

80. Nick Pinfield

(1) Tell me about your background.

Okay, I was born in 1969, on June the fourth, in Worcester. My parents were originally from Birmingham. They moved down to Malvern in around about 19... mid-sixties, I believe. They were actually... my Dad was in the army, based in Germany. Went back to Birmingham, but didn't like Birmingham too much, so they came down to Malvern. I went to a comprehensive school called The Chase, in Malvern; obviously left there when I was sixteen. My first job was a sheet metal work apprenticeship. I was there for about two and half years; gave that up, then actually went to work at a factory, which is where I met Joanne. I was there fourteen years, believe it or not, for all my sins.

What kind of work were you doing?

Okay, well, the company made pewter products, giftware, ie chess sets, promotional gifts, like cars, et cetera, that were given as sort of free gifts when people bought cars, or whatever; that kind of thing. So, I used to solder them together - a bit like welding, but with it being pewter, it's very sort of low melting point, so it's a solder sort of bonding them together. So, that was my main occupation there.

What was Joanne doing?

Joanne was a finisher and painter - mainly painter. She used to hand-paint all the little models, chess pieces, et cetera. Very sort of fine painting; very detailed, tiny little brushes. So, yes, that was... She had to have pretty good eyesight for that, and with her being diabetic, that can cause problems, but I don't think it did, 'cause she was certainly one of the best painters there - was the best painter there, I shall say. So, yes, that was Joanne's role.

And talk about getting to know each other.

Well, that sort of developed - in fact, she'd actually been at this place of work for quite a few years, really, before I got to know her. I obviously saw her around, et cetera, but didn't really start talking till around the sort of '97, '98, sort of time. How that came about: it was just... she was sat outside, actually. We both smoked, at the time. I probably shouldn't be saying that, with Joanne being a diabetic; she'll kill me. So, yes, she was sat outside, and she was a bit upset, actually, so I just sort of asked if she was okay, et cetera, and we just got chatting. And, you know, our friendship sort of started from there, really.

(2) What did Joanne tell you about her diabetes?

Nothing really too in depth, to start off with. Obviously I've heard of diabetes, but I didn't understand it, and she just very briefly outlined the main sort of situation with it, and, you know, all the sugar, et cetera. So, I wasn't into... you know, I didn't have much detail, really, to start with, it was just a kind of "oh right, okay". The more I sort of got to know her, the more things she told me about it, and sort of what to look for if she ever had sort of problems,

perhaps, with her sugars, you know, having a hypo or something. And how to sort of deal with it in an emergency, which is obviously sort of quite important when she gets to meet people, and she's going to be spending time with people, that anything can happen. So, yes, that was sort of just the outline of it, really.

How did you feel about that?

Well, I suppose it's quite scary, at first, because you think "well, blimey, what if we're out walking?" or... because I'm a great dog lover, and I had a dog at the time, and we used to go out for quite some long walks. And you're thinking "gosh, what if we... Jo suddenly has a hypo in the middle of the countryside, somewhere, and we've got no sugar?" or, you know, or hasn't... she's forgotten her injection, or something. So, you're thinking "okay, how do I deal with that?" So, yeah, it was a case of making sure we took, you know, perhaps a bottle of Coke, or something, just in case we had an emergency. So, yeah, that was... yeah, it was a bit weird. I'd never really sort of... well, certainly never met anyone with diabetes before, so, yes, it was all a bit new.

So, when you say it was a case of remembering, do you mean it was a case of you reminding her?

Oh no, definitely not. No, Jo would normally remember, but I was just sort of the back-up, and pop to the shop and make sure we've got something to take with us. So yes, it was... I was just like a second back-up, in case.

And can you remember the attitudes of people at work to Joanne?

There was never really a very big deal about it. I think most people did sort of know. But Jo's sort of very quiet, really, in that respect, and didn't like to make a fuss. In fact, she hates to make a fuss. She gets very embarrassed if she does sort of have a hypo, or anything, if we're out and about. And if it had been at work, she'd try and cope with it herself, rather than ask anyone for help. But I do know the management sort of were aware that she had diabetes, and possible complications. So, I think they were aware that, you know, they had to be aware that, if anything happened, what to do as well, so yeah.

What are your memories of her first hypo in your presence?

Yeah, she just sort of started panicking a bit, really, and sort of in a bit of a cold sweat, but not particularly big panics. She just sort of quietly said "oh, would you mind getting me a squash, or something with a bit of sugar in, or something, or..." So, yeah, it was no big sort of massive panic. It was just like "okay, yeah, no worries", and it was all over within a second, and job done, really, and moved on, yeah.

