

## One & Other Project

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm interviewing John Mawdsley today on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 on behalf of the Wellcome Trust as part of the One & Other Project. Hi, John.*

Hello how are you?

*I'm all right thank you. I'm glad that you agreed to be interviewed today.*

No, no it's great. It's a pleasure.

*So like I mentioned earlier I really want to talk to you about the experience of being on the plinth. You went there to promote the work of the air ambulance in the midlands.*

Yes, I was. I'd obviously seen the One & Other project in the media on the television and I thought, "Oh that's really interesting" so I had a look at the website and I saw that you could apply and I did do that, not thinking that I would get a place, and when I got the email through I thought "Oh crikey "What am I going to do?" And with my experience with the air ambulance it kind of came together that I thought "Oh that'd be great I could raise the awareness and this gives me the opportunity to do so."

*And how did you go about getting in touch with them and setting yourself up?*

The air ambulance service?

Yes

I just emailed them and I told them what happened and obviously they knew about my accident and they said "No that's great we can send somebody down and photograph the event" and they sent me through posters to advertise it and so on, so it was a good relationship there.

*Did you have any media attention? You mentioned an article in the newspaper.*

Yes I had, there was several local newspapers there that I'd sent information to just to try and raise awareness in the local community and just to get people on side in my local area and I did that in Felixstowe where I live and also in Essex where I worked at the time and yes, I got quite a few press articles out of it which was good for awareness really.

*How much money did you raise for them?*

It was just under £300 but it was in terms of my time there I wanted to raise awareness of the ambulance service as well across the country so when I was on the plinth hopefully the people that saw me from different areas would have gone back and thought, "Perhaps I'll donate to my local ambulance service."

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*What impact do you think the experience had on your life going on the plinth?*

Oh it was amazing. I mean I can't think of any other country where an everyday person could stand in the nation's capital alongside statues of heroes and have such a captive audience. It was, I guess it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, it was special and it won't come along again and I thought it was amazing.

*What was it like when you heard you had a place?*

Oh, I didn't believe it at first. I thought at first it was excitement and then I thought "Oh my God I've got to go and stand on the plinth" and I thought, "What am I going to do?" And it was just all these ideas running through my head and finally it just twigged and I thought "No I'm not going to do something silly or daft or... I'm going to use the opportunity, you know, how I can to raise awareness."

*And just to capture what the experience was like when you were on the plinth and immediately after can you bring me back and tell me what it was like?*

Oh it was a strange feeling being up there because when you're at ground level it's different, you're surrounded by people but when you're on the plinth you've got all the people around you but you feel completely alone. It's very odd ... it's, I felt like a statue myself almost in that everybody was looking up to me but I was separate from everybody else. It was very strange.

*Did you have any comments or direct dialogue with anybody in the square at the time?*

Yes the odd person asked me about, you know, what I was doing up there and so on but it was a case of capturing peoples gaze and just seeing their reaction to the picture that I had on the placard and just getting a thumbs up from them. I thought it was more communication there in terms of seeing their reaction and having a visual reaction than with words and I think that's more powerful sometimes.

*I was actually deeply affected by the photograph that you held up having watched part of your video yesterday of this pile of smoke, literally, and being very surprised you survived it.*

Oh it was. When I see that picture it's very powerful, it's a very powerful image to me because, well, when you see the car it looks like a squashed toy car and to know that me and my fiancée were in there and that we escaped with our lives, it's a very striking image and that was the reaction I got from people, you know, to see their hands go to their mouths as they saw it and then when I turned the placard over and showed them that I'm here, and I was stood on the plinth due to the Midlands Air Ambulance and what they did, you know, they give me the thumbs up and smiled and hopefully they went back home and it stuck in their minds and hopefully, you know, some of those people would have donated. I know quite a few said that they

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would so that was great. That was brilliant.

*So I heard the people cheering you in the Square. I know you had some friends there. Who came to see you?*

Yes it was my fiancée and her parents and my fiancée's sister and it was brilliant to have that support there with me because I was nervous and when I got up there they were cheering me and that just spurred me on really and yes, it's good to have support from your family and yes, it was brilliant.

