

Child Psychologist

featuring Laverne Antrobus

I have a confession to make. Before I went along to interview one of the country's leading consultant child and educational psychologists I made sure that I had done my homework. I first checked with the dictionary to reassure myself as to the respective definitions of a psychologist and a psychiatrist. For any of you who may also be unsure, the OED states: \*Psychologist – a person who is qualified in the science and study of people's minds and behaviour. \*Psychiatrist – a person who is medically qualified to study and treat diseases of the mind.

It was with some trepidation that I rang Laverne Antrobus' doorbell. How should I approach someone whose expertise includes the skill to study the mind and behaviour of others? Was I the one about to be analysed? I need not have worried, in no time at all I was relaxed and with a cup of coffee in my hand we started to chat.

Laverne moved to the Suburb 13 years ago with her partner, a world-renowned photographer, Andy Barter. They had been living in a flat in North London with their daughter, Scarlett and Laverne was pregnant with their second child. They wanted to raise their family in a house so Andy decided to explore the area. As Laverne describes it, "We really stumbled across the Suburb, but once here it felt like an ideal find. As soon as I saw our house I could imagine our children playing in the garden and, as a family, us walking together on the heath. The Suburb seemed a place that we would all feel content in." Soon after the move Emilia was born and two years later they had a son, Joseph. The other important member of the household is their dog, Lorna.

As a Consultant Psychologist Laverne spends much of her time at the Tavistock Clinic specialising in the treatment of children between the ages of 6-12. When I asked her

why this age group she explained that as part of her specialist training she spent a lot of time working in primary schools and was shocked at the number of young children who were in need of help. At the Tavistock she works at a day unit for youngsters who have, as she calls it 'fallen by the wayside' either through family problems or because of problems with education. She is also part of a clinical team where a group of professionals – social workers, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, nurses and psychologists – confer to decide on the best way forward for the treatment and care of children referred to them. She understands the publicity given to some tragic cases of failure within social services but emphasises the enormous amount of excellent work which goes unacknowledged. She added, "My main role is to engage, gain trust, be non-judgemental and to provide much needed support for children and parents alike." She also consults at two specialist residential schools and is in great demand as a speaker at mental health conferences.

Amazingly, Laverne – this lovely, energetic yet completely serene person (despite all her domestic and professional responsibilities) – has still found time to write a book, 'Aint Misbehaving' and to appear in several television series including 'Little Angels', 'Teen Angels' and 'The All New House of Tiny Tearaways'. Perhaps her most challenging role in the media was 'Growing Babies' for BBC Four which looked at the beginning of life in the womb and a baby's desire to survive pregnancy at all costs. She presented this herself, having researched the subject widely in the USA and Europe.

Laverne also travels to South Africa for a registered charity, Siya Phulaphula aimed at developing child and family mental health there and is involved with several other charities including Shelter.



Laverne Antrobus

PHOTO: ANDY BARTER

I asked Laverne how she achieves all this. What does she do to remain so relaxed? Her main reason is the family. "I enjoy cooking and we all love having a meal together, we walk on the heath and I don't work in the school holidays so that we can spend time together. I can watch my son playing sport and my daughters enjoying their drama lessons. I do pilates and I enjoy watching Arsenal –

I am a season ticket holder but have put that love affair on hold this year. When I'm on my own and want to unwind I sit on the patio and watch what's going on in the garden – fantastically rewarding. My main worry about the Suburb is the ridiculously fast speed at which cars travel – these roads were not made for it and I do care a lot about safety, particularly for children and the elderly."

membership card?" I showed it to her. "I see, and how long exactly have you been married to your wife Jane?" she asked, and glanced meaningfully at the door. Although she was being surprisingly good humoured, we thought it wise to move on to the next tent.

The second tent had a display on about Suburb Architecture and my friend and I were reading it innocuously, hoping that none of our peer group were there. A woman came up to us, and introduced herself, "I'm the suburb architect." "Gosh, so what do you do?" "I review planning applications and decide if they're...appropriate for the Suburb". She glared at me, daring me to consider an unlicensed loft extension.

We Suburbians, as a breed, get extremely passionate about urban development – either our self-evident right to build whatever we want in our own houses, or our innate prerogative to tear down whatever disaster the neighbour put up. Anyway more about that in another issue of Suburb News!

I have to thank Susie Gregson very much for her patience, since we ended up slinking back into the Member's Tent not only for the post show drinks, but also for the next day's performance of the Goldberg Variations. Also worth thanking are Leo Davidson (alias Jane Kessler) and his charming grandparents the Fishburns for their company, Dave for his lack of authority and Ellen for her extremely competent and graceful volunteering. I'll hope to see everybody again next year in the Member's Tent – if I'm ever let back in!



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