(3) How did it affect your social life when you were going out together?

Not vastly, really. She kind of looked after herself. I mean, obviously, I'd go and - perhaps if we were out in a pub or clubbing - I'd go and get the drinks, and I'd always have to make sure that the drinks were obviously diet-free, you know, got no sugar in, et cetera. Which, back in the days when we used to go

clubbing, there wasn't much on offer, to be sugar-free, so it was like Diet Coke or Diet Coke, really, so a bit boring for her. So, yeah, but it didn't really affect much. As far as perhaps going out for something to eat, she's never really found that too much of a difficulty. Always, sort of, compensated with... weighed up what she's got, you know, and what she's going to have, and pretty much managed to sort of inject the right amount of insulin to sort of cope with, you know, all the carbohydrates, et cetera. So, yeah, she's... to be honest, she's pretty good at that, and she's not really massively involved me. As I say, she does get embarrassed, and she likes to just quietly do things herself.

But you had the impression that she was adjusting her insulin to her food from when you first met her, so '97, '98?

Oh yes, she's definitely sort of looked up the food that she's going to eat, and sort of weighed that up, and tried to... I mean, never gone to the extremes of weighing food out, if we're cooking or whatever, and doing it... I'm sure there isn't many diabetics who do, even though they might say they do. So, yeah, it was... I suppose it's a bit hit and miss, but she always seems to have got it pretty right, so yeah, that's never been too much of a problem.

Has her diabetes affected your eating at home?

To be perfectly honest, not really, no. We're reasonably good healthy eaters, anyway, and we do eat a lot of vegetables, et cetera. And, of course, we do have a lot of bad stuff as well, like everyone - plenty of sweets and chocolates, et cetera. But yeah, Jo... I mean, that's probably me, actually. I eat it all, and Jo will have a little bit. So, yeah, she's... that's never been too much of a problem, never too much of an issue, really, unless I'm missing something. She's probably just very good at it.

(4) So, has her diabetes affected your lives in any way at all?

Yeah, it can... there's been a couple of sort of cases, in the middle of the night, when perhaps Joanne's woken up in the middle of a hypo. And I mean, I must admit, a lot of the time I've been fast asleep, and she hasn't woken me up, and she's dealt with it herself, ie she's got up, come down stairs, you know, and made a drink or et cetera to cope with that. But there has been one or two times when she has had to wake me up, in a blind panic, in floods of sweats, and literally hasn't really been able to sort of make the move herself and get downstairs. So, I have had to come down in the middle of the night, and make a drink or, you know, with some sugar in, et cetera, and sort of get it to her pretty quick. She's never been in such a bad state that she's actually sort of passed out, or et cetera - gone into a coma - that I know can happen. But yeah, there has been a few occasions, but she'll probably tell you that I'm quite a deep sleeper, and she's managed to cope mostly on her own. Occasionally I wake up, and I can hear her downstairs, pottering around with a drink, and I'll wait till she comes up just to make sure she's come up and she's managed okay. So, yes, that's probably sort of what happens in the evening, in the night time, yeah.

Is a sweet drink always enough, and she's always in a fit state to drink it?

Yes, she's always managed to drink it herself; it seems to do the job. There's never been an occasion where I've actually had to sort of ... you know, actually feed the drink to her. She's always... but just not had the strength to actually get down herself, you know, come downstairs and make it herself. So, she may have sort of managed if I hadn't been there, but because I'm there, and it's quite a bad hypo, she has just sort of nudged me, woken me up, and said "oh, do you mind just popping down and getting a drink?" So, yeah, that's...

And outside the home, has it affected having meals out at friends' houses or in restaurants?

We do go out quite a bit, either to perhaps friends, parents, for something to eat, or restaurants. Again, no, it hasn't really affected anything that Jo's had to eat; not at all, really. I mean, I guess she is a bit more choosy on what she has to eat, but no, I can't ever think of her sort of looking at something and saying "oh no, I'd better not have that", or "I can't have that, that's a bit too much... whatever, sugar in, or carbohydrates, et cetera". So no, it never really has affected too much. Not a problem at all.

(5) Have you had any impressions of her medical care?

