

Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE



Issue Twenty-eight
Autumn 2019

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Front cover picture
M @AnnaJones at Refuaid
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Welcome to Her Edit

Whatever the attributable causes – conflict, socio-economic shift, climate change – the huge rise in the number of refugees seeking sanctuary in Europe over the last few years is an undeniable truth. For most of us our engagement with the issue will vacillate between sympathy at news reports, frustration at governments' seeming inability to act and revulsion – or otherwise – at the judgemental and often hostile reporting on the plight of people compelled, for whatever reason, to leave their homes and seek a safer and more stable existence elsewhere.

Lyndsey Stonebridge's account of Hannah Arendt, a refugee in the 1930s, gives an uncompromising assessment of a complex and harrowing situation. It provides the perfect introduction to the work of Anna Jones and her colleagues at the charity Refuaid, of which she is co-founder. Refuaid provides pragmatic help and support for people forced into a critical situation, few of us could imagine. We are delighted to feature the stories of Mo and M, who, with the charity's help, are beginning to rebuild their lives.

We also shine a spotlight on another issue which has increasingly gathered traction, certainly on social media, that of the transgender community. Cutting through the gender politics and complex discourse is Carly Barratt's heart-warming account of her child, Phoebe, who is now finding a happy place as Joey. Sometimes it is only by understanding the personal story behind the headlines that we can find empathy and perspective.

There is more positive news in Megan Adam's shop Re:Store, which is setting a new paradigm for ethical shopping. For some sheer joy in the act of creativity, I urge to read our focus on artist Fiona Weedon and the inspiration she finds in the landscape around her home in Catalonia. All these stories touch on complex and often global issues, but perhaps it remains a truism that in the personal we find the political and, hopefully, a deeper and richer understanding of our fellow humans.

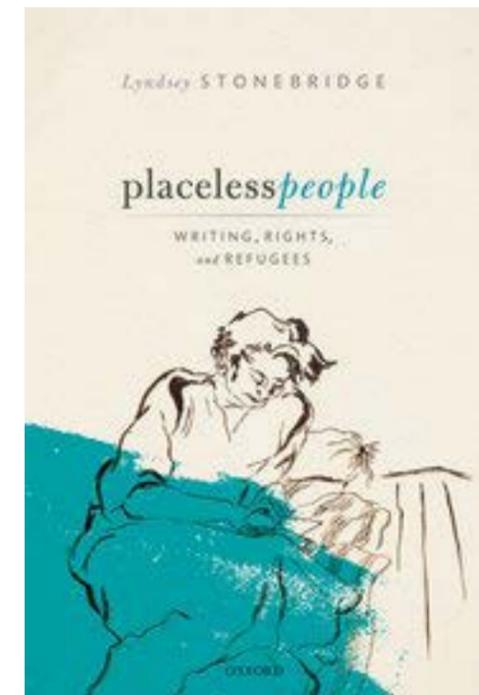
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jayne".

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IMAGES

Above: Artist Fiona Weedon in her studio in Catalonia.
Right: Bookcover, Placeless People, Writing, Rights and Refugees by Lyndsey Stonebridge.

Lyndsey Stonebridge is Professor of Humanities and Human Rights in the Department of English Literature and Institute for Research into Superdiversity, (IRiS) at the University of Birmingham. Her research focuses on twentieth-century and contemporary literature and history, Human Rights, and Refugee Studies, drawing on the interdisciplinary connections between literature, history, politics, law and social policy.

She is a scholar of the political philosopher, Hannah Arendt and following Arendt, adopts a comparative and question-driven approach to modern cultural history.

Words and image copyright
Lyndsey Stonebridge

Lessons from an illegal immigrant

LYNDSEY STONEBRIDGE

Hannah Arendt was, in her own words, an 'illegal immigrant'. She had never been under any illusions about the capacities of the Nazi regime, but when she was caught doing clandestine work for a Zionist organisation in 1933, she knew she had no choice but to leave. In the late spring, she crossed the German-Czech border through a safe house. 'Guests' would arrive at the front door, in Germany, take dinner, and then depart through the back door, which happened to be in Czechoslovakia. Arendt would spend the next 18 years as a stateless person.

Arendt knew she was an 'exception' refugee, one of the fortunate. Others were unwanted, superfluous. Something shifted in the way vulnerable strangers were treated in the West in the first part of the twentieth century.

In 1944 Arendt wrote,

'Everywhere the word 'exile' which once had an undertone of almost sacred awe, now provokes the idea of something simultaneously suspicious and unfortunate.'

Today, we live under the shadow of that change. For millions of the unfortunate that means misery and uncertainty; it means untimely and undignified deaths, chronic sickness, separated families, violence and poverty; it means tirelessly struggling to persuade yourself and the world that you, your family and your community still exist in the world.

