a chain of people, of suppliers, to find what you need. Sometimes what you need doesn't even have a name, or it just is a specific colour or- because you work with the designer and the director. Certain props might be really important to them. So you have to fulfil many, many, many briefs.

Mostly at the end of each job there is a prop store of items. Unless it's a continuing drama or job carrying on and they can store it, most jobs will get rid of everything. And there's usually tens of thousands of pounds worth of...

It could be anything. It could be domestic items. It could be specialist items. And because I don't like to see things getting thrown away, skipped, then I always end up bringing stuff home.

Interviewer: Yes, it makes sense. Do you know if this is a- is there any, I don't know, structured system for perhaps bigger studios to get rid of stuff? Have you heard of anything like that? Or is it usually informal and the people who are involved and that getting the stuff for themselves?

Respondent: It's different in different areas of the country. Down in London, there's huge prop houses. Like, enormous warehouses. And you can go and hire anything. You can hire a pencil. You can hire an aeroplane. So people who do my job in London almost can walk into this one building, sit down, drink coffee all day, and then occasionally walk into the warehouse and go, "I'll take that, that, that, that and that."

So that's it. So they're just hiring it, and it goes back to the hire company after, which is much more cost effective, and less environmentally destructive.

People like me in the north, there's a little bit of- there are some prop stores in the north of England. Manchester, Newcastle. There's one or two small ones in Glasgow. But in Scotland mainly you're buying stuff or hiring it from private companies who don't specialise in prop hire. But there are a lot of companies that will hire, but there's not really a kind of system to get rid of stuff.

There are some people who have set up prop staging, recycling companies. But I think it's a very harsh, very difficult thing to kind of-

Interviewer: I imagine. I imagine it should be low quantities and a huge diversity of materials.

Respondent: Yes. Yes, because every single job is so different. Everybody wants something exactly to their specification. And it's almost more expensive to reuse and readjust things than it is to just build it from new. So yes. There's a lot of waste in-

Interviewer: Do you think if I look into prop houses I will find something? Because that's interesting, as a kind of example of hiring objects instead of buying them. For my research it can somehow relate to circular economy. So I would be interested in looking for maybe prop houses, or how do you think I should go about-

Respondent: Prop houses, yes. So there's the main ones in London. There's a huge one called Superhire. Most of the prop houses have a speciality. You know, they'll have a particular style. Superhire is like domestic. You know, you could go in there, you could have pictures, you could have cushions, you could have ornaments, lamps, bedding. Mostly domestic, and there's a few bits of maybe pub things and...

They'll have it all in areas. If you want to go and have a look at the interior, pub interior furniture you'll go and find it over there, or- and then there's other places like Trading Post. They do massive kind of really big exterior stuff. Like it could be medieval, it could be Egyptian. It basically is big lumpy things that you could have outside.

It could be roadworks equipment, it could be wooden barrels, metal gates. You know, huge, industrial kind of pieces.

Interviewer: Nice.

Respondent: So, there's lots of- and then there are other companies that just do fabrics, curtains, drapes. Yes, there's lots of- I have a couple of books, actually, that if you'd be interested, I could lend you and you could look up all the props companies. There's some guy- there are places that do cars, just vehicle...

You could get almost anything you want on hire. In London, for sure. If companies up here are big enough and they have enough money, they'll send a buyer to London to hire everything, and then they'll just bring it all up in a truck. And then they'll send it all back.

The whole industry is extremely wasteful. But I think the worst costs are in transport. There are costs in props in our department, but there are worst costs. And they try to- like BBC and stuff, they try to adhere to this kind of thing called Albert, which is a carbon footprint project that they try and adhere to these rules. But I think they kind of probably bend the rules.

Interviewer: Yes.

Respondent: They like to say that they're [____ 0:11:35]. But in reality, it's not that easy.

Interviewer: Yes, it's still a kind of horizon. Okay, let's move to the exercise. Can you tell me a bit about what you are trying to repair and what were your impressions?

Respondent: Okay. So what I'm trying to repair and rebuild is a little, tiny little kind of shed cupboard, which is outside my kitchen window. And I have- this is for my gardening tools and stuff. I have a tiny tool-shed, but I need a separate shed for my garden tools.

It was just- if you looked at it, it was just a little three sided with a top. And it was sitting on a wooden- it had a little wooden

floor on it which was kind of sitting on bricks, because it's a wet area. It rains out there so the previous guy who'd built it had sat it on bricks.

So when I got that area reconstructed, because I got new windows in and I lost the backdoor. I thought, "Right, I'll put the original cupboard back, but I'll bring it round the corner," so it's like at 90 degrees. "And I'll use that as a bit of-" because there's a cat flap in the other wall. "I'll use that as a bit of a shelter for the cat flap so that the wind doesn't come through there. You know, blah, blah, blah. We'll just knock it all together and it'll be amazing."

So I've been using scraps of wood, stuff that I've got lying around, stuff that I'm scrounging off family. It's much more difficult than I realised, because I'm working with slightly wonky angles and different elevations. I've got an old backdoor step to figure in, and I've got a bit of a windowsill to figure in. You'll see when I send you pictures of it.

