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Job interviews? I've had a few — and they were all disasters

Hilary Rose



It's a long time since I've been for a job interview, which is probably just as well because I was usually turned down flat. Offices all over London 20 years ago resounded to the sound of managers binning my CV before they even met me. They didn't want me as a receptionist at Christie's, or as a press officer at Historic Royal Palaces. Now it turns out that if they had called me for interview, my voice would have scuppered my chances. New research has shown that managers make assumptions about you on the basis of your first seven words.

In a nutshell, plummy voices get the job. I've been accused of many things, but having a plummy voice isn't one of them. I don't sound like the Wurzels, I'm well-spoken, but I'm a million miles from plummy. Researchers at Yale have found that interviewers make immediate assumptions about your socioeconomic status based on the pronunciation of a few words. Denied access to candidates' CVs, the researchers asked people to judge professional qualities and social class from a candidate's voice, and assign a starting salary. They found that if your accent was thought to be from a higher social class, you were judged more competent and more likely to get the job. You were also likely to be given a higher starting salary and a bigger signing-on bonus.

"While most hiring managers would deny that a candidate's social class matters," says the professor who led the research, "in reality, the socioeconomic position of an applicant, or their parents, is being assessed in the first seconds... People with hiring experience infer competence based on socioeconomic position." In this country the principal of an elocution school has reported an increase in the number of people wanting help to get rid of their regional accent, and it's surely no coincidence that the school is in Birmingham.

On the few occasions I reached the interview stage for a job, it rarely went well. At the first interview I went to after I graduated, I was more than a little thrown when the man's first question was: "And what does your father do?" I was turned down for a secretarial job because the man said I was better educated than he was. My interview for a summer job in the sales at Harrods focused, bizarrely, on whether I planned to try to steal from the till, and became even weirder on my first day. My new colleagues impressed on me the advisability of not attracting the attention of a particular boss when he walked the floor, unless I wanted to be whisked to his office for "careers advice".

A friend warns of the perils of being interviewed over a drink after work. After one too many, she accepted a job she didn't want, then had to backtrack humiliatingly the next day. And whether you get a job isn't always about your CV or even your accent; my suitability for my first job in newspapers, typing Conrad Black's autobiography, was gauged on my ability to read his illegible scrawl across endless A4 notepads.

But the real joy of not going for job interviews any more is that I no longer have to answer that most deadening of questions, "Is there anything you'd like to ask us?" which could be relied on to make my mind go blank. I know you're supposed to express a keen interest in their environmental strategy or career development paths, but the only question I could ever think of is the only one you should never ask: "What will you pay me?"



Luxury is a laundry room

The world's most expensive house has gone on the market and, blow me down, it isn't in Wales. Casa Encantada in Bel-Air is 40,000 sq ft and costs \$225 million. It has a

screening room, sports facilities and ponds — plural — of koi carp. I don't even have one pond full of koi carp. Life is so unfair.

But Casa Encantada has helped to put

my tiny flat into perspective. My idea of luxury isn't a pond, but a laundry room. I think I need to dream bigger.

Deborah Ross is away

A plant even I can care for

Ironically for someone who dreams of having a garden, I can kill a plant at 20 paces. My flat is a botanical graveyard where flourishing plants and flowers go to breathe their last, usually within seconds of crossing the threshold.

So I'm all over the news from New York that they have perfected a technique of making dead plants look alive. They are called "preserved" plants and these, unlike ordinary dried flowers, which tend to look brown and crisp, have had their natural sap replaced with conservation liquid. The result is that they look alive while actually being, as a curator at the New York Botanical Garden put it, "as dead as dead can be".

This is wonderful news. Even I can't kill dead things. In an ideal world I would have cut flowers in every room, but cut flowers are a) expensive and b) a full-time job, what with having to change the water and cut the stems every ten minutes. I thought orchids might be the answer because someone told me they were indestructible, but the end of that sentence could now read "before they met me". No matter. The future's bright. The future's dead.

Johnny Cash?

William Cash was astonished to discover he was a distant cousin of the country music icon — so he went to meet the rest of the clan in Arkansas

There is no road sign to Johnny Cash's boyhood home, which stands off a dirt track surrounded by cotton fields in the Sunken Lands of north Arkansas. Nor does it have a name. It is a tiny white clapboard house of five rooms, which Johnny's parents, Ray and Carrie, moved into with their five children in 1935 as one of the first poor families "settled" in the New Deal colony of Dyess. All there is to distinguish it from 500 others (each had 20 acres of "jungle land" to clear, along with a mule and a chicken house) is the number above the front porch: 266.

