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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Louisa Compton, editor of Victoria Derbyshire BBC Two's daytime current affairs programme. Louisa joined the BBC in 1998, becoming daytime editor on Radio 5 Live in 2005. Alongside her work on the show, she's also executive editor of BBC Newsbeat for Radio 1 and 1 Xtra. Her trophy cabinet has a Pink News Award for broadcaster of the year in 2015 and a BAFTA for best news coverage in 2017 for its ground-breaking reporting of sexual abuse in football.

Louisa, thank you for joining me.

Hi, thank you.

So, Louisa, Victoria Derbyshire its hugely acclaimed. It's a format that you actually came up together with Victoria, is that right?

Yes, that's correct. It's actually a programme that Victoria and I had been wanting to put together for years. I think I first pitched it, actually, ironically to BBC Two about five or six years ago. We worked together on the radio since 2009 I think, and we felt during that time that there was a real gap in the market on TV for serious popular journalism, and that was something we were doing on the radio and always aspired to do on TV. And then pitched it a couple of years ago again, from my point of view for the third time, and James Hardin, our boss, said yes. And here we are, two and a bit years later.

And how's it going?

It's going all right. Doing a daily two-hour live TV news programme is very challenging. Our remit is to provide original stories on a daily basis, and original journalism is incredibly time-consuming and hard work, but I'm really proud of the kind of stories we're breaking, the kind of stories we're covering, and I feel that we are incredibly different to any other news programme on TV, or indeed on the radio.

It's that word 'distinctive', isn't it, in the BBC's charter. It is quite a distinctive news show, isn't it?

Yes. And when we set ourselves up, the aim that we gave ourselves, or the remit that we gave ourselves, was to do something different. Bring the kind of stories you wouldn't see anywhere else to reach a different kind of audience, and hopefully we are achieving that.

So are you in Victoria a kind of double act, then? Because you worked together at 5 Live, you've stuck together for a long time.

I don't know! You'd have to ask her.

Clearly it works very well for both of you.

Yes. I think we work well together because we both care about the same kind of stories. We both care about people. We both want to make a difference. And I think when you've got an editor and a presenter who both think quite similarly as well as being able to challenge each other and our preconceptions, that's always a good thing.

So what kind of topics are good for the show?

In broad terms, anything that's interesting. Anything that's got the wow factor, that genuinely tells the audience something new, something they haven't heard about before. We try and make sure that any time we cover a topic it's genuinely enlightening our audience and telling them something different. But it's stories that the audience care about, so we try and only cover stories that we think will affect our audience, will interest our audience, and will give them a slightly different worldview, I suppose.

And do you have a specific audience in mind? When you're putting a show together, do you actually have a person in your mind's eye?

Yes. Less so a specific person, but we know that BBC News reaches 98% of the British population, which is an amazing figure, but we also know that it slightly super-serves a certain part of that population. And the kind of audience we're trying to go for, or trying to attract on the programme, is a different kind of audience who don't necessarily automatically want to listen to BBC News or watch BBC News. So that's women, people who are under 40, people from diverse communities, people who are different working classes and so on and so forth.

So talk us through a typical production day then. I mean before the podcast started recording, we both shared the fact that we get up at the crack of dawn. But you're on the treadmill almost immediately, aren't you? Talk us through your typical day.

Oh, gosh! I'll talk you through today, I suppose is a typical day. Most days in the week I get up at 4am, get into work at 5am, and from 5am we're really hitting the ground running, planning that day's programme.

Is it produced from NBH?

Yes, so Broadcasting House. A lot of it is set up in advance, but by the time I come in in the morning I'm wanting to kind of reshape that, look at stories that have broken overnight, chase new stories and so on and so forth. So between 5am and 9am we're preparing for the programme, then we're obviously on air for two hours, and it's never an easy day, but some days are particularly tough when things are falling down around you and stories are moving quickly, obviously. And then from 11am onwards it's the usual kind of blight of far too many meetings, but also planning long term, original stories. Most days I think I leave about 7pm. So it's long days.

Do you have tomorrow's show basically in the bag barring any big developments the day before? Or do you have a rough idea? How does that work?

