

FEATURING: the Olympic gold rush, Britain's French invasion, and the fight over James Brown's fortune

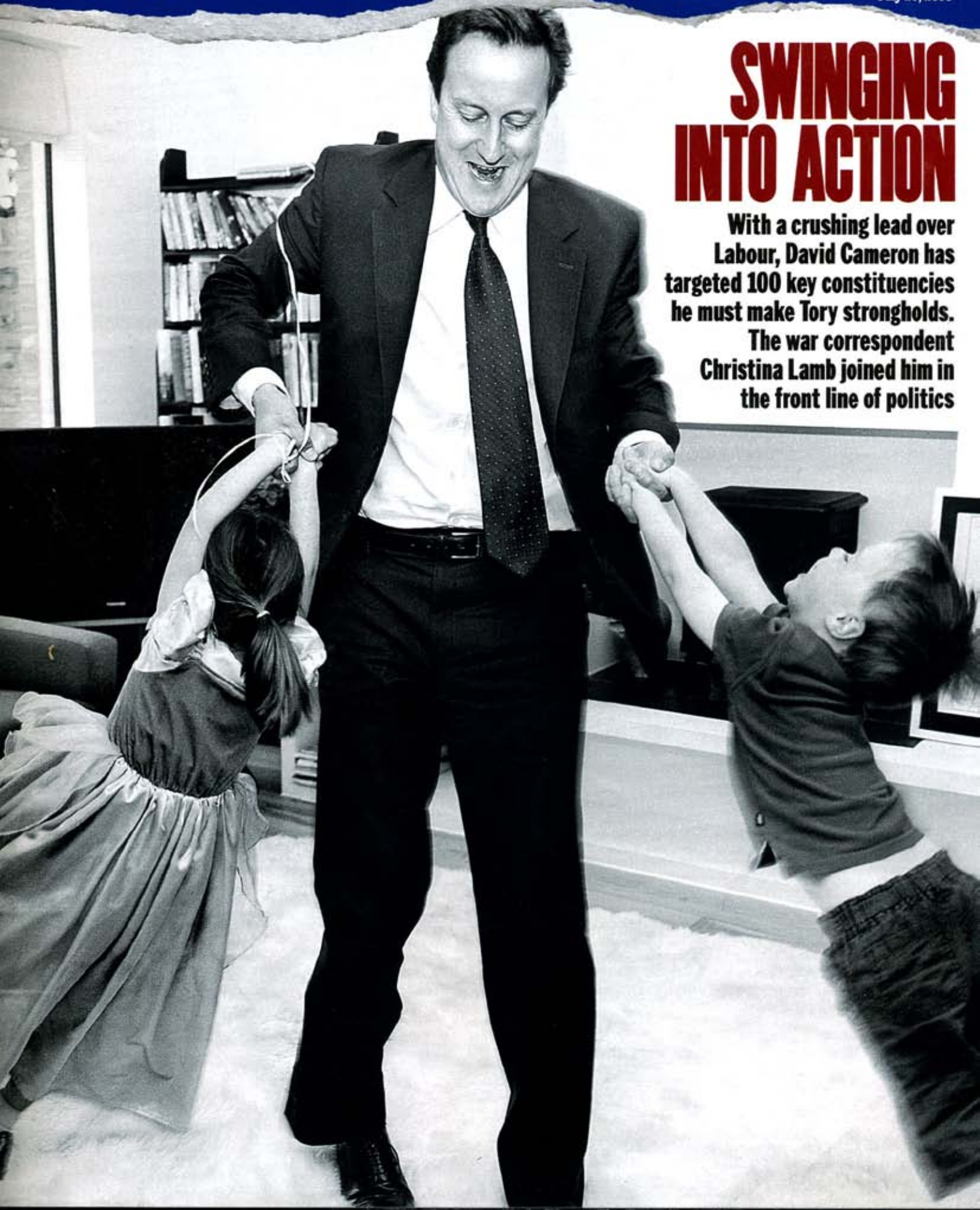
THE SUNDAY TIMES magazine

July 20, 2008

SWINGING INTO ACTION

With a crushing lead over Labour, David Cameron has targeted 100 key constituencies he must make Tory strongholds.

The war correspondent Christina Lamb joined him in the front line of politics



Kim Creswell, willow sculptress

The artist, 36, creates sculptures, mainly in willow, some designed to grow. After 16 years on the road, living in a yurt, travelling with trucks and trailers, then horses and a wagon, she rents a cottage in Dorset with her daughter, Rowan, 13

I set the alarm, but wake anyway at about 10 to seven. I go downstairs, make a cup of builder's tea, then go back to bed and write a list of Fun Things to Do Today, which includes menial chores. It helps me focus on the day and reminds me that I always have choice.