Cash described it as a "real bare-bones kind of place, three rooms in a row, the classic shotgun shack". There was no electricity or water — only an outside lavatory. It couldn't be farther away from my home, Upton Cressett Hall, a grade I listed Elizabethan manor house in Shropshire.

Nevertheless, it is of special significance to me. Last weekend I visited Dyess for the Johnny Cash Heritage Festival at the invitation of Johnny's Grammy award-winning singer daughter Rosanne because, unlikely as it may sound, the country music legend and I are related. Family genealogy started by Rosanne's father directly links our British Cash family to that of the Man in Black.

No one was more surprised than me to discover this fact five years ago. Although I had gone out to America to work for *The Times* in 1991, and stayed for nearly a decade in Los Angeles, with regular visits to Tennessee, Georgia and Virginia, I discovered Johnny was my "cousin" only after Rosanne tracked down my father, Bill Cash, MP, by email to the House of Commons.

It turned out that we shared an ancestor in the Anglo-Scottish mariner William Cash. He was the captain of the 17th-century pilgrim ship, *The Good Intent*, that took Rosanne's family to America in 1667. For 25 years he had run a highly profitable business ferrying pilgrims from Britain to the New World, then settled his family in Virginia, where the Cash family had more than 1,000 acres of plantations. My father, always proud of his singing "voice" and a member of the All Party Parliamentary Jazz Appreciation Group, was delighted.

Rosanne is a serious anglophile and invited our family to one of her concerts at the Barbican in London. Halfway through a black and white photograph of a dashing soldier holding a rifle flashed up on the theatre screen. "This is my ancestor William Cash, who fought in the Civil War," Rosanne told the audience. "And I'm happy to have some members of my family here tonight."

As the picture flashed up my fiancée (now wife), Laura, almost gasped with disbelief. The Civil War soldier looked strangely similar to me and my father. The same Celtic features, prominent nose, high cheekbones and overall likeness were unmistakable. "He has the Cash ears," Laura whispered. Standing there, realising that I was related to America's greatest country legend — who has sold more than 90 million records and played for three presidents at the White House — did feel a little strange.

Surreal though it was, it was nothing like my weekend in Dyess, where the extended Cash clan — mostly still living around Nashville or Arkansas — gathered, as they do every year, to salute the cultural legacy of Johnny Cash. This has just been enhanced by the recent magisterial 16-hour PBS documentary *Country Music* by Ken Burns, in which Johnny is portrayed as the country titan of 20th-century music and Rosanne appears as well.

The festival was my baptism into the hardscrabble South. I didn't know what to expect as I set foot on Cash holy soil. A Nashville version of *Dynasty* or more of a low-key "country" family reunion with dogs and children? One thing was certain, I wasn't showing up in a Nissan compact car. I was wearing an old pair of black jeans and a denim linen shirt (from Cordings of Piccadilly) and was driving a rented V8 Dodge Charger. I parked it outside the little Baptist church where Johnny had first sung in public as a boy.

