

Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE



Issue Thirty-three
Autumn 2021

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Front cover image
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Welcome to Her Edit

There can be few amongst us who haven't felt changed by events since March 2020. As we begin to piece together our lives post-Covid, I'm delighted to share a collection of perspectives from women with a story to tell.

Hilary Cottam is someone who truly deserves the moniker 'change-maker'. Her agenda for social change was designed before the pandemic struck, but now seems more urgent than ever. With the Cop26 climate change conference on the horizon, Emma Hunter's passion for marine conservation is an inspiration.

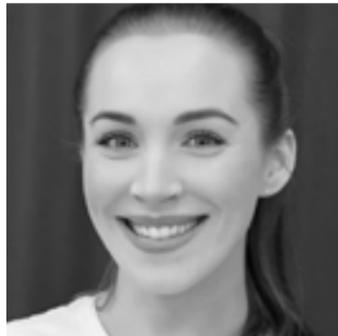
Hopefully, most of us can take some positives from our lockdown experience. Lulu Allison created the wonderful 'Haturday' project - the photographs are an absolute joy - while Carolyn Kelly shares her experience of home schooling and the lessons she's keeping. A chance lockdown encounter for Her Edit's Ann Clark, led to Judith Elliot, one of the very few women London black cabbies, revealing the mind-boggling process of learning 'the Knowledge'.

I can think of no moment in my own life-time which has seemed so auspicious. Our vision for Her Edit is that by sharing our stories and experiences, we can inspire and support each other and collectively drive positive change for us all. We are continuing our journey with renewed energy and ambition and hope you will join us.

Please send your stories and ideas to us at editor@heredit.co.uk, share your thoughts on our website heredit.co.uk and keep in touch on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/her_edit).



Her Issue Thirty-three



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Hilary Cottam is an internationally acclaimed social entrepreneur working with communities and governments around the world to design collaborative, affordable solutions to big social challenges. She is an Honorary Professor at the Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose at UCL, a trustee of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, author of [Radical Help](#) and a regular commentator on social issues in the media. Hilary has a studio in Peckham, south London, where she lives with her husband and daughter. Jayne Phenton spoke with Hilary about her work.

HILARY COTTAM

Free Radical

Despite our government attempting to rally a kind of war-time spirit with a narrative of 'we're all in this together', the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the unequivocal truth that we are not. The highest death rates are in the poorest areas; the most vulnerable and disadvantaged are bearing the economic impact of lockdown. The social, economic, geographical and racial divisions in our country have been thrown into stark relief.

Have we reached a 'critical juncture' akin to that following the Second World War? A point where the established systems and structures are exposed as so broken and inequitable, change is inevitable? There are many voices calling for radical change akin to the reforms outlined in William Beveridge's 1942 report, Social Insurance and Allied Services, but author and change maker Hilary Cottam is well ahead of the game.

'We got a welfare state in the Second World War because - like during the pandemic - people were working alongside each other and realised that people weren't poor because they were feckless or lazy, but because the structures were

stacked against them, because of class or race. We are having that moment now. The question is whether the momentum is going to build so we have a Beveridge moment and get the social revolution we need - or will it get swept under the carpet?'

In 2006, Hilary began an experiment to find workable solutions to social issues: access to secure, properly paid jobs, education, ageing and chronic health. As outlined in her book, *Radical Help*, the work focused on building relationships and working collaboratively. Over the course of a decade, Hilary, her team and their project partners, helped 12,000 people make positive changes to their lives.

They sought to learn from the people it intended to help making them instrumental in designing solutions. Some were more successful than others. Loops offered young people experiences in work and unfamiliar social settings and mentor-like support, but was such a departure from the existing paradigm of youth work, that it wasn't adopted further.



IMAGE: A still from Hilary Cottam's TED talk

'I feel very open to failure because I think our systems are so broken, we need to experiment and if we're going to experiment, we are going to fail. Our young people are suffering really badly and there's no recognition of that.'

'In Loops we saw really strongly the value of connecting young people with people who are not like themselves; what was very successful was that loads of people joined in. Most people want to support young people. We need to be alert to risk but current frameworks prohibit the kind of relationships young people need to flourish: the computer says 'no.'

The learning from Loops went into the employability experiment Backr. Backr was unique in that rather than just addressing unemployment, it tackled the bigger challenge of progression out of poorly paid, entry level jobs. A greater proportion of benefits are paid to people in jobs with low wages, than to those who have no work at all.