Rowan and I have come to an understanding: we stay out of each other's way first thing. While she gets herself breakfast, I make her packed lunch. She's always been quite independent. We've had our cottage since last November. After the yurt it's like living in a hotel: indoor bath and toilet, water on tap, heat and light at the flick of a switch... The decadence of it is beautiful, but there are pros and cons. When you're on the road you don't need as much to get by. If you do need money you just go and make it. Here, you need to find it whatever. That's something I had to get to grips with. Here we're really fortunate because spring water is piped in, so there's no need to go with horse and cart to fetch water. But funnily enough, that's the sort of thing I miss most. It connects you to where you are. I still go wooding, though, because our main heating is fires.

When I've made sure Rowan is on the school bus, before feeding the horses or having my own breakfast of yoghurt, fruit and nuts, I might go for a seven-mile run, or a ride or a walk. Our two dogs, Brindle and Summer, come with me. Stodge, my big piebald horse, I've had since he was born. Wonga — which is Romany for money — used to pull my wagon, but she's 34 so she's retired. And now I have Stodge's mother, Fay.

I work from about 10 until 4, when Rowan gets home. Between November and March, when the sap's down, I cut willow, plant more, and concentrate on my living willow sculptures. Mostly



‘WHEN YOU’RE ON THE ROAD YOU DON’T NEED MUCH. IF YOU DO NEED MONEY, YOU JUST GO AND MAKE IT’

I make animal shapes, but it can be anything. I create a sculpture and plant the legs about a foot deep in the ground, where they take root. For the first few years you weave in the new growth, then it's a case of cutting back to keep the shape. In summer I concentrate on non-living sculptures, using all the colours which come from the wood in the hedgerows. As well as willow I take beech, oak, ash, elm, hawthorn... I coppice, pollard, prune. If you do it responsibly, it does the tree only good.

I work outside in all weathers. I create a space, with bundles of wood around me, sorted by size and colour and flexibility. I don't need prep sketches. Because I've already cut and handled it, and thought about what I'll be doing, it is almost a subconscious action to pick up the right piece of wood. I'm quite into contrasting my work. Willow-weaving is a traditional skill, but now I'm working on creating sculptures, then painting them with ultraviolet paint, so they look different in different lights. I run workshops at arts festivals and go into schools to teach willow sculpture and hedgerow basketry.

I am starting to get into clay sculpture too. I figured after spending years wading in mud when I was camping on common ground, I should be qualified to make something with it. All my work is through word of mouth. Or people see my sculptures and get in touch.

When I get home I tidy up and cook dinner. You wouldn't think it to look at

our place, but I vacuum regularly. When I first moved in I broke three vacuum cleaners in a week. I was used to sweeping with a brush, and I was sucking up sticks with them — they do like that, do they? Now I've managed to get my head around the electricery. Also, in the yurt our fridge was a bucket of water with a damp cloth over the top. These days I can just do an occasional shop and fill the freezer.

Living in the countryside, there's a lot of game on offer. I'm given pheasant and venison, to which I'll never say no. The other day, Summer caught a rabbit. A friend wrung its neck, I skinned it and cooked it up. I like to use what's around me: young leaves of beech and hawthorn in salads, wild garlic, jack-by-the-hedge. Rowan's really good at nettle soup.

At the end of the day, a bath is such a luxury. In summer, we used a watering can for a shower, and for a time I had a tin tub which came out of a submarine from a reclamation yard.

I do lots of visiting, or have people over for dinner, which is another nice thing about living in a house, because people will come in all weathers. There are some good pubs around here. I like a drink of anything from red wine, a pint of bitter. I've been running, to a G&T or a Jack Daniel's. I like going to gigs to see live bands, or dancing to electronic music, which is where I got the inspiration for the UV sculptures.

After dinner, once the horses are bedded down, I do yoga, aerobics, whatever I feel like, and Rowan sometimes joins in. Then we might watch TV. I walk up the hill with the dogs to look down on the valley in the moonlight. I sit and absorb the energy from the moon and from being outside. How I sleep depends on the phase of the moon. I get so much energy from a full moon, it's almost annoying. In the open you're bombarded by stimulation: sound, smells. Indoors is just somewhere to lay your head. When Rowan is older, I'm sure I'll be out there again ■

www.kimcreswell.co.uk

**Interview by Rose Shepherd
Portrait: Robert Schweitzer**