*What impact do you think it had on their lives the fact that you went on the plinth?*

Oh it was a good day out for all of us and I know that my fiancée said she felt really special that I was up there and, you know, that she was related to the person that was stood atop on the plinth alongside Nelson and you know the other people and it made her feel special as well so it kind of rubbed off on everybody else. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

*Just out of curiosity do you talk about this experience together? How do you remember it?*

Yes we look back and we watch the videos and there was somebody from the Midland's Air Ambulance who came down and took photos so we look back over those and it's such a happy time really that you know we went down there, we went to Trafalgar Square and we made a whole day out of it. And like I said it doesn't happen that often and it won't happen again and I think the people that got the opportunity to stand on the plinth, I think it will stay with them and their friends and family forever and I think it's brilliant.

*Thank you John. I just wanted to talk to you now about the profile that you had on the One & Other website. You wrote as your three words to describe yourself Dream Out Loud.*

Yes I mean it's kind of where I guess you have to make your dreams become reality in that if you want to do something don't let things hold you back, just try and make it reality and you know if you have a wish to do something if you want to do something never hold that in never be afraid to try something new. Always be willing to take risks and sometimes they go wrong sometimes they don't but if you're willing to do that then you grow as a person.

*And where have you learnt this?*

I think it's just the accident had a big impact in terms of how I view myself and where I am and the world around me and it's taught me a lot in terms of living in the moment not worrying about the past or the future and just trying your best to be yourself.

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*Okay, so just one more thing about the profile I see you had a few comments one of which is from your sister who seems to suggest she's far away. Where is she at the moment?*

Yes she ... my sister and my granddad live in Merseyside and my parents live in Wales and I live in Suffolk so there is quite a distance there between all of us but, you know, we are at the end of a telephone and I do go and visit them regularly so in terms of distance it is great but that's easiest to overcome, you know. They're always there at the end of the telephone or you can go and visit them so that was great to have that support from my friends and my family.

*Out of curiosity, did you use any other social networking sites online, either before, during or after your time on the plinth?*

Not really. I mean I was on Facebook and I had statuses saying that I was going on the plinth and then afterwards I had the pictures from me on the plinth so and I'd met another person who was on there directly before me and we became friends on Facebook so that was good, that came out of it.

*Do you follow the plinth group of Facebook at all?*

Yes I'm a member. I'm a member of various groups on Facebook and it's good just to get their input in terms of how they felt and any updates and so on so and I check the One & Other website and I know there's a book coming out and so on so yes I do check up on the internet.

*And do you participate with this particular community at all either by writing online or meeting up physically in person.*

No not really. After I did appear on the plinth I did post a couple of messages and my pictures are on there so there was that side of it there was that input.

*Okay, thank you. I wonder whether you knew that people met on the 6<sup>th</sup> July one year on just a couple of days ago, a few days ago?*

Yes I saw that and I did think about going down but I had other commitments and so on but it was good to see people are still ... that the anniversary has come and people have met. And I think you know like I met somebody who was on previously and we became friends on Facebook and I think other people became friends and it built up a community that you know, it's brilliant.

*And what do you think made it happen then this sense of community?*

Because it was a one off it won't happen again and I think the people who got chosen instantly become friends, a community in terms of, they have this special incident in their lives that nobody else could witness and you could talk about it to

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somebody, what it's like to stand up there but to stand up there for an hour, and have a captive audience and so on, it does stay with you.

*Okay, thanks John. And now just to bring you back to what you mentioned about your accident that you had a haemorrhage. Tell me more about your accident, what happened.*

Yes, we were going visiting my mum and dad in Wales. I was going on holiday for a week and we were driving over there. It's a long journey, about six hours, and about two hours into the journey we stopped and had food and then we carried on and then on the outskirts of Birmingham I later found out that I'd had a seizure at the wheel and hit my head and had a small brain haemorrhage and consequently the car flipped over on the motorway and we crashed. And I was obviously unconscious at the time but my fiancée was conscious throughout the whole accident and it took the ambulance services, the fire brigade and so on an hour to cut us out and to get us off to hospital and we both went in the air ambulances to the hospital and that's where it started but we both sustained trauma and severe injuries and so on. My fiancée fractured her neck, she broke her wrist and her thumb and she had to be in halo traction for quite a few months and then myself I fractured my back in three places, I had a collapsed lung, various other cuts and bruises about myself so its, you know, it was touch and go at the time because I was in intensive care and I was in pretty bad shape really and I came to and I wasn't sure what had happened but the first word that I said when I came to was Nicola, you know, my fiancée. I wanted to know how she was and when they told me that she was okay and I was okay I thought right we can deal with this and then I listened to the nurse and she told me what had happened and I was just, you know, I was just shocked. And, you know, after me coming out of intensive care I said could we both be on the same ward and the staff at Selly Oak were really accommodating and we were both on the same ward so after then we had each other and that's all that matters that we were both alive, we had each other and we could help each other heal.