It means being detained in airports and being taken off planes. And while all this endless work is going on, others watch with baffled and



'How you police your borders is not just about strangers. It's hardly about refugees or migrants at all. It's about citizenship.'

outraged dismay as the barely articulate forces of nationalist hate crash into the legal and political structures that were built to protect ourselves, and others, from the same barbarism.

Arendt took many lessons from her own refugee history that we might benefit from thinking about today. Here are three of them.

First, when you have a 'refugee' crisis what you also have is a political, existential and moral crisis about what a country is and who its citizens are. The First World War 'exploded' the community of European nations. The financial crash killed the prospects of millions. Civil and colonial wars, persecutions and pogroms followed. Then came the refugees; stateless, homeless, 'the scum of the earth' in Arthur Koestler's phrase, the 'rightless' in Arendt's.

That refugee crisis revealed a horrible truth about human rights: they were only as good as the nation you happened to live in, that is, if you happened to live somewhere in the grip of nationalist racism, not very good at all. This was particularly bad news when other nations were also scrambling to protect their own self-interest.

'The world', Arendt observed, 'found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human'. Refugees, then as now, were everybody's human rights crisis.

Second, if you want a politics committed to democracy and human rights, you must be historically and actively vigilant. Totalitarian regimes are easy to spot; they exist in history books and far away places. It's more difficult to recognise the totalitarian elements in one's own place and time.

In the 1950s, amid the 'make America more American' campaign, the McCarran-Walters Act proposed a revised immigration model. This was a Cold War piece of legislation designed, from one perspective, to improve foreign policy by appearing to change the race bias of the quota system, whilst actually battenning down the hatches in the name of national security and keeping America safe from communists and other undesirables. Truman thought it discriminatory and vetoed it. He was over-ruled by Congress.

Arendt was appalled and frightened by this turn of events in the adopted country which she admired, if not uncritically, for its democratic

processes. America would not be more American by keeping or throwing certain people out, based on their race or their beliefs, she pointed out, it would be committing a crime against humanity, 'As long as mankind is national and territorially organized in states, a stateless person is not simply expelled from one country, native or adopted, but from all countries...which means he is actually expelled from humanity.'

How you police your borders is not just about strangers, in fact, a lot of the time it's hardly about refugees or migrants at all. It's about citizenship. Start on that category, Arendt taught, and nobody is safe.

It seems absurd, but the fact is that, under the political circumstances of the century, Constitutional Amendment may be needed to assure Americans that they cannot be deprived of their citizenship, no matter what they do.

Third, beware of making hasty historical comparisons. One thing her own history had taught Arendt was that the impossible can become possible, with mind-defying brutality and alacrity. Trying to grasp the unprecedented through the precedented, she discovered, risked

not understanding how a different number of elements have to be in place in order for atrocity to happen.

The 'punishing' of refugees for things they haven't done doesn't happen just because of racism, uncontrolled global expansion, imperialism, financial crises, and nasty nationalisms, it arises out of a particular constellation of all these things. To ascribe 'obvious' causes, to say that this state of affairs is 'easily explained', is to normalise the politically and morally abhorrent.

Arendt's experience of history as a refugee in the last century was not 'just like' the experience of being a refugee today, nor is our contemporary fascism like the old fascism; if only because they are all part of the same history. The bitter events of the past few years are the latest chapter of a refugee history that is in fact everybody's history, and its latest challenge to our historical, moral and political imagination. © Lyndsey Stonebridge 2017

Hear Lyndsey Stonebridge discuss Hannah Arendt on BBC Radio 4's ['In Our Time'](#). Read more on refugeehistory.org and follow Lyndsey on Twitter [@lyndseystonebri](https://twitter.com/lyndseystonebri)

RefuAid co-founders, Tamsyn and Anna, met in September 2015. They were horrified by reports of the plight of refugees in Calais and the Mediterranean over the previous summer.

Determined to do something to help, they founded RefuAid, which focuses on offering practical, sustainable and successful solutions to the three key barriers which refugees face when they are trying to restart their lives in the UK: finance and re-qualification, language tuition and specialist employment advice.

RefuAid is part of [Nesta New Radicals 2018](#) and winner of [Charity Partnership of 2018](#).

Ann spoke to Anna Jones about her part in the story of this remarkable organisation.

Interview Ann Clark

Image courtesy of Anna Jones

‘Simple acts of kindness’ ANNA JONES

Anna studied International Relations at Nottingham Trent University and wrote her dissertation about Darfur. She was shocked to learn that a mature Rwandan fellow student, who had sought asylum in the UK, had spent 20 years trying to get into education.

In 2015 there was a lot of negative media coverage about refugees and Anna, working as paralegal, joined a local welcome refugees Facebook group. On 2 September shocking pictures were published in the media of three year old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi, who had drowned in the Aegean sea trying to reach Europe.