Yes. So we plan it in different ways. So about a third of the programme or thereabouts is a long term thing that we've been working on for a period of time, an original story, our own investigation, an exclusive interview. About a third of the programme or thereabouts we fix the day before based on that day's news agenda or the following day's news agenda, and then about a third of the programme we fix on the morning from scratch.

What happens if a big story breaks on air? Do you have to kind of resist going into rolling news because there's a news channel for that.

Yes, we are also on the news channel. So I think our bar for breaking news is slightly different. When there's a huge massive story, we roll on that story. So we've been on air the morning after Grenfell and we obviously devoted two hours, the entire programme to that. Likewise the Manchester terror attacks. When a big story happens we roll with it.

So the news channel doesn't take over and they don't go to the central studio.

No, no.

You're still on air?

Exactly. And hopefully we do this in a slightly different way to the other news channels. I hope we bring a bit more humanity and a bit more compassion to the stories. But obviously our lifeblood is news and breaking news, so when a big story happens we're going to want to cover it.

And how do you balance the straight news packages, debates? Is there a kind of formula, do you have like a pie chart as to how you would divide the two hours up in any regular programme?

No, not at all. It totally depends on the day and that morning's agenda. It depends on the strength of our own original story versus the strength of the big newsgathering story. So no, there's no formula. I think every day is different. Some days we have

really good programmes, some days we have programmes that we feel are below par – but every day is different.

Well, it's the same when you read a newspaper, if the splash is a weak splash you think, "Well, they obviously haven't got anything better for the front page."

Exactly.

Adrift on the sea of news.

Exactly.

So do you have methodologies in place if it is a slow news day and you've not got much in the bag?

I mean, the short answer is probably not enough, as is the case, I'm sure, for plenty of people. But I think we try to work really hard to humanise stories and to think of creative treatments, so on those kind of quiet news days hopefully those are the days when we have a big original story of our own to break. But also we just work really hard to think about stories that maybe the rest of the news machine isn't covering, but they do affect our audience and to try and bring them to life slightly more than other places.

I mean, the show's widely acclaimed now, but I remember lots of sniffy stories about ratings when it was first launched. Talk us through that in terms of how it launched. Presumably you had to stay quite strong because you could let the criticism get to you.

We reach, every day, around a million people watch us on TV. But more importantly around 11 million people a week watch our programme in some shape or form on digital platforms. And I think in 2017, it's really important that you can't just measure the amount of people you reach purely by linear TV because, as we know, audiences on TV are gradually declining, and what's important for us is to measure our reach across all platforms. And I'm really proud of the way that our stories reach so many people in the UK and the way that we've proved there is a home for serious popular journalism, not just between nine and 11 on a weekday morning, right across the board – and you'll see that our stories don't just live and die in our programme, they get followed up by other broadcasters, by newspapers, by the rest of the BBC.

The 10 O'Clock News regularly throw out clips from what happened on your show earlier in the day.

Yes, not regularly enough from my point of view, obviously. I would like to be on there every day.

And how does it work within the BBC, then? If you've got a breaking story, do you get a correspondent on, and then do they have to realise that they have to change the way that they present their own package and their own down the

lines and their own interviews based on the accessibility of your show? How does that work?

Yes, so we're part of BBC News. so obviously when there is a breaking news story and there's a BBC News correspondent already working on that story, they will appear on our programme as they would any other part of BBC News outlets. With any coverage of a news story, BBC News correspondents use the best bits of that day's output and that day's interviews, so we often feature as part of that.

I think one of the first news programmes to broadcast live from an abortion clinic. You know, you've got these big audience debates. How does it work in terms of the innovation, then? Do you just do it and roll with it, or do you have to seek approval from people like James Harding?

No. So when we were at Radio 5 Live we did a series of kind of pioneering and very different programmes, so we were the first programme, and I think the only programme, to ever broadcast live from Guantanamo Bay. We were the first and only, I think, programme to do a live broadcast from an abortion clinic, as you mentioned. We did one from an animal rights testing laboratory. We were the first programme to broadcast live from Zimbabwe once the restrictions against foreign journalists had gone down. And I don't think we ever had to seek permission from anyone to do that, it was just about constantly thinking, "What's the next thing we can do?" What's the kind of thing that would bring a new insight to our audience, take them somewhere they wouldn't necessarily have been, show them a bit of life or society that they wouldn't see, and how can we illustrate that and kind of bring that to life to the audience. So I think wherever I've worked, I've always thought never stay still, never kind of just be happy with what you've got. Always try and work that bit harder and think of that slightly better idea or that more innovative idea to take it forward.

