

# G7 AND BEYOND

21 YEAR OLD ELENA SALVONI DISCUSSES THE IMPACT OF THE G7 AND HOW TO EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION WITH SOME OF THE DUCHY'S MOST INFLUENTIAL WOMEN.



## About me

I was born in London but I always knew Cornwall was where I wanted to be. I grew up spending every holiday and free weekend in the county, and the summer before I went to secondary school, my family took the leap to relocate. As for so many who move to Cornwall however, my parents made the decision out of lifestyle considerations rather than job opportunities. I was

As a young person growing up in Cornwall, I had always been made to feel that being ambitious in your chosen field meant that you would move away, either to London or another urban centre. However, spending a large part of my university years at home due to the pandemic made me fall in love with Cornwall all over again, and dread the prospect of living in a city, particularly in a time when people are increasingly confined to their homes.

Thousands of people feel the same; Cornwall has overtaken London this year as the most searched for location on Rightmove and house prices and tourist numbers have rocketed. This has coincided with the G7 Summit coming to the county, the biggest and most far-reaching event to ever be hosted here. At the event, Cornish businesses, innovations and talent as well as the beauty of our county were broadcast to the world.

For many, including myself, this has increased a sense of excitement about what the future holds for Cornwall.

Career opportunities, which have all-too-often been viewed as scarce in the county outside of the tourism and hospitality sectors seem to be increasing across a range of fields, many of which are leading the way nationally but also globally. The space industry, arts, communications, technology and environmentally-friendly energy solutions are just some of the areas which young people in Cornwall can increasingly aspire to get involved in.

Therefore, I decided to ask some of Cornwall's most influential women, from across this range of different professions, about what they think is in store for the Duchy following the G7, their own stories, and what advice they would give to the next generation about building their careers in Cornwall.

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fortunate enough to go to Truro High School and Sixth Form, a school which nurtured my ambitions and helped me to recognise my passions for writing and research. I then went on to study History at the University of Warwick, alongside which I was an editor and writer for my university's student newspaper. This experience built my passion for telling stories which matter to people and I have since been an editor for a number of publications, including Empoword Journalism, which aims to elevate women's voices across the UK and globally.



## Melissa Thorpe

Elena: Tell me about your background and what you do?

Melissa: I'm from Canada originally and I grew up in a very rural area. I was always interested in astronomy but where I lived it wasn't really an option. I am also really into airplanes - my dad worked fighting forest fires using aircraft. I moved to the UK to study economics at the London School of Economics, specialising in aerospace marketplaces. About 11 years ago I was brought down to help Cornwall Airport Newquay diversify its business activities from just passenger services.

At the time I was looking at unmanned aerial systems, search and rescue and maintenance contracts, and then spaceport was announced in 2014. I was immediately moved on to that project, so I've been on the team since it started. I was initially brought in to write bids for the UK space agency funding, lobby government, and eventually secured our partners at Virgin Orbit. Then, earlier this year I became the Head of Spaceport Cornwall, filling the very big shoes of the previous director.

E: What do you think the Spaceport can provide the local community in Cornwall?

M: I believe this is a huge thing for Cornwall to reap the benefits from. That's my main goal with my job, to make sure that our activities reach as far across Cornwall as possible. At the beginning that's jobs, whether that's working directly with Virgin or us, contractors on site or this new facility that we're building, the Centre for Space Technologies. This will involve Virgin, other SMEs, academics and multinationals in one physical R&D workspace. There's a huge benefit in being a launch location because it drives interest and investment into your site. People want to be part of it, so we're trying to use that as a catalyst to create jobs and economic growth for the airport, Cornwall and the Southwest.

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We've also engaged with about 10,000 schoolchildren already this year, inspiring them to get into careers in STEM and showing them the pathways into the space industry.

E: Women are significantly underrepresented in the space industry according to recent statistics. What is Spaceport Cornwall doing to encourage gender equality in the industry?

M: Just going out and talking about it. Our team is pretty much 50/50, but unfortunately when girls get to secondary school they can lose interest in STEM. By telling my story I hope that I can be an example that the stereotypes associated with working in STEM aren't quite what they think they are. I never had role models growing up that would come into school, so now I am massively passionate about going in and getting girls interested.