And because I'm not a- I haven't had to do any technical drawing or anything construction-wise for a long time, it's really pushing my skills. Which I'm a bit frustrated about, because I trained as a furniture maker, so I [____ 0:14:18]. But I just don't- but it's been a long, long time since I've done anything like that. So yes, challenging.

Interviewer: So you are trying to use things, wood scraps and material that you have around. Do you usually keep things for future use?

Respondent: Yes. I'm not- I don't have a lot of space to store stuff, but I have had some larch lap stuff, you know like the tongue and groove that you put on the outside of buildings. Looks a bit like

a skirting board. So it's like six inches high, and it's thinner at the top. And then you kind of, if you layer it on the outside of a building, it means that the water runs down to your feet.

Anyway, there was some leftover from when I got my windows in. So I've been using that, and I did get some from the wood recyclers up in Dunblane, because I needed a couple of specific bits cut. I've been using bits of the old cupboard that I took apart. And just general, whatever was lying around, really. My family are quite good at hoarding bits of wood and- wood specifically. I don't know why we've got a thing about it.

Yes, some from my mum. Some from my sister. And the guy who lived here had built a lot of, like built in furniture that I took apart. So there was a few things around. The guy who used to own this house was a technician at the art school along the [____ 0:16:05].

Interviewer: Nice.

Respondent: I think he had quite a good supply of nails and screws and timber that he could get his hands on. He built quite a lot here. So yes.

It's challenging, and I have actually not done anything to it for probably about two weeks. But I've got a friend coming at the end of the week who is very good at making one-off specific props and items, and he said he would have a look at it and help me, give me a bit of advice. So I'm hoping that will push me forward.

Interviewer: Yes, one of the questions I was trying to make was about specific skills. And you have mentioned already technical drawing and making things, and this friend. Another thing I'd like to ask you is whether you felt the need to acquire specific equipment or tools that you don't have?

Respondent: No, I haven't had to buy anything. I've got quite a good toolkit. I could do with a bigger drill, a more powerful drill. But I've got a fairly good toolkit. And it's made me actually try and be more organised with my tools and treat them a bit better.

But no, I think I've got- I've been trying not to spend money on new stuff during this pandemic. I've been very specifically thinking, "Do I really need this, or can I borrow it or use something I've got already?" So no, I haven't had to buy any tools.

Interviewer: And you mentioned recyclers, that you got some-

Respondent: Yes, Tayside Wood Recyclers up in Dunblane, which is up almost at Kingsway. They recycle mostly pallets, I think. And they make like garden sheds and raised beds. They're really good.

Interviewer: Are they open or not?

Respondent: I don't think he's open at the moment. I think he's open by appointment to pick up firewood, because they sell bags of firewood.

Interviewer: I may know about that.

Respondent: And they're- they actually recycle in a funny way, because my brother owns the brewery XXXX, and all the malt bags, the grain bags that he gets in are like polypropylene. And this guy from the wood recyclers uses these bags to sell his firewood. So it's kind of like this big circular system.

When I went up to pick up firewood, I was like, "Oh God, these bags are from my brother's company." And that was quite a nice way- because I knew there was so much- so many of these bags went in the bin when I used to work at the brewery. So it's good to see that they're getting used somewhere else.

Interviewer: That's nice. And do you think, just I guess my final question about possible effects of COVID-19 and coronavirus in the willingness of people to reuse materials, or to get second-hand objects from other people. Do you imagine there would be an impact, either positive or negative?

Respondent: Yes, I think so. I think so. I think people are much more now...

In my experience at the moment, people have been more- buying more in eBay and Facebook Marketplace. I've definitely been selling more on that. People have been clearing out, because they've got all this time in their house. They're bored, they're wandering around, so they're clearing out stuff.

They can't take it to the charity shop, they can't take it to the dump. So they're selling it and- so there's this kind of really thriving second-hand economy going on at the moment. Lots

of people buzzing backwards and forwards with stuff that they've picked up for their garden.

You know, people are selling half a can of paint for your fence, because you can't get it in B&Q anymore. So folk are buying stuff like that. I think it's really made people think anyway. I mean, obviously a lot of people are doing gardening. Amazon are thriving as well. Obviously people are buying new stuff, but there's definitely a bit of an energy about the eBay and Facebook Marketplace, Gumtree type-

Interviewer: Yes. Yes, I would say so.

Respondent: Platforms at the moment, yes. So long may it last.

Interviewer: Yes. Let's see what happens. I have spoken also to a guy who owns a pawn shop, and he is getting out of business as soon as possible, because he sees that now that people are going to eBay, the demand for a high street shop in which people can put things will eventually change. So he is a little depressed with all of it.

Respondent: Which shop is that?

Interviewer: It's called XXX. So he has closed his business in Dundee, and he still has a shop in XXX. And he's trying to sell it. He's trying to put up the shop for sale, because-

Respondent: What kind of shop is it? What-

Interviewer: He has something that is similar to a pawn shop, but it's a little more contemporary. So people can put stuff- so if you have for instance, I don't know, a computer and you need money, you go there. He evaluates, and gives you say, £500 for the computer, and you have 28 days to buy it back.