Backr created a social network enabling people to build so-called soft skills, articulate their

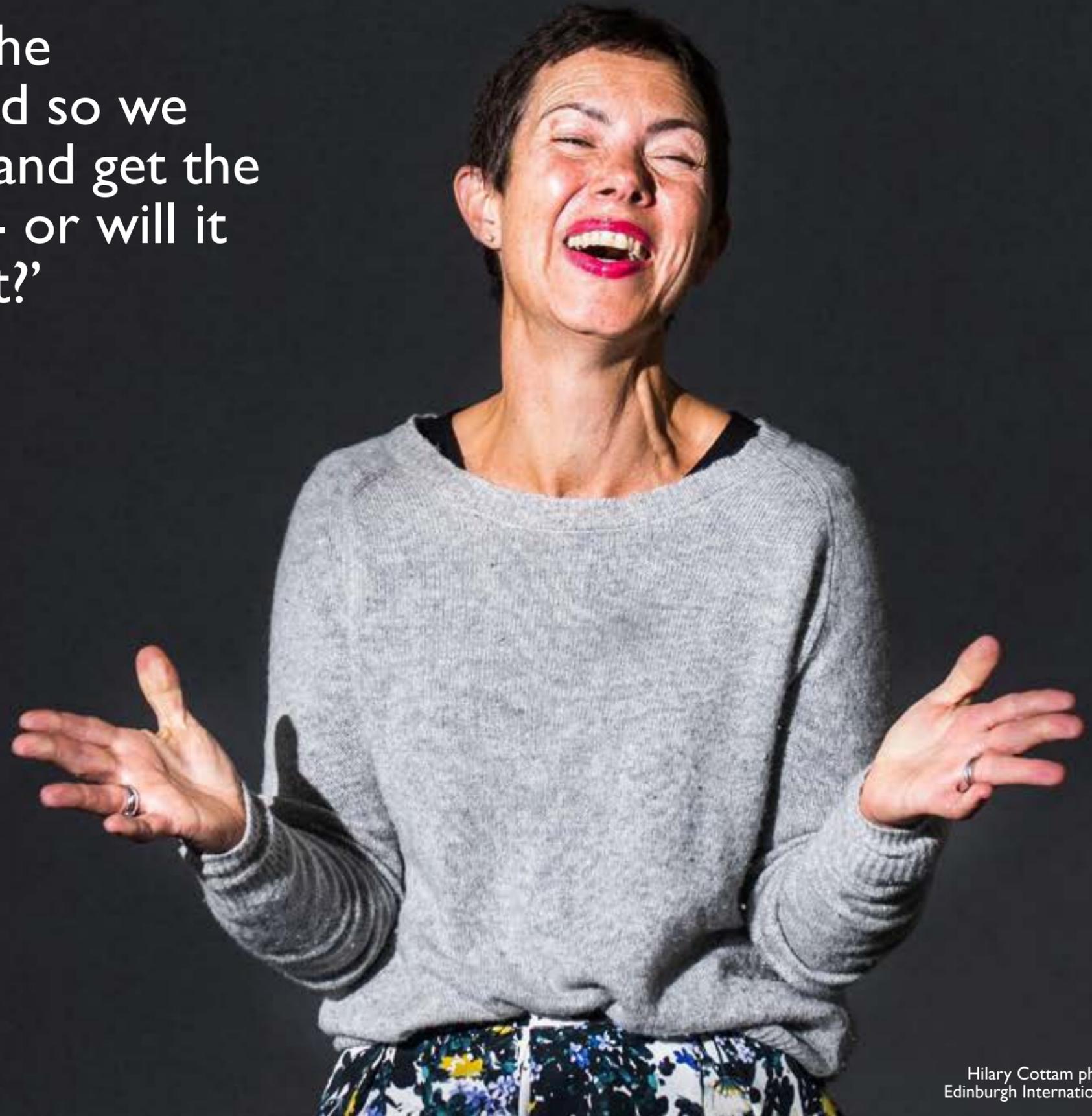
dreams and ambitions and negotiate a route to achieving them. A two-year evaluation by Price Waterhouse Cooper found that 87 per cent of members were supported into better positions or had found work and those who had been out of work for long periods benefitted most by restored confidence and motivation. Furthermore, it was delivered at one-fifth of the cost of Welfare to Work services.