What was the move like from radio to telly? Because there's vastly more resources that need to be put into television. You've got to think of images, you know, you can do lots of journalism across the world and all over the place in terms of radio, but the minute you get into images it's a whole different world. Was that particularly difficult for you?

It wasn't difficult. It was definitely challenging, and I think I love and hate TV in equal parts!

Tell us why on both counts.

Well, I grew up in radio. My formative working years were in radio, and I think anyone who works in radio has a real passion for the simplicity and the immediacy of radio, and I'm sure some of my happiest days will have been working in radio. It's amazing for that. TV is much slower, much more laborious, so many more people need to be involved. And initially that really frustrated me; I couldn't understand why something that took an hour in radio would take a day in TV.

And the rest.

And the rest! And some of it is I think genuinely, the systems aren't as well put together, people work in different ways. So that frustrated me a lot at the beginning. But also the beauty about TV is that it does, by virtue of the fact that it's so intimate in people's homes, there were pictures there to sell a story, its impact is far greater. So I often look at stories we've done on TV and can see that they perform so much better than had we just been doing it on the radio. So there are, to me, a lot of negatives but the benefits do outweigh. And also I really like the challenge of thinking differently and thinking about how we're going to illustrate this story, what pitches we're going to use. I think you have to work probably harder and smarter in a very different way in TV than radio.

Because that wasn't your first pivot, was it? After your stint as daytime editor at 5 Live, you moved to Radio 1's Newsbeat. I mean, that is the same medium but a completely different audience. How did you adapt?

Newsbeat is just such an amazing place to work and such a creative place to work. And you say it's a very different audience to the 5 Live audience, and of course it is; it's a younger, much younger audience, but actually some of the kind of pillars by which we operate on are similar at 5 Live, at Victoria's programme, and at Newsbeat, there's a real priority on explaining stories really clearly to an audience, never assuming any knowledge. So those kind of foundations have carried on throughout my career. But also it is really exciting at Newsbeat, being able to really lead innovation and feel very different to the rest of BBC News in terms of our story selection and stories we covered, and of course it's so important for the BBC to have a strong youth department.

Do you think the BBC's future depends on finding ways to connect with that young audience now? Because there's such a plurality of different other ways that they can get their news – via social media, Facebook – so how does the BBC stay relevant to that generation?

Well, of course it's absolutely key for the BBC to reach young audiences. We know that young audiences still listen to and watch the BBC in huge numbers, but of course there are so many other platforms now that younger people consume their news on, their TV on, their music on, be it streaming sites, be it YouTube, be it Netflix. So it's a great time at the BBC to really be thinking, "Right, we're going to have to keep innovating, we've got to work differently, we've got to think about how to attract different audiences. And it's definitely going to be an exciting few years, I think."

How do you connect with young people when neither of us are as young? You know, we're not classic Newsbeat listeners, are we? We're not the key demographic. Is that a challenge?

What are you saying?! I'm only 24, you know.

But how do you keep that connection with your audience that are clearly at a different life stage to both of us?

I think it's important at Newsbeat to surround yourself with young team members, so we have a number of digital trainees and apprentices here with us. We have a young team. And also, to keep in touch with the audience, we have regular audience sessions, we meet the audience, we regularly research audience trends, and we get great feedback from the audience. You know, they are not shy in telling us when we got it right, but also when we did less well.

So how do you balance the role of being executive editor at Newsbeat with the role on Derbyshire?

The main focus of my job as being editor of Victoria's programme. I had a really fantastic time at Newsbeat and absolutely loved it, and now Newsbeat has the most amazing editor, who is truly inspiring, and my role is very much the kind of back seat to support the management team.

So as a mentor come cheerleader come consultant type thing.

Yes. I think so. Cheerleader. I think.

And is that more enjoyable or less enjoyable? Because you're away from the actual day to day editing, but on the other hand you've still got a hand in it and you've still got influence, and you can still take pride in the output.

I think they're equally enjoyable in different ways. I feel a constant guilt that I don't spend as much time at Newsbeat as I'd like to, but it's really rewarding, seeing how the department is continuing to grow and flourish, and trying out new things.

