Recordings- Katie O’Malley

1) Introduce yourself:

My full name is Katharine O’Malley, but my friends and family call me Katie or Kate. I was born on the 23rd of April 1992 in Birkenhead, Wirral. I live in a peninsula in England, between the River Dee, overlooking Wales, North Wales and the River Mersey, looking over to Liverpool. The nearest cities to my town are called Heswall, or Chester and Liverpool. I am English, but have Irish descent from both my mother and father, which is quite obvious by my incredibly Irish surname. I have one brother who looks quite similar to me but is 6ft 2, called David, who’s 2 and a half years older than me.

Height wise, I am about 5ft 8. I have long brown hair which is unfortunately naturally curly so I straighten it quite a lot which probably doesn’t do it any good, and I’ve recently had highlights to make it a lighter colour. I have green eyes and I’ve got quite pale skin although I do tan in the sun thankfully. I would say I am quite sporty and I try to eat healthy so my figure is slim but I wouldn’t say it’s skinny. I try to do a lot of running and I’m quite active, I do try and maintain a healthy figure.

It’s quite hard to describe your personality, I would hope that people would say I’m kind and compassionate; I do always try and think of others. I like to have a laugh and I’m always up for fun so I like to think that I’m, on the whole, a positive bubbly person. However, I must admit that I am a terrible worrier and I get incredibly stressed when it comes to University work and achievement. I have always been quite competitive, not so much with other people, but with myself. I always push myself to achieve my upmost and strive to do the best which can take its toll because I’m quite hard on myself sometimes.

In terms of sport, I was an active member of several sports teams in school. I was on the netball team, I played hockey for the North West of England, I loved rounders, I was on the athletics team, I did rock climbing in my spare time. Nowadays in University, it’s quite hard balancing sports with my studies but I run a few times a week, I go to the gym with friends occasionally, play netball on a Friday for the French society, I go swimming sometimes with my Mum, things like this. Running is quite a big sport in my family. My mum has done several marathons, as has my brother, and it’s my dream to do a marathon before I turn 21, but we will see how that works out. When I go back to university next year, I really want to try out for Women’s rugby as some of my friends are doing it this year and say it’s really good fun and a good way of keeping fit. Although I am a bit scared of being tackled down to the ground but I’ll give it a go. What’s the worse that could happen?

2) Thoughts on France

I have always loved France and the French language from an early age. I don’t know if it’s from watching the Disney film *Beauty and the Beast* too many times as a child, but I always had this dream of living in France, going to the local patisserie, buying a croissant on the way to work with a coffee and speaking French all day long outside a cafe with friends. This really was the stereotype I grew up on as a child. In England, especially for girls, the stereotype of French women is that they all dress is chic black clothing, they barely eat which is why they are all so skinny, everyone rides a bike with a basket on the front, normally carrying a baguette, everyone smokes and it is the most romantic country in the world. After visiting Paris several times and now that I’m living here in Toulouse, the stereotype doesn’t exactly match up to the reality. I must admit, compared to England, cyclists are a common sight, as are the numerous patisseries shops everywhere. I can’t deny, I love French food, the pastries, the fashion, the autumn weather, the French streets and mentality to the importance of lunchtime, although this equally can be irritating. In France everyone seems to have 2 hours off for lunch, most shops close at this time. This doesn’t really happen in England, nothing shuts for lunch. One thing I have noticed recently, which is probably a weird observation, is that sometimes when you are coming through a doorway with another person or you give way to someone walking along the same pavement as you when there is no room, nobody really says thank you. I would say that English people do have the stereotype of being overly polite, saying ‘sorry’ and ‘thank you’ for a lot of things but I’m starting to think that perhaps this is not just a stereotype anymore. I noticed this whilst living in Spain too; I think the English are a bit too polite in some circumstances. As for me, you can’t beat the French language, it just sounds so beautiful. The accent and pronunciation is difficult for English people but whenever I hear a French person speak, I’m just so jealous that I wasn’t born French. Oh an lastly, one thing that has got on my nerves a bit recently is the fact that dog owners don’t pick up dog poo. Walking along the pavement, I’m constantly annoyed by the fact dog owners haven’t thought about pedestrians. I’m not generalising and saying that this is the image of France I now have, and this is France, it’s just something that you don’t really see in England so coming to France and owning a dog myself, it really bugs me.