However, sometimes quantifying the impact of such work is beyond percentage points. Long after Loops had finished, someone from the local authority team approached Hilary after a talk she'd given, saying that the experiment had changed her and the way she worked.

In her childhood, Hilary experienced a rich mix of cultures with 'always a diverse collection of people through the house; I was aware of other places that had different realities that I wanted to learn about.'

Her parents met whilst working in east Africa. Hilary and her younger sister were born in England, then the family moved to Spain.

‘The question is whether the momentum is going to build so we have a Beveridge moment and get the social revolution we need - or will it get swept under the carpet?’



The question is not, 'what should we be doing', but 'how do we make it happen?'

Growing up there in the 1970s, Hilary encountered social inequality first hand when she and her father visited a gardener's home which was considerably more impoverished than her own.

'I grew up wondering what you could do about it, how you could change it. When we came back [to England], I grew up under Thatcher and I couldn't see any possibility making change in Britain. I went overseas to find anywhere where I could make change and spent a couple of decades abroad building the skills.'

Hilary worked in Northern Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic and was based in Washington for a time working on famine relief, community projects and for the World Bank with responsibility for urban poverty in Southern Africa. On her return to the UK, her work developing new approaches to the design of schools and prisons rather controversially won her the UK Designer of the Year Award in 2005 prompting a national outcry from those with more traditional ideas of what constitutes a designer.

'It's interesting, how far design has moved; the discipline has changed. Most of my life has been about using guerrilla tactics to work round these systems which aren't serving people. Design is a way of doing that.'

Using the prize money to establish a social enterprise, Participle, Hilary wrote about the experiments in her book *Radical Help*, published in 2019. It's extremely readable and gives real insight into the lives of people like Ella, a mother whose life and experience epitomises how many in "disadvantaged" communities struggle to negotiate a system which, despite the best efforts of multiple agencies, fails to support them.

At the root lies fundamental economic inequality reflecting the disconnection between the work of the social sector and the wider economy.

'You can create as many crap jobs as you like and let the welfare state pick up the mess afterwards, but no welfare state, however brilliant, can patch people up if we have an unequal economic system.'

'The economy is so different now. Beveridge thought people might fall out of work and they'd need a bit of TLC and they'd go back on their way, but our lives are going up and down in unstable ways. We need to create a new social economy.'

Hilary has lived in the increasingly gentrified area of Peckham for many years and being rooted in her local community is important to her. Clearly fiercely intelligent, articulate, as you might expect of an Oxford graduate, and a self-defined introvert, Hilary is also incredibly warm and approachable with a delightfully broad, genuine smile which I suspect wins the trust and confidence of the people she works with even if their lives are very different.

'If you turn up in a community and ask people about their lives and you're genuinely interested, and with your whole heart you are trying to make change, then people meet you on a level as a human being. It is important to build teams that are reflective of the age, race and gender of communities. I've always tried to do that, so if there's a space for a middle-class white woman on the team, then I'm already sitting in it.'

Last year Hilary was awarded an OBE for 'services to the British Welfare State', which she

accepted reluctantly after being persuaded by her husband that it could be a useful lever to 'get a foot in the door.' Although she doesn't use it and finds the reference to Empire abhorrent, she welcomes the recognition of the work of her and her team and sees it as a tool in her pocket to make real change to people's lives.

In *Radical Help*, Hilary speaks of being 'on a quest' and she feels she has come a long way on that journey.

'It's unbelievable how fast things have changed. Fifteen years ago I wrote a manifesto outlining how I thought the world should be; I asked people to join me and those that did were really brave. Now I've published a book which has touched a nerve around the world - they're not mad ideas. The question is not, 'what should we be doing', but 'how do we make it happen?'

'I've worked with local authorities through this pandemic and they've said, 'Now's our moment.' I've seen incredible changes in practice. I am always in the foothills, always learning.'

In terms of gender politics, the Beveridge report reflected the status quo of the day with an expectation that care - for children and older adults - is women's work. Creating Participle enabled Hilary to design a flexible work life around her family, but believes it's important to acknowledge that being a working mum isn't easy.

'Like lots of women, I feel like most pieces are on the floor. If I didn't have a middle-class income, I would be in exactly the same position as Ella. It's not just the practical help, but who is the one holding the lists in their mind; whose study has

the name tapes in it? If you'd interviewed me when I was in my 20s, I'd never have thought these things would be so slow to change.'