Yeah, I always sort of accompany Jo, as much as I can, if she's just going to the doctor's, even the den... in fact, we pretty much go everywhere together. Our dentist appointments are always the same, and if she's got to go to the doctor's, I'll always try and go with her, whether it be anything related to diabetes or not. But I've always accompanied her, certainly, to the actual diabetic clinics. She's always been a bit nervy about those, and perhaps being told off for not doing something right, and she likes a bit of back-up. Some of the doctors and nurses can be a bit scary, I guess. So, yeah, I've always been there. Sometimes she does go into the actual room herself, but most of the time I'll go in with her, and she'll sort of chat to them how things have been going. So yeah, that's always been okay. She doesn't particularly look forward to going to the diabetic clinic, in case, you know, they... as I say, they do tell her off, and perhaps hasn't been going quite to plan. But she's pretty good. It's certainly been getting better the last year or two, actually.

What are your impressions of the medical staff?

They seem pretty good, actually. I think Jo struggles that the doctors and nurses sort of sit there and tell you how it is, or how it should be, and, of course, they haven't got diabetes, so - well, I presume they haven't got diabetes - so it's easy for them to sort of say "this is how it should be done" and "why aren't you doing it this way?" It's always very easy to sort of shout those rules, but I think Jo struggles with that a bit, because it's just not that simple. So, yeah, I think that's one of the main reasons she gets a bit scared of going. I think she just feels like turning round and saying "well, you just don't know what you're talking about. You've got all the facts and figures, and yes, that might be the

ideal world, but it's just not as simple as that". So, yes, she often struggles with that.

Do you agree with her or do you agree with the medical staff?

No, I would definitely agree with Jo, actually. It's easy for them to tell you how this should be done and everything, but it's just not as simple as all that, you know, when you have got to go out to eat, you know, and try and run a normal life. Just not as simple as that. If only it was. So yeah, I'd definitely agree with her.

But you say they're quite good?

Oh, they seem very good, yeah; you know, they're certainly a caring sort of bunch of people, and I'm sure they know what they're talking about. So yes, certainly no problems with them.

(6) Can you talk me through the various kinds of appointments that you've been present at?

I've, as I said before, I go to all. The opticians - obviously that's very important. I know diabetics can obviously struggle with their eyesight more than most, so yeah, she's very sort of vigilant on the eyesight. I don't actually go into the rooms when she has her eyes tested. I have my eyes tested at the same time, so I've never actually been present with her when she's actually gone for the tests. But as for the diabetic clinics, I have sort of seen her when she's had sort of her feet looked at, because obviously that's another important thing for diabetics, that they can have problems with their feet. So, she's had to sort of, you know, go through that sort of ritual, which can be a bit weird, I guess. But, yeah, that's the sort of general appointments: doctor's appointments, normal stuff, really, so nothing much different there, so yeah.

What kind of help does she get from the doctors and nurses?

Just general advice, really. And, obviously, they test her blood and... et cetera. Try and point her in a few different directions, maybe, on perhaps where it's going wrong, or weight issues. They always seem to think that she should be getting pregnant, actually, at the diabetic clinic, so they're always going on about "oh, you're not starting a family yet?" And "no, we don't want to". It's almost as if they're willing you to, but I guess they're just sort of thinking "well, you're at that sort of age when you should be". And, obviously, there can be extra complications for diabetics, so you need to be thinking about that. But there's no such thing like that on the horizon, so, yeah, that's...

What's your attitude to having children?

At the moment, we both love kids, but we've never had any desire to have them, any of our own. We certainly like having kids over at the house, whatever, but as long as we can give them back at the end of the night, that's absolutely fine. To be perfectly honest, we're not particularly sort of into it, at the moment. We've got enough on our plate, with the business that we run, et cetera. And

we're too selfish, to be fair. We like going away on holiday, and going out, quite a bit. And obviously, sort of, kids tie you down a bit. So, it's certainly nothing to do with Joanne being diabetic that we've not had children, or ever sort of thought about it. It's just, you know, personal reasons for not being too into it, at the moment.

(7) Has the kind of work you've done been affected by her diabetes?

Not sort of directly affected. It's certainly been a lot easier, both of us being self-employed, with our own business, hence the fact that I can go with Jo to all the different appointments. Obviously, the business that we're in is more sort of evening and weekend sort of work, so we've pretty much got a lot of the time in the week, that we can sort of both go to all the appointments, et cetera. So, that has helped us a lot, actually, being self-employed. Before we were self-employed, it was difficult to try and - because we both worked at the same place, as well - to try and... I always like to still go to appointments with Joanne, but both getting time off could have, you know, can be a bit difficult. So, yes, that's certainly helped with us having our own business.

When did you give up working in the factory?