One member of the group, Tamsyn, had a child the same age as Aylan, and suggested that it was time to do something practical. Social media brought Ann and Tamsyn together with Luke, a surgeon. They had a brainstorming session in a café.

Within two weeks International Health Partners had donated 100kg of medicines and 12 doctors and nurses took unpaid leave and with Tamsyn, Anna and Luke flew out to Lesbos for two weeks.

‘We’d intended to drop the donations and offer what help we could for two weeks, but there were no organisations, not the UN or Save the Children, able to take charge of the medicines. Witnessing the refugees landing – some dead on arrival, others ill, maimed or injured from torture - was harrowing and life-changing. One Afghan boy had had his Achilles tendons severed by the Taliban and was unable to walk; a pregnant woman needed urgent kidney treatment. There was no one to help these people’.

The reality of this very real humanitarian crisis was in sharp contrast to the very negative publicity against refugees in the British press and there was no practical help.



'One Afghan boy had had his Achilles tendons severed by the Taliban and was unable to walk.'

It was rumoured that the Greeks were hostile to the refugees, but Anna and the team found the reality at the hospital very different. In fact the staff were willing to help, but had no resources to manage their own needs – no fuel for heating, no x-ray film, no alcohol scrub.

Anna, Tamsyn and Luke had something practical to aim for and after five weeks they returned to the UK to fundraise for the whole island community. Over a few weeks they raised £85,000.

After eight months Anna and Tamsyn knew the people on Lesbos and Leros and realised creating a sustainable community for the refugees on Lesbos was essential.

Anna made contact with [Help Refugees](#) founders Nico Stevens and Josephine Naughton and this enabled a partnership for a local housing programme supporting 10 families over a five year plan to enable them to live, take language classes, get jobs and access to education.

A Greek teacher has been funded. The programme has been designed with local partners with the initial 100 per cent funding to be reduced over three years to 25 per cent.

'Four of the refugees we'd seen arrive at Lesbos put their lives into the hands of smugglers and reached the UK. That was an eye-opener. They are housed in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation which is usually in deprived areas and known to criminal gangs who exploit and abuse these vulnerable people. Once people are granted asylum they are evicted

within 28 days. We realised that the biggest barrier to living here and avoiding such abuse was language.

'Many of the individuals we met had professions or had been studying. To make their education and skills transferable they needed an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) qualification.'

The IELTS is demanding and in even greater demand since government cuts to the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programme which now only offers a pitiful two to four hours of tuition a week.

'We approached my local English Language School in Wimbledon, number one in the country. The school's directors had offered help to the British Council; it hadn't been very forthcoming, so they were excited at the prospect of helping.

'We had funds for travel expenses and course materials, but not enough to cover tuition costs. They happily took on our students and provided preliminary course materials for us to share with refugees.

'At this point we knew we had to become a charity and were guided by [Prism The Gift Fund](#), which taught us how to run a charity and advised us on safeguarding and anti-fraud. We'd witnessed mis-expenditure in Greece and wanted complete transparency.

'RefuAid now works in partnership with 78 language schools. We have 40 students at

Manchester Metropolitan University where the Masters Teaching English students need students to practice on. We also have a further six on the Pre-sessional English Language course at Reading University. In total we have 220 students. Our potential is limited by our capacity to grow. We need £1,250 per student per annum, but have leverage worth £4million for tuition and also donations of £260,000.

Of the team of 10, seven are caseworkers. They build crucial one-to-one relationships with the refugees so they understand exactly what the barriers are for them getting back to work. 48 per cent of the refugees are language students who intend to go to university and the other 52 per cent had careers which have been paused by their need to flee.

'The average cost of re-qualifying to work here is £6,000; £10,000 for lawyers, £8,000 for vets and architects and £6,500 for dentists and lorry drivers. We'd heard of a Canadian organisation, Immigrant Access Fund (now [Windmill Microlending](#)) set up by a group of women who were horrified that, for example, they'd encountered cleaners with PhDs. They provided interest-free loans and gave us encouragement to use their model.'

'We approached Street UK for a loan admin quote and with PRISM and donors we had £20,000 to start lending. We put out a message on social media and immediately had 68 applicants of which 51 were eligible. The average loan now is £5,250. So far we have lent £370,000 to 68 people. Karim, a neuro-surgeon we met on

Lesbos, finally has the accreditation to work here and is employed at St George's Hospital in London. His wife is also here and studying for the English language requirement to gain her UK accreditation to work in obstetrics.

'Fortunately we have just been awarded £420,000 from Comic Relief and Joseph Rowntree. So we are looking forward to making the aspirations of refugees a reality'.