The word 'radical' means 'going back to the root of things' and Hilary's work questions fundamentally how we can create lives with meaningful work, love and care to enable everyone to flourish. If the pandemic has made us reconsider what we value in life, how do we seize that moment to deliver that change?

'It's a moment of schism because those who didn't realise how unequal Britain is, have now seen it. We've seen policy makers pivot very fast. Last year the Chancellor ripped up economic rule books we were told we couldn't question.'

'The scales have fallen from our eyes. It's up to all of us who believe we need to create a more equal society to keep talking about it. *Radical Help* is a book for the general public, not a policy book. At a book signing, the first person in the queue said to me, 'I'm Ella.', a woman who saw her own life reflected in that of Ella's described in the book.'

'We created our incredible welfare state in the first place because Beveridge talked to people and used that national conversation to hold politicians and civil servants' feet to the fire. We need to keep talking about it. *Radical Help* is for all of us.'

Radical Help is available [to buy](#) and we urge you to share your copy and spread the word. Find out more about Hilary and her work on her [website](#) and on [Twitter](#) and watch her fabulous [Ted talk](#).

Emma Hunter is a wildlife enthusiast and explorer from Scotland. She recently completed her Master of Science degree in Wildlife Biology & Conservation with Distinction from Edinburgh Napier University. She is currently based in Otautahi-Christchurch, Aotearoa-New Zealand. Here she talks about her journey in the marine conservation sector starting with a catalytic dolphin encounter to combing an estuary for plastic. From starting in Scotland and ending up in NZ via Canada she is riding the wave of life with a passion to protect the ocean and those who call it home.



EMMA HUNTER

Marine life

I was around eight years old when I decided I wanted to be a marine biologist. While at a dolphin sanctuary in Florida, I turned to my dad and asked: 'How do you get her job?' (pointing to the trainer). The answer, 'Study marine biology.' was succeeded with a cautionary phrase '...but you will only get paid in fish.'

For the next 10 years I flitted on and off with the idea. When the time came for university applications, I gave in to the nagging doubts of an unpredictable career path and set my sights on becoming a veterinarian: a stable, animal-related job that paid well and would perhaps, one-day, reunite me with my love for the ocean.

One and a half years of dog dissections and grappling with a scientific vocabulary the size of the Oxford Dictionary were realisation enough

that this profession was not quite for me. A switch to zoology later and I felt like I was more where I was supposed to be.

In the penultimate year of my undergrad, a field trip to the island town of Millport gave hope to my ocean dreams all thanks to an unassuming creature: the barnacle. *Semibalanus balanoides*, to be scientifically specific, captivated me with a waft of their cirri (feeding apparatus). What I thought was just a painful nuisance on bare feet when scouring rock pools all these years was, in fact, a crustacean. The dream was alive (and so were the barnacles!).

For my Honours year project, I honed in on the chemical sensing capabilities of *Semibalanus balanoides* to see if they reacted to the presence of facial cleanser microbeads in the

water. Barnacles are filter feeders meaning they use feather-like arms to swoop through the water collecting microscopic organisms to eat. Unfortunately, unpalatable items such as microplastics can end up on the dinner menu as barnacles feed non-selectively. The threats humans pose to the marine environment, particularly plastic pollution, have stuck in my mind since then.

I decided to further my studies with a post-graduate degree, but I knew I wanted to travel and work at the same time, so chose a distance-learning MSc in Wildlife Biology and Conservation. Over three years I stretched the term 'distance learning' to its maximum living in New Zealand, then Canada, then back to New Zealand while trying to visit back home when I could. This meant getting the study books out on

trains, planes, automobiles and the occasional boat.

While in New Zealand I discovered the rewarding world of wildlife guiding. Being able to set sail every day in the Marlborough Sounds with the goal to spot and interpret as much wildlife as possible was a delight. Eight-year-old me jumped for joy as I finally became the person whose 'work' involved being surrounded by dolphins: Bottlenose, Dusky, Common and the endemic Hector's (one of the smallest marine dolphins in the world!), not to mention the flocks of endemic birds with unique behaviours.

