

## Interview with Suzanne Evans 14<sup>th</sup> Nov.. 2019

If you attended Abbot's Hospital 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Evensong in November you would have heard Suzanne play her violin. The music was exquisite with a string quintet sensitively supporting the girl's choir.

Suzanne and I met at the Royal Oak pub on a dank dark Thursday evening where a coterie of choir parents wait for their off-spring to return from choir practice. Suzanne has a child in each choir.

She offers that she recently had a "Big Birthday!" but her characteristic peaked cap, elfin face and petite figure make one think of someone much younger.

Born in Long Island, New York, Suzanne laughingly explains.

"I have always loved living by water and was able to swim before I could walk." The violin also entranced her at a young age but her mother said she had to wait until she went to school to learn, which she duly did.

When it came to University she explains,

"The sensible thing would have been to stay in New York but I wanted to move out, as I love nature, so I went to study Music at Shenandoah in Virginia. The Shenandoah Valley is one of the most beautiful places in the world!"

Shenandoah, is 400 miles from Long Island, the valley, bounded on one side by the Blue Mountain is part of the Appalachian Trail where campers and hikers are warned to beware of venomous snakes and black bears, so a very different environment from New York,

But it wasn't just the natural environment that was stunning,

"This area is the apex of the North/South divide, I was shocked, as a student of 17 to find gun aisles in the Wal-Mart and Confederate Flags flying from the back of pick-ups!"

At University she made long lasting friendships, in fact celebrating her birthday with them in 2019. Specialising in Violin, Suzanne revelled in playing all genres, confiding, "what I really like best, is playing "cheesy pop" hastily adding, "but whatever the genre I want it to be good no matter what it is."

Suzanne clearly likes a challenge and to explore.

"After Grad. School I went to work in Mexico for three years on a Government scheme, working in an orchestra training up the next generation of musicians. I was thrown in the deep end, as the pupils didn't speak English so we had to get by with sign language! It was a strange place to start out, as normal transactions like depositing a pay cheque might take a whole afternoon. But the orchestra was a conglomeration of lots of different nationalities and that was great... I miss that." She loved the Salsa dancing too.

It was there she met Jonny who she married and there their daughter was born. In 2008 the family moved to Guildford, Suzanne's first time living in the UK and where her son was born. "I didn't miss the scorpions, cockroaches and heat, the monsoon floods at 4pm or the plague of locusts that came down on me as I walked to school! I yearned for cosy carpets and pubs."

"But there was masses of cultural shock in England, words and phrases didn't carry over, people would say, "are you all right? And I would think what is wrong.... don't I look O.K."

"I also miss the small talk, the sort you get in the North of England where people you don't know just strike up a conversation."

Now Suzanne works freelance, dividing her time between teaching, performing and her children.

"I feel as if I am in a cartoon with plates spinning... I am off to China for 3 weeks with the Zulu Ballet and the Soweto Gospel Choir, there are five in the band, and we've already taken it to Singapore and the Albert Hall. Travelling and touring is exciting and I like seeing different places and getting out of my comfort zone."

Suzanne knows that Jonny and family will look after the children while she is away as our meeting ends and her children emerge beaming from choir.