Ann asked Anna how she switched off, given the dedication of the team and the heart-rending human stories they encounter every day. She's a surfer and that, together with travelling, is her relaxation. RefuAid has very strict office rules that the team switches off at the weekends. In the summer they have a whole week off, but the pressures are huge with 700 on the language waiting list.

Anna concludes by saying 'we believe in the power of #dosomethingfornothing – simple acts of kindness to transform people's lives'.

So what can individuals do to best support RefuAid, apart from donations or organising fundraising events?

'We're always looking for people to help others with applying to university, careers mentoring and (if people hold any CELTA qualifications) English language tutoring'.

To support RefuAid find them on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) via [@refuaid](#)

M has been on the RefuAid language programme and once she had gained the language qualification she needed, she borrowed the funds from its Equal Access Loan programme to cover the cost of requalification.

M asked to remain anonymous, but shares her story here.

Image courtesy of Anna Jones

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M's story

I am an experienced high profile senior consultant in haematology and oncology who was drawn by destiny into the UK.

Just in a few months, my daughters and I lost everything: our home, our car, all our belongings and all this alongside the sorrow of becoming separated from our family and friends, feeling lonely and the trauma from what had happened to us as well.

Indeed, we became homeless; a situation I had never even imagined. We were sent to a refuge and there, we were given support and relocated in the community. In that moment, I cannot imagine what would have happened if there was not an organisation to help us.

I needed to find a job and pass exams to be able to practice as a doctor. The nightmare was the English language exam. My English was fairly good, but I needed a high score for my registration with the General Medical Council.

It was a huge barrier in front of me and other doctors from abroad. I was sent for tuition for the English exams by other charity organisations as I could not afford the tuition fee. However, the quality of these courses was not desirable and as a result I mainly self-studied. I was completely desperate.

Then one of my friends introduced Refuaid to me. I contacted them through their website and they responded the next day; it was so swift! I was not positive that they would reply to me, as I had done this for other organisations and I had not got any answer. I was referred to Hessy for an English course and she offered me an IELTS course and although they were busy with their clients, they did that for me very fast.

At first, I was not optimistic about the English course based on my previous experiences. However, when I went there, I was astonished by the quality of the course and in fact I found out that I had wasted my time with the other English

courses. I wish I knew that institute earlier and I had been sent there before to save my time. Fortunately, I passed the English exam and I could overcome one of the biggest barriers in my way with the support of RefuAid.

Now it was the time for other exams. I passed the second exam. However, I fell into depression before my third exam and I failed, which made my depression worse and I thought that I would not be able to do that exam again. But the way RefuAid approached the situation was really professional. They left me for a few days and then they contacted me. In that time, I was struggling with financial issues as well, because I had lost my job. So I was hopeless, jobless and depressed.

They made an appointment and I met Niamh and Johnny outside their office. I cried for two or three hours when I was speaking to them. They listened and offered more support. Indeed, they had everything I needed in their magic pocket.

They offered me a loan and private psychology counselling. Johnny even came to the Citizen's Advice Bureau with me which was really heart-warming. I cannot describe how I felt. I was not alone; I had someone to come with me like a friend.

Fortunately, I passed my third exam too. To be honest, I couldn't have done it without RefuAid's support. Now they are helping me to find a job. Whenever I feel anxious I tell myself, 'don't worry, they are there to help you.'

The support from RefuAid is holistic, away from prejudice, honest and high quality. Sometimes, I thought that I was a component of a project for other organisations. But when it comes to RefuAid, I think that I am a human being who needs help.

When I start working as a consultant, it will be the organisation I will donate to, as I know that they will help people in the way they deserve

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Mo, a dental surgeon and father of two young girls, borrowed £6,750 on the [Equal Access Loan scheme](#) to cover his requalification costs and is repaying £187 a month over 36 months. He's currently awaiting the results of his final exam.

Image courtesy of Anna Jones



Mo's story

'RefuAid and everyone in it provided orchestrated efforts of help and support before, during and after securing the loan required to return to my career as a dental surgeon.

'I was so depressed and about to lose faith, when RefuAid came to the rescue and gave me hope. Through the loan they helped me secure to get through the hefty costs of dental licensing in the UK. Their kind support continued even afterwards and during my preparations and revisions for my license exams, they ensured that I've got all I need of not only financial support,

but also emotional support to keep my morale high while battling through my job, my studies and my family.

'They've arranged for meetings with local distinctive professionals from our specialties to give us relevant guidance, they took the extra mile to make sure we have what we need even after securing the loan. It is fair and the least thing to say that RefuAid and the brilliant, talented and dedicated team behind it were truly a family to us and they were always there when we needed them.'

We gave Anna the Her Edit magic policy wand - these are her three (or rather four!) wishes...