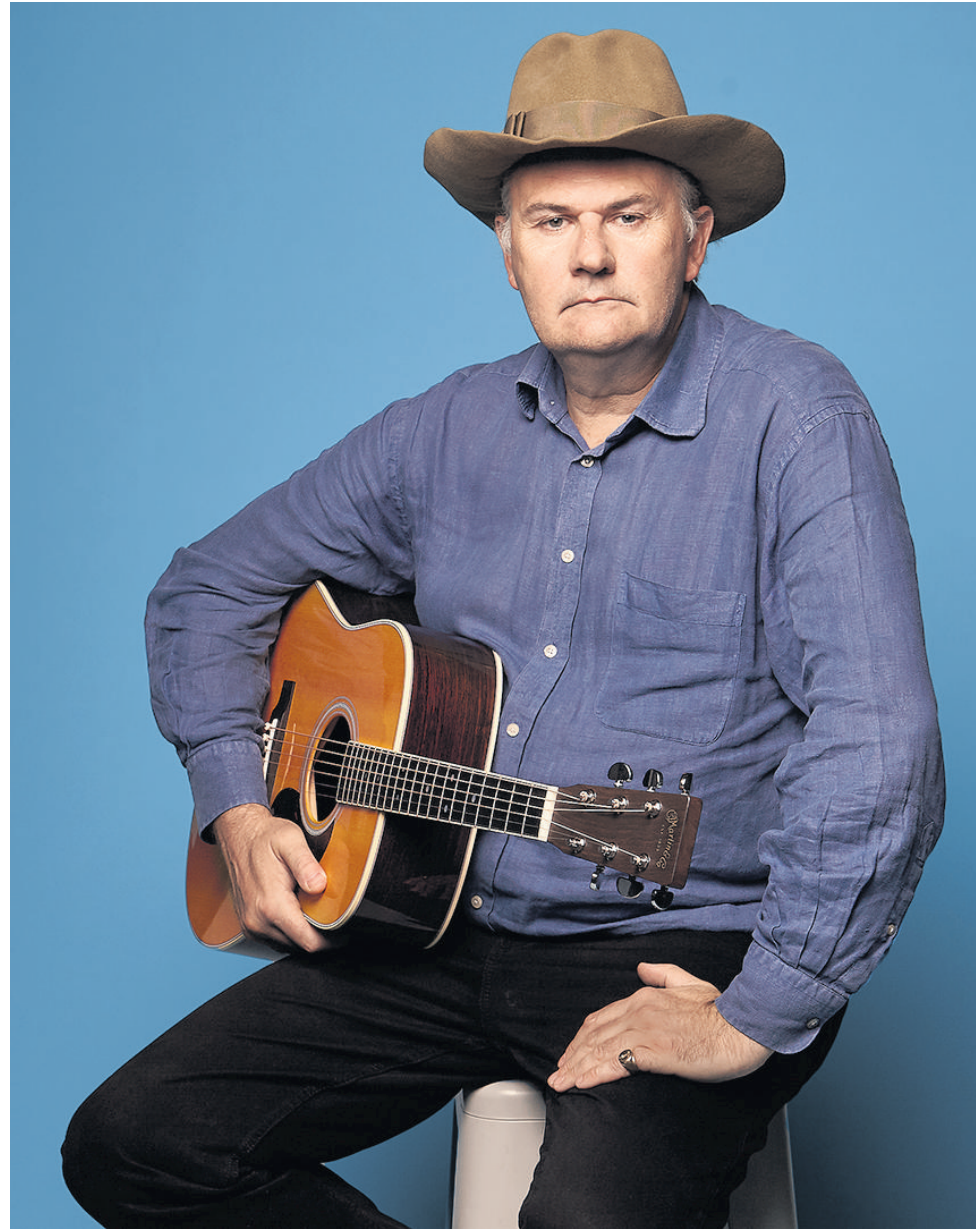
The fun kicked off on Friday night with an informal dinner in the old administration building at which the 30 or so extended Cash family members were invited. We ate barbecued southern chicken, pasta, wheels of brie and giant orange pumpkins washed down with iced beer and wine. Each table was decorated with cowboy hats. The family uniform seemed to be the Nashville cowboy look with black jeans and boots and many wearing black T-shirts and baseball caps that said "CASH" in white print. I was welcomed like a long-lost cousin.

I was introduced to Roy Cash Jr, the 6ft 5in son of Johnny's oldest brother, Roy, who didn't take off his pilot shades or large black cowboy hat all weekend. As I sat, he looked me up and down and said that, at 6ft 4in, "you look like a Cash", although he said his uncle Johnny was "only" 6ft 1in. Roy served as a captain in the US navy, wrote several songs for his famous uncle and lives in Memphis.

He introduced me to his glamorous daughter Kellye Cash, who I soon learnt was the Miss America of 1987. Kellye has also performed with such stars as Billy Joel, and did some acting in regional theatre. In her own right, I learnt, she had recorded six albums, "four Christian and two country". So I

He's one of the family

COVER AND BELOW: SARAH CRESSWELL FOR THE TIMES; WILLIAM CASH IS HOLDING A CF MARTIN D-35 (THE BRAND ASSOCIATED WITH JOHNNY CASH), £2,699 COURTESY OF MARTIN & CO (QUICKFIND.ME/MARTIN)



was not only related to the greatest country star of all but also a Miss America? This was becoming fun as well as a little surreal.

Politically, the Cash family are mixed, with Rosanne being a loyal and outspoken Democrat — she lives in New York — and Kellye a Republican who has performed for the hardline conservative Pat Buchanan and was elected to the State Executive Committee of the Tennessee Republican Party. As I swilled a beer, I heard that beauty parade success ran in the Cash family — Kellye's

“**Not only was I related to the legend but also a Miss America**

daughter Tatum was runner-up in the Miss Virginia pageant this summer.

The next night there was a family concert hosted by the musical matriarch of the family, Joanne, Johnny's sister, who has recorded 27 albums. It was headlined by Rosanne, but ended on a giant family sing-along. Given that I haven't picked up a guitar since twanging along to Queen in my bedroom at school in the 1980s, I wasn't invited to join in, but there

must have been thirty Cashes — of various levels of career success — up there. It was lovely to see them all together as a country musical dynasty.