That happened around about 2002, when we got married. We actually left, both... well, in fact, the factory came to an end - they went bust anyway - so we were forced into seeking alternative employment. And actually, I went and worked on a building site for two years, and in the meantime of that, we started up the limo business that we're still in today, so... Yeah, that was 2004 I would have left the building, when the limos got so busy that we managed to just sort of kick everything else into touch, and that was our full-time employment, so yeah.

And is it a handicap, in any way, in that employment, that Jo's got diabetes?

No, definitely not at all. It's helped, as I say before, that we can both go to appointments, et cetera, and I can be there for a bit of support. So, no, it's helped. It certainly hasn't had any other effect.

(8) Are you always looking out for signs of hypos?

I often do. I know Jo will probably say I don't often spot them, or I certainly don't spot them enough. I think I said before that she is quite sort of private, when it comes to that, and she gets embarrassed, so she'll tend to sort of just swan off somewhere and see to it herself. But yeah, I mean, I do look out, especially if we're perhaps in the garden, and we're doing sort of strenuous work, which obviously can burn up the sugars, and et cetera. So, I can, you know, sort of be looking at her, and thinking "you're looking a bit pale", and might just sort of say to her "are you feeling all right?" et cetera. But yeah, to be perfectly honest, she just sort of quietly goes off, and if she's feeling a little bit dodgy, she'll sit down and just have a drink, or something. So, she tends to look after herself, more than anything. But yeah, I look out for it, as much as I can.

And do you ever have to nag her?

No, I don't, really. She's very self-sufficient, and, yeah, as I say, she does get embarrassed about it, for whatever reason; I never quite understood that. But no, I've never really had to nag her.

Do you mean she's actually embarrassed to have any symptoms of a hypo in front of you?

No, certainly nothing... not embarrassed in front of me, but no, it's more if we're perhaps out. For example, if we're at my parents', perhaps, for something to eat, and she has a hypo there, she would never sort of just say to them "ooh blimey, I'm having a bit of a hypo. Can I just pop to the kitchen, or could you get me something?" It would always be through me, very quietly and discreetly, "oh, Nick, can you just, you know, go and pop to the kitchen and get me a secret drink". She does get embarrassed, especially if she's perhaps having some sweats, or something, and she's... Never understood it - well, no, I can... I guess I can understand it - but, yeah it's always just through me, and I'll sort of quietly help her out.

(9) And how do you see the future?

Well, it's... I see the future as good. She's doing her best to sort of monitor the illness, and she does her best to cope with the illness. But, of course, it is always a bit of a worry. I always sort of worry about, perhaps, her eyesight. She sometimes tends to sort of be squinting a lot, but she does spend an awful lot of time on the computer screen, which obviously doesn't help in the best of circumstances. So, that's put an extra strain on the eyes, and maybe sort of careful with her feet, or whatever, which obviously is another big issue. But yeah, I think she looks after herself as well as she can do, so, you know, you've just got to hope for the best. But, of course, it's always a worry, like anything, and you've just got to take each day as it goes.

When I recorded her mother's memories this morning, which obviously go back much further, she sounded much more anxious than you. What would you attribute that to?

Well, I think it must have been very different for her Mum and Dad, in that, back in the days when she was sort of diagnosed with diabetes - because that would have been around 1977-ish, I would guess - and in those days, of course, diabetes was sort of not very well known; people didn't understand it. In fact, I believe people used to think you could catch it from someone. How ironic that sounds. But yeah, I guess because they've had to go through that. And in the early days, I believe Joanne went into a coma, so I can see her being a lot more anxious, and sort of seen Jo probably in a lot worse states than I've ever seen her, purely because they didn't really know what was going on, back in the early stages, so they didn't know how to cope with it. And obviously didn't know... just didn't have a clue what the problems were. So, yes, I guess, having gone through that, they've seen a very different sort of side to it; a lot more dangerous

side than I've ever seen. Because now, it's sort of... she's coping with it a lot better, and things are understood a lot better. So, yeah, I guess I'm a lot more relaxed about it.

So, what would your message be to someone who was thinking of getting together with someone with diabetes?

Well, strangely enough, the question sort of sounds really weird, because it's almost... it's almost as if people think it's going to be completely someone different; I don't know. My understanding of diabetes, now, is it's a lot better controlled, and you'd not necessarily even know that there's anything wrong with the person. So, I could sort of... The message to anyone would be like, yeah, it can be sort of a bit difficult, at times, et cetera, but usually - certainly in Joanne's case - she's managed to cope with it, and look after it more herself, than anything. And you probably wouldn't even know that she's got diabetes. So, as far as controlling your lives, it really doesn't, and no problems whatsoever. Definitely should never let any... that sort of put you off anyone, definitely.