- Family reunification and the legal aid that is necessary.
- Ensure that children are legally permitted to be reunified with their families.
- The asylum process needs to be independently audited so that everyone receives a definitive response within three months. Currently it can take as long as 10-14 years.
- Permit asylum seekers to work rather than to become vulnerable to criminal and illegal activities.

Carly Barratt wrote for [Her Edit](#) in 2017 about her experience of alopecia and her volunteer work for Alopecia UK. In 2016 she starred in a BBC4 documentary tackling attitudes to beauty and was photographed by internationally renowned Rankin.

Here she shares her story of her little boy Joey and his transition from being Phoebe.

Words by Carly Barratt

Images courtesy of Carly and Joey Barratt

My two sons

CARLY BARRATT

To anyone that doesn't know me, the title of this wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary, but to those that do know me it would be a little confusing.

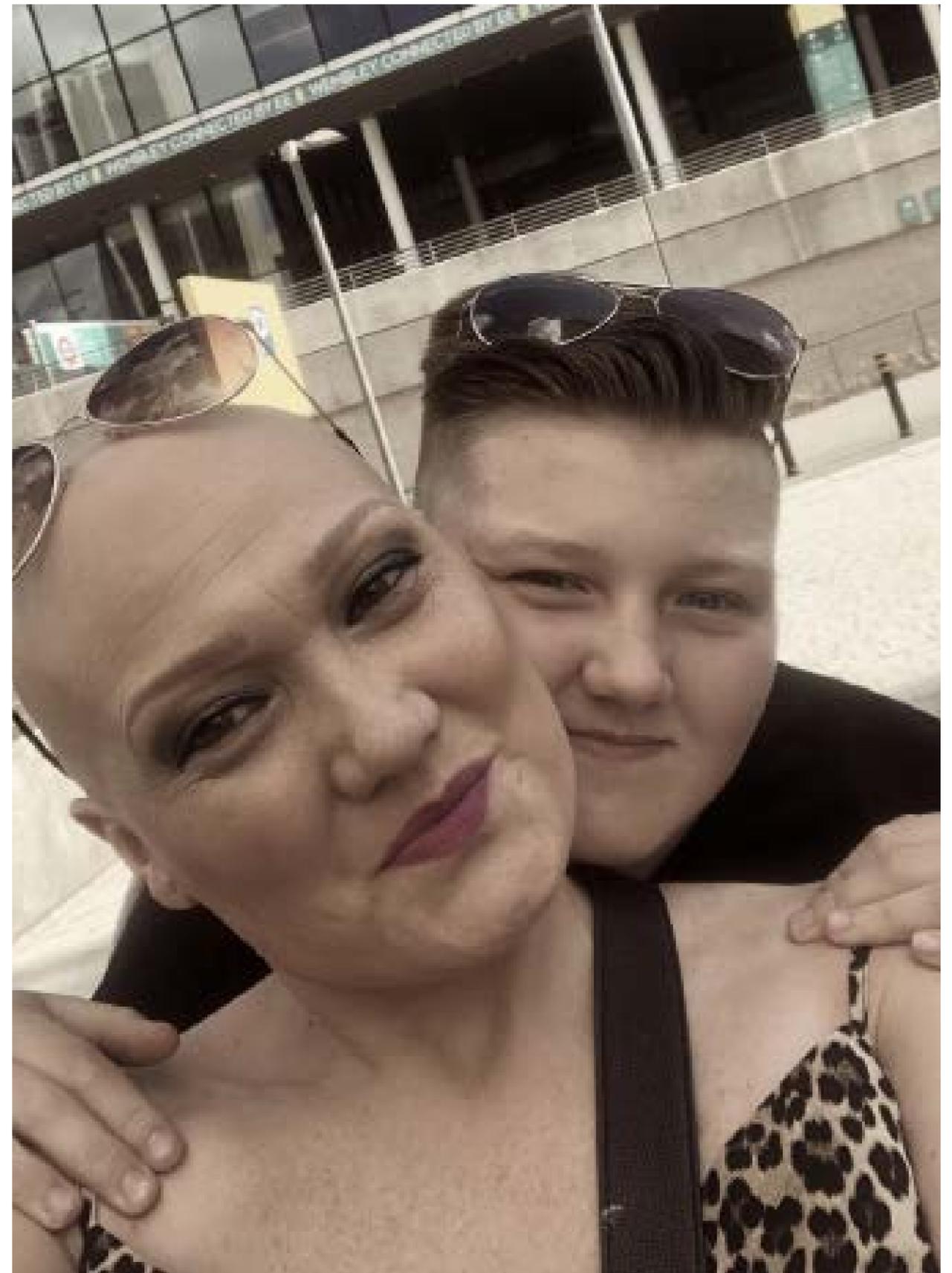
On 23 June 2002 I gave birth to my first child, a beautiful baby boy and on 8 August 2006 I gave birth to my second, a gorgeous baby girl. I can't tell you how lucky and blessed I felt to have 'the pigeon pair'.