E: What was your role at the G7 summit and how did you find it?

M: I welcomed the delegates as they landed in Cornwall alongside my Virgin Orbit colleagues and their rocket. We were getting the message across that they weren't only landing at an airport but also a spaceport and that the two can be integrated in their countries too.

My main objective for the G7 was to challenge outdated perceptions of Cornwall, showing it to the delegates, their entourage, and the media as an innovative and exciting place to be. It was definitely a lifetime memory, and I am so proud of how my small team delivered and represented Cornwall on the global stage.

THE G7 WAS A BRILLIANT SHOWCASE  
FOR CORNWALL'S TOURISM INDUSTRY  
AND FOOD AND DRINK SECTOR.



**Kate Wild**

**Elena:** Tell me about your background and what you do?

**Kate:** I've been in PR for many years, since I left university, and I set up my own business, Wild Card, about 25 years ago in London. I was born in Cornwall and 12 years ago I moved back with my family, and we opened an office in Truro which is our Wild West office. We've built a strong presence for ourselves in the food and drink industry, particularly the hospitality sector around hotels and places like the Eden Project, working with clients like Tresco Island, Roddass and St Austell Brewery.



*Photo: Karwai Tang, G7 Cornwall 2021*

**E:** What impact has the G7 had on your business and the brands you work with?

**K:** When COVID hit, about 60% of our business disappeared overnight, which I think was the same for a lot of creative industries in Cornwall. So, the G7 arriving as it did this year is a huge boost for Cornwall. We're certainly seeing quite a bit more interest in business coming back now which is good. The G7 was a brilliant showcase for Cornwall's tourism industry and food and drink sector. Seeing Emily Scott and the Watergate Bay team cooking for the G7 leaders at Eden was amazing and really good for Cornwall's food profile nationally. It was also incredible seeing Simon Stallard from the Hidden Hut doing the barbecue on the Saturday night using all-Cornish ingredients, and Boris with his bottle of Tribute! It is all adding to a real sense of positivity around our key sectors.

**E:** You've mentioned Cornwall's prestige in the food and drink sector and how this was showcased at the G7, but what would you say to young people who want to work in other industries?

**K:** I think that for the sake of young people we've definitely got to show that we're more than just a lovely holiday destination, particularly because our visitor capacity is only so much. I'm keen to keep young people working in Cornwall and not having to move further afield. We employ 12 people in our Truro office, and what has happened since COVID is we've been able to work on Teams. Work from home is much more fluid; our employees can work on London-based campaigns, and we've got cross-office teams. I think there's a real opportunity for young people, and as I said there's also opportunities growing around tech, energy solutions like the Wave Hub and Cornish Lithium, the Stadium for Cornwall and the Launchpad initiative at Falmouth University which is really strong.



*Photo: Karwai Tang, G7 Cornwall 2021*

**Daphne Skinnard**

**Elena:** Tell me about your background and what you do?

**Daphne:** I am currently Executive Producer at BBC Radio Cornwall. I studied journalism at Falmouth, now Falmouth University and like any young journalist, I found it difficult to find a job after university, so I got a completely different job alongside volunteering for the local commercial radio station. Then an opportunity came up with the BBC, and because of my breadth of experience in different areas I got the job. I do all sorts of different things and I love it because no two days are the same.

**E:** What would you say to young people who, as you did, want to stay in Cornwall but are worried about finding the career they want here?



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**D:** I think there are more opportunities now in Cornwall, it's such an exciting place to be. It's quite funny, because a lot of my school friends who were going off to university elsewhere said 'you go to Cornwall to retire, you don't go there to train or, or live or work'. And, of course, they're now wanting to come back!

**E:** What impact, if any, do you think the G7 will have for people in Cornwall?

**D:** The G7's showcasing of what Cornwall can offer has been a wonderful exercise in collaboration, and with that collaboration comes the showcasing of what Cornwall can offer. The impact of the summit will last in name because a lot of the recommendations made by the leaders will have Carbis Bay attached to them.

From what I've heard the world leaders and their partners were very impressed with Cornwall. I think the Eden Project was the perfect location to show what the G7 stands for, promoting sustainability and providing training for young people. The summit showed that Cornwall is a serious place in which to do business and is also taking environmental concerns seriously. **T B**