3) Worst part-time job

I have had 3 part-time jobs so far in my life. The first was working part-time at the weekends and holidays during school time, in a chocolate shop for a large confectionary chain in Britain called Thorntons (now this was a fun job!). Then, the summer before University I worked for my Dad, along with my brother and his friend, imputing medical notes from paper form onto the computer. This was 7 hours a day of sitting in front of a computer which wasn’t exactly stimulating. However, nothing is worse than my most recent summer job, the job I did just before coming to France- working as a house cleaner. At the beginning of the summer, I desperately wanted a job in a cafe or restaurant, something that wouldn’t be too difficult or take up too much time but would give me a good wage. However, as it is every summer, all the students come back and are all doing the same thing, searching for jobs so in the end there is nothing left. I saw an advert in the local newspaper for a cleaning agency looking for students who would work the summer, with flexible hours, for above minimum wage. Now, I’m not going to lie, I wouldn’t say this was my dream job as a child but I wanted the money so I went for the job. I ended up getting the job and worked 5 days a week, cleaning 2-3 houses a day. Sometimes the job would be a 4 hour clean; some would be 2 hours so it varied on the size of the house and how much detail the customer wanted you do go into. I cleaned these houses on my own, lifting a basket of cleaning products up and down stairs, hauling a huge hoover around everywhere and regularly soaking myself with the mop and bucket which was not fun. I was regularly critiqued on my ‘mopping’ technique and would be told to clean a window again because there was a finger mark in the corner. But the most mortifying part of the job was that I had to wear a pinafore to clean and I had to clean a family’s home whose daughter went to my school. Bearing in mind I was Head Girl at my school, it was embarrassing knowing that this girl had seen me go from making speeches to 1200 students in assemblies, to scrubbing the insides of cupboards for a measly wage. All I kept thinking of was how much money I’d be earning and that it wasn’t forever. One of the things that really got on my nerves was the judgemental attitude that some people gave me, thinking that because I was working as a cleaner, I was presumed to be thick and have no life ambitions. The second they found out that I was actually studying at University and was earning money to go and live in France for the year, their attitude towards me changed completely. I didn’t like how people would judge me just on the job that I was doing. Other than the money, I did really enjoy going to old people’s houses and cleaning for them because I loved speaking with them, making them a cup of tea, helping them with things because I kept thinking that they might not have any other interaction that day and that when I get to that age, I would hope that someone would take the time and effort to come and speak to me and care for me, even if it was just for a few hours.

4) Person I admire

I always find this question a hard one to answer, because I could always respond with the generic answer, listing all the famous people that I admire, for example Princess Diana, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, the suffragettes, Margaret Thatcher, Audrey Hepburn etc. And although, these figures in history of course deserve admiration and merit, the person that I really admire is plain and simply my mum. My mum is the most selfless, compassionate, loving and warm-hearted person you could ever meet, seriously she is like an angel. She has always put other people first, never once complains about anything she does, gives her time up for people that she doesn’t even know, runs marathons for charity organisations and above all, she loves doing all these things. Every Sunday we would drive 2 hours away to see my Great Aunt who had cerebral palsy and was in a nursing home, just to spend the afternoon with her. Although she couldn’t speak, my Mum would always say that ‘It doesn’t matter if she can’t speak to us, just knowing that we are there, will mean the world to her’. Currently my mum cares for 3 elderly people that we know, they are not related to us in any way, some are neighbours, some are friends of neighbours, people that she has met who need help and she donates her time and effort into doing their weekly shop, sitting with them in the afternoons just chatting with them, bathing them, sorting out their finances, organising medical care for them; and she does all this without being paid, solely for the satisfaction that they are ok and to let them know that someone cares about them. According to family members, my Mum has been like this from an early age. She trained as a nurse at 18years old, was the top of her class and was even asked to present flowers to the Queen when she came to visit the hospital where she worked and where I was eventually born! She then worked as an interpreter for the deaf as she saw the importance that deaf people didn’t feel isolated from society. She has always taught me and my brother to care for people and never think that we don’t have the time for anyone. I always say to my Mum that she needs to take care of herself and have some time for herself because she gives so much to other people. Sometimes I worry that people will take advantage of her kind heartedness but she doesn’t care, as long as people are cared for, she will do anything for them. Now, although my mum might not make the history books due to her compassion, and she might not have changed the world politically or anything like that, but having seen how she has changed people’s lives in the simplest ways, just seeing them smile when she comes into the nursing home with a potted plant and some chocolate biscuits or bringing their favourite liquorice and music, makes me realise that she makes the biggest difference a person can make in someone’s life- because she is there to care for them. What else does a person need really?

5) Best Vacation

I’d have to say that the best vacation I’ve ever had is when I was 6 years old and my parents decided to move to Australia because my Dad had the opportunity to have a sabbatical year abroad for a year. We lived in a town, 2 hours south of Perth, West Australia to a town called Busselton, right on the coast of Australia. We moved on the 27th December 1998 so we went from freezing cold winter weather in England, to boiling hot sunbathing weather. My brother and I went to school 3 times a week and my Mum taught us our English curriculum the other 2 days, normally resulting in an afternoon at the beach. School in Australia was so much fun, the teachers would take lessons outside, on the beach and everyone was so laid back and relaxed about life. On the weekends, my family would take the car along the coast, we would go surfing, visit wildlife parks etc. After 6 months in Busselton, we travelled for 6 months around the whole of Australia, starting in Cairns near the Great Barrier Reef. We did snorkelling in the Great Barrier Reef, swam with dolphins and whales, visited Aboriginal camps, went to outdoor cinemas most evenings, played tennis. Then we ended the year with travelling to Sydney, going sightseeing, we visited family etc. Not many families I know would take the risk of pulling their children out of school, uprooting their lives and moving across the world for an adventure, but that’s exactly what my parents did and we loved it. My parents have always instilled in my brother and I, the importance of travelling and understanding the world. I truly believe you can’t understand the world without seeing all of it and even at such a young age, living and travelling around Australia was such an exciting time in my life and an experience that I will treasure forever. 16 years later, I have such vivid memories of Australia and have such fond stories to tell people about what the 4 of us did during that time, it really was the best holiday and time in my childhood ever.