I loved shopping for girls' clothes. I had a mini me and used to imagine us having girlie nights doing our nails and having face packs and playing with make up; all the mother and daughter things that we look forward to.

When Phoebe reached toddler years I began to realise she was not a typical girl. She was so beautiful with piercing blue eyes and golden blonde hair, but every morning started with a battle. She hated girls' clothes, and by hate I mean hysterical temper tantrums while trying to get her dressed. She would scream, 'I don't want

to wear girls' clothes, I hate girls' clothes' and as soon as my back was turned she would be out of her clothes and in something of her brothers', even down to wearing his pants. I'm sure the neighbours thought that I was torturing her. She would show me pictures of men in magazines and say that she wanted her hair cut like a boy. She would get frustrated and cry because she couldn't understand why she couldn't stand up to go to the toilet like a boy. She would tell me all of the time that she wasn't a girl, she was a boy and her name was Thomas.

One day, when she was about four, we were having a heated discussion about it, as we did every day. She repeatedly told me that she was a boy and I kept correcting her and telling her she was a girl. I told her that boys have a willy and asked her if she had one, to which her reply was, 'not yet, but I'm going to grow one and it will be a big one, you'll see!' I laughed so much, but she was so adamant and serious; she truly believed that one day she would be able to grow one.



I continued to make her wear girls' clothes as best I could when we were out, but as soon as we were home she would strip off the minute we stepped through the door. I quickly decided that the battle wasn't worth fighting and started buying clothes that were more tom-boyish and often said that I wouldn't be surprised if she told me she was having a sex change when she was 18.

There was nothing really feminine about her; she walked like a boy, had a stocky build and even had a deep voice. Everywhere we went I was having to correct people when they called her son or lad. I didn't want to influence her in any way so I never made a big thing of it. I just let her be herself and encouraged both of my children to be happy and proud of who they are and that they didn't have to conform to society's pressures of what was considered 'normal'. I felt she was too young to fully understand what she was feeling, but I knew she wasn't just a tom boy like people kept telling me. It was more than that, but it had to come from her.

At nine years old she was still asking for a boy's haircut, so I told her to find a picture and she could have it done. She was over the moon. She started secondary school and all was well briefly, but then a couple of boys started picking on her, calling her tranny and lesbian. She told me that she wasn't either of those things and she had told them that too. Things settled down for a bit, but when she began year 8 the boys started again. One day she completely lost it and beat them up. This was so out of character for her; she was the kindest, gentlest of children. Everyone was shocked.

After a lengthy phone call to the school they told me they had been concerned as her behaviour had gone down hill over the past few months and the once bubbly and happy girl had been replaced with one who was very angry and sad all of the time, being argumentative with teachers

and acting totally out of character. It was at that point that I knew.

On 8 February 2019, after I'd spoken to the school, Phoebe arrived home and I asked her to come and sit with me so we could talk. I told her what the school had said and asked why. She told me it was because of the what the boys were saying about her being a 'tranny'. I asked her why it upset her so much; was it because it was lies or was it because it was the truth? She broke down and said that it was because it was true and that she wanted to live her life as a boy.

I threw my arms around him and held him so tightly. I literally saw the weight of the world lift from his shoulders at that moment. 'I know sweetheart', I said, 'I've always known, I was just waiting for you to know'. He said that he had always felt it, but knew for definite over two years ago. My heart broke that he had been carrying that burden for all of those years. It was tough enough for him with the onset of puberty and racing hormones, but to know that all of these body changes were going against everything that he felt as a person must have been so hard.

That evening I dropped him at football practice and dashed to the supermarket to buy him mens' toiletries and a birthday card with words that could have been written for that moment.

'Reach for a start and never settle for less than your heart's definition of true happiness.'

'Today loving wishes and thoughts come to mind for a son that was born to be one of a kind. Making his way with a mind of his own, making a difference and making it known that he has his own hopes and dreams to pursue which is why, son, these wishes are special, like you.'

That was the day that Joey started his life. He kept saying that he couldn't believe how calm I was about it and thanking me for being that



way, but I didn't see what other way I could have been. He is still my child, the only thing that has changed is his name. He is still the kind, caring, loving, thoughtful and funny child that I loved. If anything, I loved him more, if that was ever possible, and was so immensely proud of him for being so brave and true to himself.

I told his brother who shrugged his shoulders and said that we always knew and it didn't change anything, but it has. It has brought them so much closer. They are either in the garage working on their push bikes or on a bike ride or playing Xbox together. I burst with pride every single day watching them together. Everyone we told was of the same thinking; they had always suspected so it wasn't a shock, but I was fully prepared to remove anyone, friend or family, that had an issue with it, from our lives.