We touched on it briefly in terms of how you met Victoria and worked with her at 5 Live, but how did you form that special bond? How has the relationship developed?

We began working together in 2008, and I think we work well together because we have a shared love of a certain type of story. We care so much about doing stories properly, even story space, breaking stories. We both care really about people as well and we want to make a difference. And I think it's great having a relationship with someone where there is a kind of an innate trust, an innate sense that we both get it, as well as the idea that we can both challenge each other and sometimes tell each other when we wrong.

And what's the secret of being that great working relationship where she's air side and you're behind the glass? Clearly you've got to bring different talents and different sensibilities, but how does that work? Do you think slightly differently or is it two flip sides of the same coin?

Yes, on some stories I think we can be poles apart, on other stories we both automatically think a similar way. Both work really well.

So being the editor of a broadcast programme that's on air is clearly different in quite a lot of ways to being the editor of a newspaper, even though they're similar responsibilities in terms of editorial judgment and so on, but what's the secret to being a good on air editor?

Well, the similarities are, you're absolutely right, it's editorial judgment, it's managing a team, it's leadership, it's inspiring that team of people to deliver your vision. I suppose the difference with an on air programme, an on air TV programme to a print newspaper, I don't think they're that great in terms of our main aim at the end of the day is to have an amazing front page story, or an amazing lead story on a TV programme. But it's thinking about so many different processes, I think. There are so many different levels involved and layers involved in TV, and of course you have to do so much more to bring a story to life. A newspaper front page could be one phone call that a reporter has made that becomes suddenly a front page splash. On TV there are so many more logistics involved. You've got to get a camera to that person, and you've got to think about other elements that are going to be contained in that film. I think logistically, it's slower it's not as quick as newspapers can be.

How often do the logistics get in the way that you have an idea for a great programme, it's definitely doable, and then you either can't get a camera there or the correspondent can't do it, or for whatever reason it just can't come to air – that must be deeply frustrating as well. Or does it not happen?

I don't think it happens. It's part of our job to always find solutions, whenever there's a problem to think, "Right, what's the other way around this?" How else can I get to where I want to go to?

So Hannibal's lament where he says, "We will either find a way or make one."

Exactly. Exactly. That's kind of our philosophy, I think.

So how does that work, then? What are the levers that you can pull? I mean, you don't really see these days... I remember growing up watching the telly where, if something broke, it would be a portrait shot of a reporter on the phone and it would say, "Down the line, Nicholas Witchell." And they'd be waffling for 20 minutes while they scramble to get some images. Or do you still do that?

There's still an element of that. But the great thing is about modern technology is that pretty much everyone has a smartphone. Doesn't matter where you are in the world, or certainly where you are in the UK, if you are where a story breaks you can get on air in seconds, in vision, on your smartphone.

It's incredible.

And that makes such a difference. And on our programme, on Victoria's programme, I think we use we use Skype and Face Time and webcam so much more, which means some of those logistics are much easier to combat because there's always a way of getting someone on air.

I remember recently you won a BAFTA for your coverage of former footballers who'd been sexually abused. How did that story come about, and how satisfying was it to win the BAFTA?

It was really satisfying, obviously, to win it. It was satisfying to see that our original journalism and our aim to provide those kind of original stories had been recognised by our peers. But actually we shouldn't take credit for it. To me, that BAFTA was for those four footballers who spoke to us that day, and their bravery, their courage to speak out to us.

It was incredibly moving.

And I think that's the power of a live TV interview, that it moves so many people, it leads to change. And that's as a result of those four men who decided to speak out.

And is it satisfying that not only is it good journalism but it also then leads the news agenda, because that's something that then everyone else has to cover because you've started it.

Yes, absolutely, and as a result of that interview, since that interview, we spent the last almost a year now covering the issue of football abuse and we've probably had two dozen stories in that last year which have come to us as a result of that interview. So the satisfying thing for us is that we've built a reputation as a place, I hope with good reason, that people can trust and provide a safe space for people to tell their stories, which means people feel confident to come to us to report their stories.

I mean, it's a compelling story. It's great journalism. It's impactful, both in the media and in wider society, and has helped to change lives for the better. Plus you won a BAFTA! To me, that seems to be the ideal type of journalism that you want the show to be involved in.