*What caused the seizure?*

Well I had had a seizure previously, it was about sixteen years ago and at the time they ran me through different tests and nothing came up and they said "Oh it was just a one off." So I just assumed that it was a one off and then I'd had this seizure in 2008 and they ran tests and I spoke to the neurologist and they said that I could have a tendency to have seizures but they were saying that I might not for another decade or so. So they give me the option to take medication or not and I chose to take it because it's that extra safety, you know, it's a definite precaution that it won't happen again and I think that's the guarantee that my fiancée needs, you know, in terms of getting back into a car knowing that it won't happen again and I've been told that it won't whilst I'm on the medication so that's good and my GP was brilliant and the staff at the hospital were brilliant too.

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*I know you mentioned already the way in which you now live more in the moment is a way in which you've come to understand since you've your accident but more generally I wanted to ask you how the accident affected your life.*

I mean, well, for one it brought me and my fiancée closer together because when you've been through that well we could've lost each other and it definitely it pulls you together and we have that I mean we still talk about it now and it's something that everybody else might not understand but we've got that together and it's brought us closer together and in terms of us both really it's taught us that every moment is precious that you shouldn't waste it because it could be taken away at any moment. I mean with me one minute I was driving the next minute I was out of it and I, you know, that could've been the end and I wouldn't have known anything, you know, so it's every moment that you have whilst you're on Earth, you need to try and treasure and not worry about the future or worry about the past. Just try and get on in the moment as best you can.

*Thank you for that and how do you think your family was affected by your accident and your fiancée's accident together?*

Oh, they were distraught that it happened and neither of our families were close, there was that added, you know, aspect of them having to drive to get to us and not really knowing the state that we were in. They were, both families were distraught really because they weren't sure, they weren't sure of what state we were in. I mean they were told but it's, you know, they needed to be there and they both were. My mum and dad and my sister came down from Merseyside and Wales and my fiancée came from Suffolk and her sister came from London so you know everybody was there straight away to support us you know that meant a lot because we knew that we were both okay and that our families were there. I think at times like that you just want your mum and dad don't you? You want that support there and we had that.

*I suppose it's fantastic that you've recovered from such a terrible accident. What were you thinking when you first woke up? About what will happen to you?*

Oh well I woke up and it was dark because I was in intensive care and I wasn't sure what day it was, what time it was = and my neck was in a brace, I couldn't move. First thing I did was wriggle my toes just to see if I still had legs. I know it sounds strange but I wanted to see if all my limbs were there and I guess I kind of knew that something had happened but I wasn't totally sure and then the nurse, she was lovely, she was really nice in intensive care, she came over and she just said you know that I'd been in a car accident and I thought "Oh crikey" and I, you know, obviously asked how Nicola was and she said that was fine but it was very strange to, you know, to be driving one moment and then just like a flick of a switch you're in hospital you're in the dark and you're thinking "Oh crikey what's gone on?"

*What do you think helped you recover?*

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Having my fiancée and knowing that she was okay and having support from both our families and we knew that you know we'd both gotten out of it -we both still had each other and I think from then on we thought it's obviously a blessing so you know that we're here so you know we can move on, we can walk on together.

*Now you mentioned that you took up meditation and that you have a growing interest in Buddhism. I wonder if you'd like to tell me why you took Buddhist meditation on and what interests you about it?*

I think because what struck a chord with me was that it helps you deal with everyday issues of going through life. You know when I started, I think it must have been four or five years ago. I had an interest in terms of, it just made sense to me that suffering is cause to different issues and if you can try and get your head around that then you can stop suffering and you can deal with issues better and you can take things on board and deal with them rationally and work them out in your head and deal with the problems in life I guess, it just fit, it made so much sense to me.