Joey came out fully at school recently. His name has been changed on the register and it has made all the difference. Even the boys that bullied him are now his friends and Joey is happy again. Before coming out, he was spending as little as one or two hours in class and the rest he was putting himself in isolation as he couldn't cope. Since then he is in every single lesson, happy and smiling again.

I did have a moment a few days later and shed a few tears. Not of sadness really; it's difficult to explain. I had to say goodbye to Phoebe, but I welcomed Joey with open arms. We have found it so easy to transition from Phoebe to Joey, it felt more natural referring to him as a boy then it was as a girl. I always felt that even I was living a lie all these years.

I had a few pangs of guilt and 'what ifs'. Should I have allowed to him to live as a boy from those toddler years? Would it have been easier for him and caused less emotional turmoil? I will never know and, like anything in parenting, there is no rule book and we kind of make it up as we go along and do what we feel is right at that moment.

Some parents make the decision to transition as soon as their child tells them and that is the right choice for them. Waiting for Joey to get to an age where he understood his feelings and could make the decision knowing fully the implications

and struggles he might encounter, was the right decision for us.

Its been a whirlwind few months...researching chest binders and swimwear, reading other peoples' journeys and looking into the medical aspect of transitioning. Our GP was fantastic and referred Joey to the Gender Identity Clinic in London. Sadly the services are very stretched and there is a 20 month wait for an appointment. I know that this is going to mean that we will have some turbulent times ahead as his female body continues to develop.

He started periods aged 10 and his chest is well developed already. Joey had already researched everything and knows that he has to wait until he is 16 before he can receive testosterone and has said that he would like top surgery at 18. It's disheartening having to go through the next 20 months without hormone blockers. In my view, hormone blockers, the effects of which are fully reversible, would give him the mental space to actually live his life without the mental torture of growing breasts and having periods.

I looked into getting them privately, but at around £300 a month, it's unaffordable although should his mental health deteriorate then I would find a way. I was shocked to learn of the high suicide and self-harm statistics amongst trans teens and young adults, I will never allow him to become one of those statistics, so if I have to work every hour and sell everything I own to pay for private care to stop this from happening, then I will in a heartbeat.

As a mum, we all want our children to be healthy and happy. The three of us have been through some tough times over the years from divorce to homelessness, but this certainly wasn't one of them. The transformation from Phoebe to Joey has been phenomenal. He has grown so much as a person in the past few months and now loves life. He's complete and our lives are now complete; it's like the missing puzzle piece has been found.

I feel so incredibly lucky and proud to have two wonderful and amazing sons. We call ourselves the three musketeers.'All for one and one for all', and I will ALWAYS ALWAYS have their backs.



Prior to opening Re:Store, Megan Adams worked in consulting for five years, working with UK retailers managing projects to implement new technologies. She recently moved to Hackney to be close to the shop and says she is currently enjoying exploring the area and all the brilliant restaurants and cafes.

Interview Ann Clark

Images courtesy of Megan Adams

Ditching the plastic

MEGAN ADAMS

Tell us about your business.

Re:Store is a refill shop with no single-use packaging; customers bring their own containers to refill. The shop has added to the growing number of zero waste shops or shops offering unpackaged products, with the common goal of tackling the extensive plastics crisis and generally reducing waste. Customers can refill grains, oats, rice and pasta, nuts and seeds, herbs and spices, confectionery, oil and vinegar, household cleaning products, tea and coffee. Sustainable lifestyle products such as stainless steel water bottles, lunch boxes, bathroom and beauty products are also available - plus we also have kombucha on tap!

What motivated you to start in this line of business?

In 2018 my New Year's resolution was to use less single-use plastic, and it quickly consumed a lot of my attention. Through stripping out plastic from my life, I started to realise what an issue it is for the planet and how surrounded we are by it in this modern world with our demand for convenience above all else. At the time there were only two zero waste shops in London and after visiting them I was inspired to open my own, with the generous advice and support of those shop owners.

What inspired you to start up in business on your own?

I became more and more motivated by the plastics crisis and protecting the environment; at the same time I was feeling uninspired by my job in the corporate world, and wanted to do something that was going to make a difference. I had always felt that I would love to run my own business, though I didn't know what that would be, so I decided to turn my new passion into a business. After writing the business plan in the evenings after work over the summer, I took the leap to leave my job in November last year and opened the doors to the shop in February 2019.

What have the challenges been?

Business-wise the main challenge has been raising awareness of the shop, with a limited budget for marketing. Word of mouth has been the most valuable tool, but it's a slow process and requires patience, plus while the location at Hackney Downs Studios is brilliant, the footfall isn't as heavy as it would be on a high street.