Yes, that's pretty much what we get out of bed to do. I don't get out of bed to go to management meetings or to spend time talking about rotas or budgets or admin. It's to break stories, to tell stories that make a difference, that people will care about, that will potentially change lives. And from my point of view as a journalist, there is no better feeling than to know that we've achieved one or two of those things.

What's it like when you're on air then and when the four footballers are sitting on the sofa? You're obviously in the gallery watching it, you must get an incredible thrill. Or is it quite stressful? Is it the opposite, that you think of things that could go wrong and are you trying to tee up the next thing.

No. Normally it's incredibly stressful and manic in the gallery and there's lots of shouting and problems and just a lot of noise and conversations, as well as really having to listen incredibly carefully to the program and the output. But that morning there was absolute silence. You could hear a pin drop in the studio. No one spoke. I'm not sure anyone actually even breathed. Everyone was just sitting in silence and

there were people in the gallery in tears. It was one of those hairs on the back of your neck stand up moments.

Because it was just utterly compelling.

Absolutely.

When do you decide in your mind's eye whether the program's been a success or not? Is it immediately when you come off air? Is there like a debrief, or is it when you're driving home? When do you get a chance to reflect on what you, as the editor, felt worked and what didn't?

I think you know the second you come off air.

That was a duffer!

Exactly. Sometimes I think you know before you go air. And then the great programmes are the ones where you think this might not be amazing on paper but somehow by the end of the programme it's become amazing because of a sequence of events. But I always know immediately, the second we come off air if it's been good or bad. Sometimes it takes a bit of reflection, and you immediately think that could have been better, and then you watch it back or you talk to other people and actually it's better than it felt at that moment in time. But I always think your gut, in pretty much every avenue of life, is right.

How are you and the show managed in terms of the overall BBC news output? I mean, presumably your managers must watch the programme at some point to decide whether you're doing a reasonable job, or are they quite actively involved anyway?

Well, I hope they watch some point! Yes, my direct manager is really good at watching the programme and giving feedback. I'm really lucky that I feel that we have complete editorial control, so that I have someone breathing down my neck or checking up on me. They trust us to make that programme, and as an editor I am allowed to edit that programme. But our bosses are incredibly supportive of what we're doing and can see the importance of what we're doing to the wider BBC News.

Is it interesting to be almost like an incubator unit within the BBC editorially? Because you've got the strength of the BBC News brand, you've got all the editorial guidelines which rightly engender a lot of trust to the BBC's journalism, but on the other hand, you're trying to do something different than news channel rolling news. even the 10. So is it the best of both worlds or do they sometimes come into conflict a little bit?

No, I think it is the absolute best of both worlds in that we're part of the amazing BBC brand, BBC News brand in particular, that people trust and respect so much, but within that we are, as you say, a little laboratory, or incubator, that can do things slightly differently, that aims to innovate. It aims to try and look and feel different and bring in different stories. And actually it's really satisfying to see those stories appear

right across the rest of BBC News, to see our stories one of the most read on the BBC News site that day or for it to appear on the Six O'Clock News to the 10 O'Clock News, and to know that that's the difference that we've made throughout the news network.

And in order to have that freedom to innovate, you can sometimes get it wrong and that's how you learn. How does that work in terms of do you try something and then in the debrief after the show you think, "Right, we're not going to do that again." I mean, what has worked since you've started, and what hasn't?

I think the worst thing that you can do in an in programme-making or in news is to be afraid of taking risks and to be afraid of getting things wrong.

Kind of paralysed by the fear of failure and therefore you don't do anything.

Exactly. So our culture is very much, "Let's give it a try. Let's take a calculated risk." At the end of the day, what we're doing isn't, to use a cliché, brain surgery. Things aren't going to go drastically wrong. We'll will have a bad programme and we'll be annoyed, or we'll try something...

No one's died.

Exactly. But it's really important to me that we do try things. We do take risks, calculated risks. We do things that don't always work but we learn from our mistakes and we see what went wrong. And often things feel really kind of edgy or dangerous or, "Gosh, I'm not sure that would work," people sometimes say that was a brave decision.

Like in Yes, Minister. "That's very brave, minister." "Brave? What do you mean?"