While I was writing my new memoir, *Restoration Heart*, Rosanne helped me with the Cash family story in America, sending me pages of genealogical history that had been started by her father after he discovered in the 1970s that his family line “comes down from Queen Ada, the sister of Malcolm IV, descended from the first king of Scotland”, as he begins his autobiography.

He had discovered the unlikely story when flying to America. Dressed in his trademark black suit, he found himself seated next to Major Michael Crichton-Stuart, the hereditary keeper of Falkland Palace in the Kingdom of Fife in east Scotland. When the singer remarked that he had heard that the Cash family were originally from Scotland, Crichton-Stuart replied that there were villages, farms and streets in Fife that still bore the Cash name — as well as Loch Cash near Fife.

Further investigative work by Crichton-Stuart would establish that the Cash connection with the Fife area could be traced back to the 12th century. Rosanne told me that her father had tracked down a royal dowry charter of 1160 that gave the Cash family substantial lands around “the Place Cash” in the valley of the Miglo river around Strathmiglo. These

William Cash poses as Johnny Cash, above right



“Lands of Cash” were held for more than 250 years until James I (James IV of Scotland) seized them in 1424 when he returned to Scotland after being imprisoned in England.

Then the Cash family dispersed and the castle fell to ruin. Some remained around Fife, but others moved south to Cheshire and later became leading Quakers — politicians, religious dissenters (founding *The Tablet* magazine in 1840), newspaper editors and business figures.

In the US the Cash family ended up drifting to Arkansas as a poor cotton-picking family after their Georgia plantations were burnt by General Sherman in the Civil War.

Johnny Cash was “very proud” of his well-born Scottish roots. “He used to hang the Cash family coat of arms up in his big house on the lake in Tennessee, beside a cliff,” Rosanne tells me. “It was in his main living room. It meant so much to him to know that his 12th-century family was of royal Scottish blood.”

For many years house 266 was a ruined shack on the point of being demolished. However, since Johnny's death in 2003, the Cash musical legacy grew in importance and became entrenched in 20th-century culture. Arkansas University decided to buy the boyhood home as a restoration project helped by private support.

Last year the house was made a National Historic Landmark, something that gave Rosanne great satisfaction. It has been restored and furnished, including with a family piano and red-rose kitchen curtains. The annual heritage festival has also helped to regenerate the local area economically and culturally.

Learning about my American Cash family has been an intriguing lesson in how there is such a thing as family character. We have often been hard-working and have a missionary and radical streak in our genes (politics, journalism, publishing or religion). We tend to be mavericks and outsiders, and religion is never far away.

Returning home after my weekend, I felt strangely elated. Instead of our usual Christmas carol concert in our Norman church, how about if I play steel guitar and hire a gospel choir?

The lowdown Harry Styles

Well, this just goes beyond the realms of ridiculous.

I'm fed up with things being ridiculous. Really. Bring me some moderation. I'll take anything that's distinctly average. Just — please — nothing out of the ordinary.

Sorry. Not today.
Sigh. What is it?

It is fashion-related. It is also Harry Styles-related.

Remind me?

Harry Styles. He is a pop star. The best-looking one from One Direction?

Which is?

Honestly, where have you been living? Mars? One Direction are a very, very famous boy band who split up — sorry, “went on hiatus” — in 2016. You've probably danced to one of their songs at a wedding or inadvertently sung along with the radio.

Right. So what has this Styles fellow done? Formed his own political party? Found a way to clone himself? Won a Nobel prize?

Er, no. It has been revealed that he freezes his wardrobe in a secret underground archive in London. You're joking.

I'm not. His costume designer Harris Reed said so in an interview with GQ: “It's basically like a giant refrigerator — a frozen vault.” And that's not all.

I'm not sure I want to hear any more.

All his outfits have 24-hour surveillance — you can look at them with an iPad.

But why would anyone want to freeze their clothes? Is this some new way of getting rid of moths?

According to Reed it's to preserve them. You've heard of cryonics, where people have their bodies preserved for future use, right? Well this is the fashion equivalent.

It was bad enough when rich people started freezing their fat and faces, but now this? Clothes? What is there to preserve?

I could quote someone saying that style is eternal but...

Please don't.

Perhaps this is the future. Maybe we will all have fridge-wardrobes one day.

For the sake of my electricity bill I hope not.

Hannah Rogers

