

Fergus Byrne met Lisa Loader in Bridport

*Lisa Loader © Photograph by Robin Mills*

I grew up in Montreal. My dad came from a working-class background and was determined to make life easier for his family, by working incredibly hard. He's diligent and dedicated to everything he does, including being a dad and now a grandfather. My mum was a nurse, and is a super committed Mum, Grandmother, and homemaker. They both still live in Montreal. A big part of my childhood was that I was bullied—very badly, for many years—and I don't know what I'd have done without my parents, who showed me unconditional love.

Eventually I found some good friends, did a BA at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, and then came to Bristol Uni to do a master's in film and television production. As a kid, I retreated into film to escape the real world, becoming those characters instead of myself. To this day, I love stories so much—watching films, then watching them again with someone I know will love them. I've seen so many films again through the eyes of my two daughters, Joni and Jessie, and I think mine and their father's passion for film has spread to them.

Anyway, I landed in Bristol in 1996—the year *Trainspotting* came out, which had a big impact on British film culture. We felt like anything was possible and were determined to make great films. It was there that I met my ex-husband, Chris. We were excited about moving to London, but first we got married at Bristol registry office with just two witnesses, and two years

Lisa Loader

later we got married twice more, once in Canada and once here. So, we were actually married three times to each other. Our second and third weddings were in 1999, and it felt like the whole year was one big rave.

My first job in the industry was in sales and distribution. I started at PolyGram as a PA and eventually worked for United International Pictures. Box office results mattered; there was no Netflix or streaming back then. I got to meet some famous people or at least talk to them on the phone. Hugh Grant called me one morning because he knew I'd be first to receive the weekend results, and I spoke to the Coen brothers around the time of *The Big Lebowski*. They really cared; they wanted to know about the global reach of their films.

Then the UK Film Council opened—another revival for British film industry. The idea was that anybody, without an agent, could send in a script and have it read and considered. So, I applied there, took a half-pay cut, and went into Development. I loved it and worked with many inspiring people, but then I had my two babies and just wanted to get home to see my girls.

So, it all changed... We decided to try living in the country, travelled all around the UK, and chose Bridport—there was something about the vibe, a more progressive, creative energy than in the other places we visited. We sold our house in London, found a bit of land with a falling-down bungalow on it, and built an eco-house. With planning, it took about three years. But we were on our last dime and needed to make a living.

Ever since I was 15 hanging out in Montreal cafes, I'd thought I'd love to run a cafe. We saw a building for lease in Bridport, and it felt right, so we went for it and opened Soulshine Cafe. The vision came from Montreal and London—I'm really passionate about design and colour and perhaps I get some of that instinct from my mum. Bridport was ready for that kind of cool city cafe, so there was no slow learning curve—we were thrown in at the deep end right away.

The name comes from a Michael Franti & Spearhead song we listened to all the time. I was talking to friends on a train once about what to call the cafe—a bit loudly, maybe—and when I said Soulshine, the whole carriage went, "Yeah, yeah!" My little girls liked it too, and I always believed in their creative input. I did it for seven years and it was both tough and amazing. We got through Covid, and then these guys walked in and bought the assets, along with my coffee roastery, which is now Goose and Badger Coffee. I feel very lucky that the right people came. It's changed a lot but they have made it a wonderful new Soulshine.

After that, I followed another dream and retrained as a Craniosacral Therapist. When I was 26, working in Oxford Circus, I hurt my back. It went on for months; I'd seen specialists and tried many things, and nothing worked. Then someone suggested Craniosacral Therapy. I wasn't sure what it was, but two days later I was better—pain free. I thought then that I'd love to learn to do that one day. About five years

ago I trained in Stroud under Paul Vick and Nina Molyneux. Now it's something I just want to do all the time. If I won the lottery tomorrow, I'd do it for free. That's how much I love it.

When I was being bullied, I'd get home from school, walk straight through the house, jump in this pool we had for a while, and float on an inner tube. These days I'm often reminded of those hot Canadian summers. All I knew back then was that I'd get home feeling terrible, and by the time I got out of the pool I'd be okay again. In hindsight, I think when floating in that meditative state, I was tapping into a rhythm we work with in Craniosacral Therapy—a slow rhythm in the body, like a slow-motion wave. We help people drop down into it, and it reminds the body of its vitality and potential. Who'd have known the same state that helped me as a kid is what I'm connecting to now, to help others? Maybe I was always meant to come back to it. I'm running a series of workshops that stem from this experience called Floating light, so keep your eye out for them.

Right now I'm practising in Bristol once a month and in Bridport a couple of days a week, which leaves room for other work. I love being creative and working to strengthen community. I'm at Bridport Food Matters (BFM) just over a day a week as communications and community engagement coordinator, and I'm loving it. BFM is about growing, cooking, eating, and sharing—a sustainable path for good food to be accessible to everyone in Bridport. There are so many amazing small producers and beautiful projects like *Edible Bridport*, and it's a joy to spread the word and get everyone working together.

Just in the past few weeks, I've started working with Victoria Upton, who's bought the NatWest bank in Bridport and is turning it into 22 East Street Studios—eight or nine artist studios for a collective of visual artists, with a visual arts community and open space on the ground floor, and a beautiful garden too. She's asked me to be studio manager. It's an inspiring project, a chance to be part of generating creativity, which is such a huge part of a healthy community.

I'm constantly amazed by the people of Bridport and what they put out there. As soon as I landed in England, I started meeting great people, and that's continued. A mentor told me, before I opened Soulshine, that one of the hardest things would be finding good people, and I remember thinking, "That won't be hard for me." I hired a bunch of young people at Soulshine and watched lasting friendships form, and now I see them all, in their varied lives, just being awesome. However hard it was I'm proud of creating a space that brought people together, and I retain those friendships to this day.

I guess the thing I'm most happy about in my life is somehow bringing into this world my two daughters, who are kind, lovely people. I'm really proud of them every day.

Now that my girls aren't home as much, I am looking forward to more post graduate Craniosacral courses and really increasing my practice alongside working in my community, on bringing people together in great spaces. 