I mean, so many people have said to me, and I always think it's a back-handed compliment, "That was a very brave decision." But I do think that you won't evolve, you won't grow, unless you are taking risks, and allowing people – myself, the programme and also the team – to make mistakes and to get things wrong.

I think one of the things that's worked for me is you've clearly pioneered producing online first videos and using social media, interacting with Victoria's TV show. Lots of shows do that now, but it was very innovative when you guys did it. How important is that to find different ways to connect with the audience? Because you aren't just merely a two-hour show on BBC Two running on news channel. How important is Facebook on Twitter and on the social media platforms in connecting with the audience?

Oh, it's fundamentally important. Our audience are going to want to watch us at different times of the day and throughout the day, and it's really important that our content is there for them. We know that actually, far more people watch our programme, or bits of our programme, on digital platforms than they do between 9am and 11am in the morning, of course, because people have jobs, they have a

life, they're out and about at that time of day, and that's a key part of our job, and it is as important for us to reach millions of people through a Facebook video as it is for us to reach those people on the actual TV programme.

Do you have people who engage with the show's brand, if I can call it that, entirely online, and have jobs or whatever, and they don't watch the show when its on air, but they interact with it through with all the various other touch points like Twitter, Facebook and so on?

Yes, absolutely. In fact, one of my one of my colleagues was interviewing a well-known lawyer recently who quoted a load of stories that we'd done and was really familiar with our programme and said, "I always see the kind of stories that you do," but actually had never watched the actual TV programme, just read about it online on the BBC News site every morning, or saw the Victoria Derbyshire programme on the BBC News site when they got home later that evening, or watched some of the clips on Facebook or YouTube that evening. And I think that's great that the kind of people who wouldn't be able to watch us between 9am and 11am can do so later on in the day.

And is very much where when it's on air, people would watch it when it's live? Is it something that you would kind of have on series link and people would watch when they come home, or do you expect to interact with those people via things like Facebook videos?

Yes. So we are on iPlayer, so people can watch us at any point after we broadcast for up to 30 days, but in the most part it's packaging up what we do into shorter, more accessible videos that you can watch on your mobile or at home. So all of our films, which average about 15 minutes in length, go onto YouTube.

So more accessible chunks.

Exactly.

And in the old days, if you were the editor of News at Ten, 20 years ago you would have one metric, which would be the audience figures for that night's show, but now, what do you actually look at? How do you judge the impact? Because you've got the number of Facebook likes, the number of interactions, how many Twitter followers you've got, how many people have watched that video, as well as the iPlayer figures, the online figures. Do you get a daily print-out that has lots of different metrics? How do you judge your impact?

So the audience figures, both linear TV and online, are one way of judging it, and a really important way of judging it. And every week I go through the digital figures and see which of our stories have done well and which haven't. I think also, you know when you've had a good story – you can measure that by where else it's been and who else has picked it up.

You've passionately campaigned to end the BBC's gender pay gap, and you recently said, "Where all the men speaking out? I mean, do you think the issue is now being tackled? It clearly didn't reflect well on the BBC when they didn't want those pay figures to be released and then ultimately they were ordered to. And rightly or wrongly many other competitive media outlets were all over it, highlighting the fact that women appeared to be so badly paid compared to the men.

I mean, one thing I would like to say is, it is as important for the BBC and every other organisation not just to tackle the gender pay gap, but also to look at the class pay gap and the race pay gap which are as big, and in some cases even bigger, problems than just the gender pay gap.

And it's reflective in wider society of course, but do you think the BBC has a special duty to tackle this as a public service broadcaster?

Absolutely the BBC does, and I think the BBC is actually doing really great work to try and put its house in order and to try and address that. And the director general, Tony Hall, has announced a strategy, and it is important to say that you can't judge an organisation based just on those figures of the top hundred or so presenters. I did an audit on my programme and all of our staff on our programme, and there was no gender pay gap on that kind of local level, as it should be. So I don't necessarily think those top figures that were shown for the presenters reflected right across the board in production. But clearly, the BBC has a real duty – it's funded by the audience, so it has a real duty to lead the way ahead of other broadcasters on tackling the gender pay gap as well as the race and class pay gap.