There are no native land mammals in New Zealand, except a few bats, so birds here have evolved without that threat in mind. Some nest on the ground and many are poor fliers or

flightless in the case of the iconic kiwi. Sadly, with the arrival of settlers came the predators: rats, stoats, possums, cats and hedgehogs, which have decimated native bird populations. There is a large push for New Zealand to become predator-free by 2050 to prevent extinction of more species.

Next, I transferred the guiding skills across the ocean to the Pacific Northwest where I spent a season on a whale watch boat in Canada. Seals, sea lions, otters and, of course, killer whales and humpbacks, were regular sights. I relished the opportunity to share their natural history with guests and highlight current threats they are facing such as boat strikes, lack of prey and plastic pollution.

Just before the world was turned on its head by COVID-19, I made my way back to New Zealand where it was all systems go for the last push of the MSc: the research project.

Having been privileged enough to spend the past couple of years surrounded by awe-inspiring nature, I was compelled to come up with a research project that could action change and protect the natural environment. With assistance from local NGO Algalita South Pacific, my focus again fell on one of the largest threats of the marine and freshwater ecosystems: plastic pollution. Specifically, the Quantification and Characterisation of Pre-production Pellet Pollution in the Avon-Heathcote Estuary/Ihutai in Ōtautahi-Christchurch.

What are pre-production pellets? They are the feedstock used in the creation of plastic products. Between 1mm-5mm in size, these plastic beads are transported to manufacturing facilities where

they are melted down and then moulded into the final product.

However, not all of these pellets make it. Many are lost in transit, washed down stormwater drains or into rivers with a one-way ticket to the ocean. The study found considerable amounts of these pellets in the estuary.

The project may have finished, but the journey to change has only just begun. I have enjoyed interacting with the community and raising awareness of this type of pollution at the annual Estuary Festival and recently I presented the study to the national Aotearoa Plastic Pollution Alliance.

Future ambitions include knocking on the door of the plastics industry to let them know their product is ending up in the environment and potentially harming wildlife, and getting the research published in a scientific journal (fingers crossed!).

I'm now 20 years on from that illuminating moment in Florida. I get a little bashful when classified as a Marine Biologist/Scientist/Zoologist', but rather see myself as deeply passionate about nature, particularly the ocean, and want others to be able to experience it for many generations to come.

It doesn't take much to contribute to a healthier planet. For example, get creative with alternatives to everyday plastic items and support businesses that are doing the same. To quote Ryunosuke Akutagawa: 'Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean'.

Connect with Emma and follow her adventures on Instagram @emma_inthewild and on [LinkedIn](#)



IMAGES

Top: A trio of Hector's dolphins in the Queen Charlotte Sound/Tōtaranui. Below: A couple of Humpback Whales in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Canada. Photography by Emma Hunter.



LULU ALLISON

Saturday

Making things is an antidote to boredom. It is a way of engaging the mind and expanding creativity. To make something we have to first imagine it, come up with ideas about shape, structure, design. We learn, through touch, through experiment, about materials. What we learn suggests new experiments and so our experience is enriched still further. As an artist and maker, I know this to be true.

One Saturday afternoon at the beginning of lockdown, sheer boredom led me to clear out the corners where stacks of uncertain items had accumulated, wedged between chests of drawers and the wall, stacks under the bed; objects that might have an as yet undefined purpose even if they didn't have a use. Things that didn't merit either using or throwing away. Amongst one pile was a world map that used to be one of many on our hallway wall. It was too

tattered to stay up, but maps are so beautiful, so evocative, I hadn't been able to throw it away.

After years of not being on the wall, and not being seen at all, it was decision time for the map. Keep it or, being too tattered to pass on, throw it into the recycling? I decided to make a hat from it, as a way to extend my occupation, as a way of enjoying the fun of making something by hand; as a way of resolving this battered old map's uncertain status.

I stuck with the theme, making a pirate captain's hat, cutting simple shapes and sticking it together with tape. Very quickly, it came to me that perhaps I could do something like it every Saturday, call it Haturday, entertaining myself and hopefully a few others on the way. Oh, that first lockdown was so full of positive intentions!