*You mentioned that your father talked to you about taking meditation when you were in hospital?*

Yes he said about, you know, speak to the neurologist and find out everything you can and if you're given the opportunity then do so because it's better to be safe and I spoke to the neurologist and she assured me that it wouldn't happen again and even though it wasn't a regular occurrence you know it was two seizures within 16 years, but I took it up anyway, you know, what have I got to lose, it's only a tablet a day.

*Talking about the meditation what kind of Buddhist practice have you taken up?*

It's just a sense of just taking deep breaths, just letting everything, especially when you have a busy day at work, just trying to let things empty out of your head because we go through life worrying so much and just to try and empty your own head of all that worry it's such it's such a glorious feeling to not feel anything [chuckles] it's hard to explain to try and empty your head of all worries it enables you to move on. It's like if you're glass fills up with water sooner or later you've got to empty it out and then once you're empty you can go back to dealing with things again. It just, it's a good release.

*Are you practicing any particular type of meditation?*

No, no, it's just at night and in the morning, its just taking deep breaths and concentrating on, say, an object or something I have in my room and just letting everything flow out of you and concentrating on your breathing and letting it come in and out and then after, you know, a while you feel awake and it's brilliant!

*How did you learn that? From a book?*

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In terms of what, sorry?

*The meditation practice?*

What it was, I started with listening to a pod cast of a Buddhist monk and he taught Buddhism and meditation and so on in really easy to follow terms and from that I thought that's interesting and he just talked about ways of doing things where, you know, you can just take two minutes out of your day, you know, if you're out and about and just close your eyes and so on. And it doesn't have to be something set and you know you can do it in a variety of different ways and I think that pod cast that I'd listened to ... it enabled me to do meditation.

*Thank you for that. You mentioned your work in your previous interview and just now you said you work for a place called TGB. What does that stand for?*

Yes its Training and Business Group they deal with adult training and sixteen to eighteen year olds that have left college or school with little or no qualifications and its about getting those people qualified getting their confidence built up again and moving them on into college or work. So at the time of the plinth I was working at TGB and the support from the staff there, they were brilliant. They were all brilliant and they all supported me, it was brilliant.

*And are you working at the moment?*

Yes I'm working for, it's another company within the same area. I'm working for a company called CTECH and what they do ... it's a similar type to TBG in that it's about getting people back into work, its 'welfare to work' so we receive government money to train people up and find people jobs. So it's where I sit in the company ... it's brilliant, I get to see the change in people that come in with low confidence and so on and then we help them. We find them with their CV and we find them work and then if they need any qualifications we provide that as well and then they move and then the feedback we get from them ... they couldn't have done it without our help and that's brilliant, that's good to have in a job that you see that impact on people's lives.

*And what's going to happen next? Have you got any plans at all?*

Well at the moment me and my fiancée are looking for somewhere to live, a new place [chuckles] so that's taking up most of our time and the once we've done that then we well we're saving up as well to get married so it's you know I'm really loving my job and obviously we've got a new place to move into so the future's bright it's looking good.

*Oh fantastic! When are you planning to get married?*

Hopefully next year it's just saving up, you know, trying to trying to save up enough to



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... I mean we're not looking at somewhere big, just a small church because we are generally quiet, both of us anyway, we just want a small private ceremony and then go to somewhere nice for our honeymoon and yes, hopefully next year.

*You mentioned in the previous interview about moving from Merseyside down to Suffolk as being quite a big jump for you and I just wonder whether you'd like to talk about why that's such a difference and how it compares between the way you were living in Merseyside to where you're living now*

Oh I...where I was before, I grew up in Merseyside and all my friends were there and, you know, my family were there and then after I finished university my parents moved to Wales. My dad had been in the Air Force and they'd lived in Wales before and they wanted to retire out there and then they moved there you know I just thought at the time there wasn't really that much opportunity for me in St Helens where I lived you know it was a small town and eventually when I met my fiancée I had the opportunity to move down south. And where we are at the minute we live by the sea and, you know, we wake up in the morning, I can hear the sea and it's just so relaxing to, you know, to go to work and know that I'm coming back to a lovely seaside town, that's my release as well, that you know every day's like a holiday to me where, you know, when I was living up in St Helen's I'd go to these type of places on holiday, but now I'm living here everyday is a holiday so I benefit in so many ways.