And it's not just the pay gap. In terms of the gender issue. Is the BBC, in terms of the editorial side, is it still quite a male place? I mean, you are a female editor with a female anchor on your programme, that's great. Sarah Sands has just joined the Today programme, this is all fantastic. But ultimately, if you if you look at your peers, a lot of them are blokes.

Yes. I mean, within my team, our management team is four people, we're all women. When I first started to go into BBC management meetings, I would look around and think sometimes, "I don't belong here," because I was often one of only very few women. And I think the BBC is really working hard to tackle that. And these things won't happen immediately, but there are definitely steps in place to tackle that, and there are a number of women now in very senior high profile roles.

Let's take you out of the hot seat for a bit and just kind of go back to the very beginning, if I can. How did you end up even doing this? When you finished college and then went to study, did you always want to be a journalist? Did you always want to be in journalism? What was your career path at the beginning? What did you want to do?

I absolutely fell into radio by mistake, by accident. I didn't go to university, and I decided I wanted to get into journalism but had absolutely no experience whatsoever. So I did some work experience at my local newspaper, Bedfordshire on Sunday, which is now closing down, I read recently.

That's very sad. So print was the first...

Yes. And I thought, as someone who grew up reading, really kind of scrutinising newspapers, and being absolutely obsessed with newspapers, I only ever thought about working in newspapers, and I thought newspapers were the truest sense of journalism and was convinced that I wanted to work in newspapers. When I was at the Bedfordshire on Sunday a reporter there said to me, "Oh, why don't you get in touch with Neil Roy, who is a local reporter with Three Counties Radio?"

BBC3CR.

BBC3CR.

I've got that on my DAB.

Have you?

Yes.

My first ever station, and I learned so much there.

Did you start off by cleaning carts? That's one of the things I learned in this podcast. Heidi Dawson, who is obviously running 5 Live, said she started by cleaning carts. I didn't even know what that was. I had to have her explain it to me.

I managed to escape cleaning carts! I started working with Jungle, that was my first proper job at Three Counties Radio. But anyway, this journalist at Beds on Sunday introduced me to this guy called Neil Roy who was just brilliant. He took me under his wing. He used to give me voice tests, he used to give me little quizzes, and he was amazing. And he introduced me to the station Three Counties, and it was one of those lucky incidents for me at least, as these things often are, that someone was off sick for a few weeks and they asked me to do some shifts. And then very quickly got a job there.

But when you started in print, there's only one option there, which is to write words that will appear in the paper. Now, you know the minute you start to go into broadcast, did you already decide whether you were either going to go air side, or did you already feel a natural affinity with one side?

Well, as anyone listening to this podcast can tell, there is no way I was ever going to be air side!

I think you're a fantastic guest! But anyway, carry on.

Haha. Through gritted teeth. But local radio, of course, you've got to do everything. So I did read the news and absolutely hated it, and did reporting on air and thought I

was absolutely rubbish at it. But what I thought I was really good at, or quite good at at least, was at that stage production, and finding stories, and fixing stories, and persuading people to come on air.

So quite early on, you realised that actually your future was behind the glass.

Absolutely, yes. 100%.

In a way though, do you feel more vulnerable that someone else, like the presenter, could make a mistake, that you obviously can't control every word? You can write a script but things go wrong on air that you genuinely can't do anything more to fix.

No. I mean, certainly early on in my career I had some horrendous mistakes.

Do tell!

I'm never going to tell you, no! There's some absolutely awful mistakes that presenters have made, and you'd be sitting in the gallery or studio pulling your hair out. Obviously, I work with a presenter like Victoria who's incredibly talented, and I have complete faith in, and therefore don't worry about making mistakes.

So tell us what came after Three Counties Radio?

So after Three Counties Radio, I think I stayed at Three Counties Radio for about eight years, and I just... because I love it so much.

So at that point you were fully fledged behind the glass person.

Exactly.

And then did you already have a kind of career path in mind at that point like, "I'm now a radio person and this is my next move." Because some people that we have on this podcast they say, "Well, I did have a plan at the beginning, it was global domination, I always wanted to do this," and then other people say, "Oh, yes, looking back it all looks cool but actually I just went from one disaster to the next. I never had any clue what was going to do next."