Lulu Allison is an artist and author. Her first novel, [Twice the Speed of Dark](#) was published by Unbound in 2017. Her second, [Salt Lick](#), will be available from [16 September](#). She teaches art online (and when able, face-to-face) through her company [Middle Distance Arts](#), and spends the rest of her time writing, reading and making things. During the first lockdown, Lulu undertook the Haturday project, creating a new hat every Saturday for a year and raising funds for domestic violence charity [RISE](#). She has two grown-up daughters and lives in Brighton with her husband Pierre. You can find Lulu on Twitter [@LuluAllison77](#)





At about the same time, I realised that lockdown is inherently easier for people who make things, who draw or paint, who are art makers. Drawing particularly, is a mindful engagement, linking you to both your imagination and your environment. I started Middle Distance Arts, offering online art classes in the hope that this could be passed on to others who may need a creative outlet during the lockdown. Over the next few weeks we will all be making a hat out of recycling and what we have in the house, linking these two lockdown-inspired projects.

If you make things, particularly if you make things with what you have easily available, already around you, it is always possible to fill your time meaningfully and with joy. To me this is mindfulness. A chance to quietly engage with your environment by observing and drawing what is in front of you. A chance to play with materials and see what they can become. A chance to stretch your mind into creativity and problem solving. Whatever life throws at us, we need these opportunities and that was one positive understanding that became clear to me during lockdown.

As the first lockdown came to an end, the art classes had become established, and Haturday became a year-long project and a fundraiser for RISE, a charity that provides services for those suffering domestic violence. I did 'um and aah'

a bit about committing to making a hat every Saturday for a full year, but it seemed too that it would be a fun challenge and in the end I couldn't resist. My first book, *Twice the Speed of Dark*, included a theme of coercive domestic violence. In doing research for that, I came to feel very strongly about domestic violence and how silent we have been as a society as to its devastating impact. Fundraising for RISE felt like a good way of putting something positive back.

I have made hats out of paper, pens, fabric, packaging, bubble wrap, newspaper, a saucepan. As I write there are five Saturdays to go until I have completed a full year. I appeared on the news and have been working with a ukulele orchestra to expand the fundraising reach. I have raised over £2100 so far. It has been a really enjoyable project and I'm really glad to be able to offer some support to such a great charity.

People have been making their own hats and sending me pictures. You can keep up with all of the hats here: [instagram.com/haturdays](https://www.instagram.com/haturdays) and if you would like to contribute, the fundraiser is here: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/raise-your-hat-for-rise>. If you fancy a bit of hat making, but don't know where to start, please drop by the Middle Distance Arts facebook page and I will be delighted to help set you on your way.

IMAGES

All courtesy of Lulu Allison

Carolyn Kelly is an actor, theatre practitioner and presenter based in the North East.

She is the founder of the drama school [Bravo Performance](#) which offers dance and drama classes for children to help build confidence.

During lockdown Carolyn launched [The Bravo Box](#), a box of products for adults to use to create drama classes at home for children aged two to seven years supported with inspirational videos. Carolyn is also a member of the [Creative Seed](#) carnival company which offers creative workshops and celebration events in partnership with community organisations.

CAROLYN KELLY

Lessons from lockdown

You know the feeling you get when you try to print off a long document and the printer decides to shut down for the day? How about when your computer freezes mid Zoom call? Or, most frustratingly, when you've almost finished writing an article for Her Edit and your laptop dies and deletes the whole copy without saving it? You feel that burning frustration bubbling away in the pit of your stomach; you are five seconds away from wanting to throw the device in question into the fire and run away.

That is exactly how I imagine my 10-year-old son felt being home schooled by me. I mean, who has even ever heard of a 'subordinate clause'? I could see the frustration behind his eyes while I tried to make sense of the work, although it made no sense to me at all.

Honestly, I felt for my son, I really did. God knows it must have been hard; not being able to see his friends or burn off some energy in the school yard; not getting a pudding with his school

dinner without being forced to eat every scrap of the main course first. I got it. However, I'm a single mum. A working single mum at that, trying to hold down my business and make some sort of income to pay the mortgage and printer ink bill (which I was considering taking out a second mortgage for, the rate we were getting through it!). Life is tough, but it's a lot tougher when it's just you and you always have to be 'the bad guy'.

One day, I made some banana muffins for breakfast as a little treat for my son, and to remind myself that I could still be the nurturing 'mother earth' type of parent. A 'fun' parent that makes healthy deserts for breakfast. I snapped a photo and popped them on Instagram, so everyone could what a good mother I am, simultaneously shouting, 'Eat the damn muffin! It's only the top bit that's burnt; the bit underneath is delicious!'

I promise you, I never used to be this cranky. I used to live for the days I could spend at home, reading, baking and playing board games with



my kid, but what with juggling running two small businesses and grappling with grammar, those days became few and far between.