Respondent: Like a cash generators, or something-

Interviewer: Yes. I guess, Cash Converters and all these kind of business models. And he has really decided to get out of business because he's seen all the people who used to buy from his shop now going to eBay and saying that they won't probably get back to buying from his shop after the restrictions are up.

So that's- there are these effects, and we need to maybe come up with different economic models.

Respondent: People are adjusting and adapting very quickly, I think, to-

Interviewer: Yes. Let me just ask you one other thing that is really relevant. Do you think there will be any kind of public infrastructure or policies that would help society reuse more of the materials that it currently discards? I don't know, maybe publicly, or collectively owned or managed warehouses? Or community repair shops, or anything like that?

Respondent: I think...

Do you think I should- are you asking me if I think there should be or there will be?

Interviewer: Yes. Something that you feel is missing in the way cities are managed today.

Respondent: I think it's definitely something the council should look at. I mean, we've got the Men's Sheds and, you know, small things like that, but that's very specific.

Interviewer: What is that?

Respondent: The Men's Sheds. The Men's Sheds is like a community thing, it's international now. I think it may have started- could have started in Australia, but I might be wrong. And it's basically old, older retired guys who want to go and do a bit of woodwork or metalwork or computers.

It's basically just men hanging out together in a workshop, which I'm sure a lot of them, if they've done physical, manual jobs their whole life and then all of a sudden they're retired, they need somewhere to go and hang out and speak to other guys.

So that's a really positive thing. And you make- like they do wood turning and they have little- I'm sure there's two or three Men's Sheds in Dundee. But they're all over the country. Some abroad. They're interesting.

But because of the name of it, The Men's Sheds, it-

Interviewer: Yes, there's a gender issue.

Respondent: There's a gender issue. And I think women can go one day a week, and younger people can go. And they do- they're very accepting of anybody. Not only old guys, but I think because of the name, people don't really think, "That's for me."

But I think the council tip up near the Michelin, near Fintry, they've got like a reuse area where some things are sold on to the public.

Interviewer: Yes?

Respondent: But the council tip down at Riverside, unless you get a guy that is friendly, you can't take anything out the skip. But they could have the same thing. You know, the guys- one person there was good at spotting stuff and going, that looks like it's, not valuable, but it's worth reusing. Let's put it aside, sell it for a fiver. The money could go to charity or whatever.

You know, they could definitely do something down there, so it would be handy. I've picked up stuff from the skip before. I've got a sink from the skip that I've got in my kitchen now. You know, it's perfectly useable.

Interviewer: Just to clarify, you're telling me that there used to be something like that around here? And there was this person-

Respondent: There is up at- there is a big council tip up near Fintry, Whitfield, on that side of Dundee. And they do have a kind of a little reuse area. But I don't know how it works, I'm not really familiar with it. I just, I've seen it. But the council tip down at Riverside hasn't got that, which would be excellent. I'd love it.

I also know a guy who I met recently who does sort of waste management. And he clears out municipal buildings and government buildings. All sorts, just depends who phones him up. And he's started to keep certain things and resell them instead of chucking it all away, because he could see the potential for certain, you know, items that were still really useful, but were getting thrown away.

There's no systems in place. If somebody's clearing out a factory or an old school, or- there's nobody in charge. There's no government department who says, "Okay, we'll take all this and we'll rework it, or reallocate it somewhere else." There's just- people aren't really interested in that.

Interviewer: Yes, I figured- here in the UK there is this...

There are the charity shops. And whenever I ask someone in public administration about it, they say, "People can just give things to the charity shops." But usually the charity shops don't repair. So this kind of potential of reuse that requires some kind of transformation is not covered. Even though modern literature about recycling is kind of, there's a consensus that reusing is more effective and has lower impact than any kind of recycling.

But yes. Nothing's been done that I know of. There are very limited local initiatives. In Nantes in France, there is a very

interesting system being built by the state government, but it's very complex.

Respondent: Really?

Interviewer: Yes. I would be interested in getting in contact with this person that you just mentioned who clears buildings. Do you think you can ask them if they would be willing to talk to me?

Respondent: Of course, yes.

Interviewer: And eventually give me their contact so I can [____ 0:30:31] direct.

Respondent: Yes, yes, definitely. I'll give him a shout. He's of interest to me as well, because if I know somebody has a stash of interesting objects and furniture, then that's useful for me as a prop buyer, rather than just going to the same old prop houses and same old stuff that they've got over and over. If I've got these specific contacts I can ask people for, "I want 15 garden benches all the same," or, "I need really interested chairs. What have you got?"

These guys are like my special little black book of contacts. So yes, I'll definitely- I was going to email him today, actually, just to- because I only met him once, but I need to email him and just kind of say, "Let's stay in touch."

Interviewer: Okay. Thanks. Yes, I guess that's pretty much all I wanted to ask. So if you can also send me your whatever you have in terms of diary, repair diary. Even if it's just a note about how frustrating it was to work with wonky angles and not being able to draw. I'd like to collect all of these impressions, and eventually do a kind of overview of how it is to try to repair things in cities.

Any other thing that you might feel useful for these kind of questions?

Respondent: All right.