Personally it has been a challenge getting used to be working by myself as I've always worked in teams in the past, especially when the shop is quiet. It can get quite lonely!





What are the most important skills you think you bring to this business?

The ability to really listen to my customers and understand what they want, and building relationships with them as they become regulars.

What do you most look forward to in your working day?

Having interesting conversations with my customers. I've learnt so much from them, and equally it's been satisfying to share tips and advice on reducing waste. It makes me really happy when conversations are sparked in the shop and it creates a real community feel.

What's been your biggest triumph to date?

Getting the shop open and in a pretty short space of time. I got the keys on a Tuesday and had a soft launch on the Sunday, followed by the public launch the following Saturday! There are also daily triumphs when you've helped someone start their journey to reducing waste, or helped them along their way.

What's been your biggest disappointment to date?

It's not really specific to my business, but just generally the lack of response from the big supermarkets and consumer goods companies. There has been a great deal of media attention on this subject in recent months, and the lack of positive action from the companies that could make a real difference has been disheartening.

What are your ambitions for the next decade?

I would like to grow the Re:Store brand, but exactly what that might look like I'm not sure, as this is a sector that is going to see a huge shift in the coming years. Ultimately if the big supermarkets and leading producers of consumer plastic change their materials and processes, customers won't need to seek out these types of stores.

However I do believe there will always be a place for local business, particularly as trust in bigger brands has been lost. My aim is to continue to work towards helping people reduce their waste and helping drive more positive shopping behaviours.

Visit [Re:Store](#) on their [website](#) and find them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)



Artist Fiona Weedon has exhibited widely across Europe and the United States. In 2001, she moved from London to Barcelona since then has divided her time between the city, London and her house 300 kilometres away near the Pyrenees.

Words by Jayne Phenton

Images courtesy of Fiona Weedon

Chasing the light FIONA WEEDON

Even if you had never met Fiona, you would immediately appreciate her love of nature and passion for the landscape by viewing her paintings.

They are lush and joyful and delight in the architecture of mountains and trees and the details of vegetation which become microcosms of the wider world.

'I react almost viscerally to the natural environment around me and never fail to find interest and stimulation, even in a landscape I've been looking at for over a decade. Obviously there is change over time, but it can also be as dramatic as a sunrise, a rain storm or a just a cloud passing over the sun.'

Fiona grew up in Mallorca where her mother, Veronica, and photographer father, Tom Weedon, moved in the late 1950s. It is an island with a rich artistic heritage; the artist Miquel Barcelo was born here, Joan Miro moved here,

as did the poet Robert Graves who was a family friend of the Weedons. This bohemian start in life certainly seemed to equip her with a free spirit, an artistic sensibility and fluent Spanish.

After graduating from Chelsea College of Art with an MA in fine art in the early 1990s, Fiona established herself in London, teaching and exhibiting at the Bruton Street gallery in London and the Cricket Hill Gallery in New York amongst others, and art fairs in the US and Europe. The a visit to a friend living in Barcelona became a pivotal move to the Catalan capital.

'Barcelona is a vibrant city, but much smaller than London and, certainly at that time, an easier place to negotiate a great quality of life which could accommodate my work as a painter. It's also warmer and cleaner and the wine is cheaper of course!'

Fiona's paintings had long been informed by excursions into the countryside and that was



now the more mountainous landscape outside of Barcelona and towards the foothills of the Pyrenees. Her partner is an experienced mountain climber and they would undertake challenging walks and climbs, all of which fed into her work.

'My experiences and childhood memories of Mallorca, the light in the mountains and the seascape had constantly influenced my work. The landscape here resonated with that.'

In 2003, Fiona came across a barn which had served as home to a shepherd and his farm stock in a tiny village called Santa Engracia. People are outnumbered by the local farmer's sheep by at least fifteen to one. The nearest town is 10 kilometres away and the striking thing about it, especially if you live in the city, is the relentless quiet. Fiona has a studio by her house where she spends months at a time, especially if she is working on a series of paintings or a project.

'Everything I love, that inspires me and stimulates me, is here in this fantastic landscape. The light is constantly changing and capturing that magic is the drive behind my work. It continues to fascinate me even though it's a landscape that I have been looking at over the last two decades.'

'It is a source of joy and frustration, but meeting that challenge is almost a compulsion to find that means of expression.'

Fiona's next exhibition is called Chasing the Light and is at Contemporary Art Gallery Kapoenstraat 29, 6211 KV Maastricht, NLD from 12 October to 6 November 2019, open Thursday to Saturday 11:00–17:00 and by appointment. Visit www.pontarte.com or email marieke@pontarte.com for more details.

You can follow Fiona on [instagram](#)



IMAGES

Right: Untitled, acrylic on canvas, 92 x 73 cm
Above and previous page: Fiona working in her studio.



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