Of course it's always easy to be wrapped up in your own troubles and forget other people are having a difficult time too. I have friends who had to isolate alone; friends who lost their jobs. Friends who ended up isolating with boyfriends they were planning on breaking up with just before the first lockdown; single friends who have several children who needed home-schooling, feeding, watering and cuddles. Everyone found things hard and in many ways we really have been in this together.

Now things have become a little easier - no more subjunctives or modal verbs - I'm still using some of the strategies I used to get through it all. Here are a few tips which helped make life more bearable, through lockdown and beyond.

Tip no 1: If your child is your alarm clock, then you need to set your own. Obviously only on weekdays - weekends are yours and yours alone - sleep until you're hungry. But I found that dragging my backside out of bed and making a deliciously strong coffee while listening to my favourite podcast in the calm before the storm and my son wakes up - is a godsend. I see why they call it the golden hour.

Tip no 2: Plan your meals. I never had much time to cook homemade meals pre-Covid, but I always dreamt of being the female version of Gino D'Acampo (or just married to him...). Now, I take some time on a Sunday to plan our meals for the week and love digging out my cookbooks and flicking through the recipes. Knowing I'm going to eat something delicious later in the day is something to look forward to!

Tip no 3: Take time to chill with your little one. Whether it's reading a book, watching TV or playing a game, set some relaxing time aside for you and your child to enjoy together. My son, Jake and I have started reading together

on an evening. And no, I'm not talking about me reading to him and him reading to me, no, no, no. I did enough of that whilst home schooling thanks. He jumps into my bed, we get all cosy and Jake gets stuck into whichever new David Walliams book is trending right now and I can escape into whichever murderous horror book I'm into that week. No chatting, no arguing, just pure chilled time. It's honestly now my favourite part of every day.

Tip no 4: Walk it off! I hated walking before it became illegal to walk for more than an hour a day. Honestly, I used to drive to the shop, which is 20 seconds walking distance around the corner. However, when you're stuck in the house all day with only a child for company, you have to spice things up a little. So, walking became our new trend. Got a little takeout coffee café on your route? Even better!

Tip no 5: Honestly, If you're just not feeling it that day - then don't do it. As someone who is a massive control freak and turns into anxious Annie if tasks don't get done on the day they are supposed to, I absolutely understand if your initial reaction is to tell me to shut up. I would usually be thinking the same thing. But trust me when I say you will go insane if you keep trying to be perfect ALL of the time.

Most days you'll succeed in completing the tasks/goals/work you've set yourself. But there will be days that you just simply cannot function enough to get anything productive done. So, trust me when I say, if you are having one of those days then do not beat yourself up. Give yourself the day; eat the chocolate, binge the Netflix show. Get an early night on the premise that tomorrow will be a better day...and usually, it is.

Whether you are single or in a couple, with one kid, six, or none; living alone, with your parents or even your ex, we have all lived through a strange and sometimes lonely time. We are all trying to juggle life and stay sane, but thank God the home-schooling is over!



IMAGES

Previous page: Carolyn Kelly
Above: Bravo Box
All courtesy of Carolyn



The London cabbie is as quintessential a part of the capital as red pillar boxes or the guards at Buckingham Palace. Since 1865, all London taxi drivers have been required to memorise the world-famous 'Knowledge'. Ann Clark describes how her fascination with the ability to know how to get anywhere began and one of the few women cabbies, Judith Elliot, tells us about learning the 'Blue Book'.

JUDITH ELLIOT

The Knowledge

Along with so many people in the past 18 months, we have been ordering our household shop online and having it delivered. A casual chat with delivery driver Judith Elliot revealed that she had taken the job because her usual line of work had been depleted during the pandemic. She is a London black cab driver.

I was born and brought up in London, but even so I'm familiar with only a tiny fraction of it. In my early teens I went 'up to town' (the West End) to do my Christmas shopping. In my enthusiasm I spent all my money, but didn't worry thinking it would be easy enough to walk home. I set out confidently, but quickly realised that I didn't have a clue how to get back to Wandsworth. In the end

I had to follow a bus route which included going all the way round a one-way system. It took hours!

Ever since, I have hugely admired London cabbies who have 'done the Knowledge', the process of learning the geography of the capital so thoroughly that they know the quickest route to anywhere. This chance encounter was an opportunity to find out more and so Judith's extraordinary story unfolded.