*And how has it been like in terms of keeping in touch with your friends and family at a distance?*

I speak to my mum every day. I phone her on my lunch break and, you know, I speak to my friends online and me and my fiancée are going visiting my mum and my dad in two weeks. So we try and get over three or four times a year to see my parents and probably once a year to see my friends and so on. But we're all in touch online and sending each other emails and I mean with the internet as it is at the minute it does bring everybody closer together so, so whilst people can be separated by actual distance I don't think they're not in terms of speaking it's like with Skype, you know, you can speak to people across the world and, you know, video calling and so on as it's going now the world's getting closer together.

*Yes, just like us now speaking on Skype you're in Suffolk and I'm in London.*

Yes, exactly, and when I was based up north and, you know, I was first speaking to my fiancée and we were getting to know each other and then as it progressed she said to me well, "What about the distance?" And I said to her that the distance is the easiest thing to overcome because what I did I just decided I said no that's it I'm moving and you know you move and then you move down south but with technology that enables you to meet people. I mean if the internet wasn't about I would never have met my fiancée and its gone from being isolated communities to being you

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know you speak to somebody across the world and it's taken as granted that you can speak to somebody in a totally different country quite easily and I think that's amazing.

*How long have you been using the Internet and computers yourself?*

Oh crikey I've been using computers since I was very young. I've grown up with computers from being in my early teens, I guess, so seventeen years, eighteen years or something like that and the Internet ... I first started using it in 1994 so quite some time but the Internet then, as it is now, is totally different. I mean you've got your mobile phone, you've got the whole Internet in your hands and its, I think it's one of the most, the best inventions in recent times is the Internet. Because of what it can do in terms of knowledge and also bringing people together.

*Okay, thank you and now I just wanted to ask you about the way in which you met your partner, your fiancée, as you mentioned in the previous interview, you met online and this is becoming a very common thing to do nowadays. I just wonder if you'd like to talk more about that and the impact that it's had on your life?*

Yes its like I was saying that I had the opportunity to meet her online and that wouldn't have happened a few years back and how it started was we both had a shared interest of photography and it was on the Myspace website and I saw that she was in the group of photographers and I looked at her page and I was just, I was amazed at her photos. They were beautiful, they were photos that she'd taken of flowers, plants, animals, countryside and, you know, I was really captivated by that and I started talking to her with no idea of where it could lead. It was just a case of I wanted to find out how she took these beautiful photos and we struck up a friendship and it went on from there, I guess, and then yes, I ended up moving down and asking her to marry me. So yes, the Internet, it's brilliant.

*And what does Nicola do?*

She works in a school at the moment but she wants to move over into the care industry she wants to help people and I think that is a result of the accident in that she saw, you know, the help that could be offered and she wants to be a care worker so that's where she's looking at the moment is care work to help people in their lives.

*Okay, I wanted to ask you about you father, you mentioned he was in the RAF.*

Yes, he was in the Air Force. He joined up straight away when he was young and my mum and dad moved over to Malta they were based in Malta for a period and then they were based in Wales, which is where I was born. I was born in Wales and it's good to have that have that heritage. And from there he moved into the civil aviation side so he worked for British Midland Airways and other companies on the civil side and he used to take me on a weekend to the airport and when he'd be working and that's brilliant, as a kid, to, you know, he'd sit me in the cockpit of different

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aeroplanes and obviously you can't do that now with security and that but at the time you know you could and I'd be in the hangers in all these amazing aircrafts and you know I've seen Concord and so on so that's brilliant as a kid to have that.

*And you mentioned that you were discovered to be colour blind, which meant that you couldn't be a pilot, which you had wished to be.*

Yes, from a young age I always loved planes, you know. I'd grown up with them and I wanted to be, you know, a pilot and then I discovered I was colour blind and that was kind of struck out really that I couldn't do that. So that was disappointing but you know I still had the side of it where I'd grown up with my dad going to the airports and we've still got the same interests now. I mean it's great that my fiancée and her parents and that they like aircraft too so we go to air displays, we go to regular air displays around the country and we like model aeroplanes as well and me and my dad do that. So aeroplanes and that are still involved in my life, so I love them and it's great that my fiancée likes them too. So yes, I'm blessed.

*Oh, thank you so much John. I hope you've enjoyed the interview today?*

Yes, it's been brilliant to just to think back and to put it all in perspective in terms of my time on the plinth and how it affected me at the time. It's great so thank you, thank you for that.

*Oh, it's been a pleasure talking to you today.*

Okay, thank you.