At Her Edit we believe women from all walks of life have stories to tell and they never fail to amaze and engage me. Judith's story is no exception.

Ann Clark



‘I was only the 150th woman to complete and gain my Knowledge of London.’

26 June 1998 was my 'Badge Day'; the day I received my All-London Taxi Drivers' Badge and Licence. Nearly three years earlier in September 1995, I had nervously attended the Public Carriage Office, 15 Penton Street, London N1 to sign up as a student to learn 'the Knowledge of London'. Little did I know lay ahead!

I was given a booklet listing 400 routes within a six-mile radius of Eleanor's Cross which is located within Charing Cross station's forecourt. All the routes might as well have been written in a foreign language - I truly had no idea where any of these roads were.

The first route, or run as we call them, was Manor House Station to Gibson Square. So early one Sunday morning, I left home from Dartford, where I lived at the time, and drove to Manor House Station. It seemed to take an absolute age to get there, but I followed the route and somehow found myself at Gibson Square. Success! Only 399 runs to go.

Eventually, I ran all the routes, the last being St John's Way to Woodstock Avenue. That was the easy bit, but now the hard work began. Every day I 'called back' (read out) 80 of the runs so that every five days I started the process again. The idea being that I'd become fluent and quick at calling.

However, these runs merely give you an insight into London and you are very rarely tested on them directly.

The next thing to learn were all the Points of Interest within the six-mile radius. These could be anything from a Blue Plaque to synagogues, nightclubs to restaurants to embassies.

Students have a maximum of two years to complete this process and then apply to the Carriage Office for an appointment for their first 'Appearance', the term used every time a student attends the Carriage Office. Each Appearance consists of an examiner asking you to describe four or five routes; it's all oral, nothing is written down. For example, you might be given from the Australian Embassy to the King's Fund. First the examiner would expect you to know where each Point was. After naming both roads, in this case The Strand and Dean's Mews, the student is then required to 'run' the route, describing how they would make the journey.

So for this journey it would be: leave on the right of the Strand, right at the Aldwych, left into Catherine Street, left Exeter Street, right Burleigh Street, left Tavistock Street, right Southampton Street, left Henrietta Street, right Bedford Street forward Garrick Street, forward Cranbourne Street, right Charing Cross Rd, left Shaftesbury

Avenue, right Wardour Street, left Eastcastle Street, right Great Titchfield Street, left Margaret Street forward and right Cavendish Square, left Dean's Mews.

Another Appearance would be made for 56 days' time during which time you carry on 'calling' and driving round London, on a moped, looking for, and learning, new Points of Interest.

As the Appearances progress, the runs become harder and more complex and the time in between Appearances reduces from 56 days to 28 days to 21 days, but only if you are becoming more knowledgeable.

The final 21-day Appearance is known as a 'req'. The Examiner gives you another set of runs; 66 to be precise. These were known as Suburban runs. You're given six weeks to learn all these; an example of one I was asked was Heathrow Airport terminal 4 to East Croyden Station. Usually the Examiner tests you on six of these.

Before you have your Suburban test, you have to take a driving test in a black cab. Most students opt to take an automatic test, but I was renting my friend's cab which was manual, so I took a manual test enabling me to drive either. I was only the second person that year to take a test in a manual cab!

I was only the 150th woman to complete and gain my Knowledge of London. Women drivers accounted for less than 0.5 per cent of the 25,000 London cab drivers. Even now there are only approximately 500 female drivers.

I also ride for the Blues and Royals of the Household Cavalry at Knightbridge Barracks, exercising their horses in Hyde Park on a regular basis. This came about after a chance encounter with a retired officer of the British Army. We were chatting about horses and in particular the Household Cavalry and how the army uses civilians to help exercise their horses. On parting he gave me his business card telling me to email him with my details and experience with horses.

The business card revealed that he was a Field Marshall (such a humble man) and he told me that I would need to be nominated before I could even be considered. True to his word, he nominated me to a colonel. I attended the barracks one early winter morning for a riding assessment, along with two other people, and I passed. A few months later I was assigned to the Blues and Royals Squadron. It's a true honour and something I'm extremely proud to do.

Visit the [Transport for London website](#) to find out how to become a licensed black cab driver.

Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE

Issue Thirty-four
out Winter 2021

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