I'm definitely in that last camp! I've never had a career plan and I've always been really frustrated at myself for not thinking, "Right, in two years' time I'm going to move here, in two years' time I'm going to be there, and in five years' time I'm going to be in charge of the world." I've always really loved every job I've done, and always been really passionate about the job I'm doing at that moment, and therefore really never wanted to leave that role. So I loved Three Counties Radio – it really taught me so much, and I had a great group of people, many of whom are still my friends, who I worked with. I was really happy there. And then, whilst working at Three Counties Radio, listening to 5 Live and would dream about one day work at 5 Live, and then got a job there I think in about 2005. And 5 Live was kind of my blood and

my passion, and I was so happy at 5 Live and had some of my greatest times at 5 Live, and then...

It's a great station.

It's such a good station.

I've listened to Wake up to Money for literally like, 20 years.

Really?

Yes.

It's a great programme.

Well, it is, and it is still innovating even now, but I mean, 5 Live is a fantastic station. Again, much derided when it was launched, and yet utterly, utterly undeserved. A total triumph.

Absolutely. But I think for me I never want to leave a job and then there'll be a point where I think, "Right, okay, it's time to move on." And that happened at Three Counties, and it happened at 5 Live.

You don't want to get stale at any job.

Exactly.

So what happened after 5 Live?

After 5 Live I went to Newsbeat and had a brilliant time at Newsbeat, and worked with an incredibly creative bunch of very talented reporters, and then launched Victoria's programme.

How does it work then when you move from radio to TV? Does the BBC send you on some 11-week course at vast expense to the licence fee payer where you're on retreat somewhere and then you're taught how to do telly. Or are you just thrown in at the deep end?

I don't think I've ever been on any courses about TV.

So they made you editor with no training?

Pretty much, yes!

Excellent. So you've learnt as you've gone along. I can imagine the BBC is a kind of almost – I'm slightly joking here – but like an almost overly responsible employer where they won't put anyone in a post until you've gone through

every single point of training, and there you are, made editor with zero TV training at all.

Well, you make that sound really bad, but actually I think that's a really good thing. As an editor, you know, the key skills for editor are editorial judgment, legal knowledge, decision making, managing a team and so on, and that doesn't change wherever you are. And actually, I genuinely think that as a radio person working in TV, I've been able to think really differently, and I'm really glad I didn't have those courses.

Because you're story-led rather than image-led.

Exactly. And I think there is a certain way that some people working in TV are very much conditioned to think, and I like to think that because both Victoria and I have not come from TV, we think very differently and we challenge perceptions and we encourage people to do things differently. And I think that's been a real bonus. Although I'd have liked an 11-week course in an exotic location!

It probably doesn't exist, it's probably apocryphal.

No, exactly! I'm really glad that I didn't have it and I think I make better decisions as a result of it.

How concerned are you at the kind of horrific abuse that female BBC journalists like Laura Kuenssberg receive online? I mean, it's not even a gender thing. Look at how the Scottish Nationalists marched on BBC Scotland, protesting against Nick Robinson, a braying mob. The BBC's journalism seems to be under siege in ways it never was before.

Yes. I mean, Laura Kuenssberg is a fantastic journalist and a fantastic politics editor, and I think the last thing she'd want would be for her to be...

A bodyguard at the Labour Party conference!

Well, for her to be the story and for people to be talking about her in that way. Her journalism speaks for itself. She's absolutely first class. I think, you know, it's really important, and you hear it said time and time again, that the BBC gets complaints from the left and from the right in equal measures, and that kind of tells you that we're doing something right. But the current climate of fake news and of real tribalism does mean that it feels a very different atmosphere now to when I started off nearly 20 years ago in broadcasting.

Do you feel you have to second guess yourself a little bit more, that even though your news judgment is sound you almost have to get slightly defensive before you do it, because you know you're going to be attacked?

No. I think that's when you start doing that, that's the kind of real downward route to many problems. Anyone who's ever worked at the BBC will know that balance and impartiality is so ingrained in us and so part of everything we do, and any personal

opinions anyone has is so very much left at the door before you get into work. But actually, of course you examine your decisions, and you question are we balanced enough, are we representing this view or that view, but not the result of protest on either side as a result of what we do every day.

I don't expect you to answer, and I don't blame you for not answering, but what has the BBC got wrong? Is there anything that frustrates you about working there? Can I tempt you to say something?

I think editorially the BBC does a great job. The frustration of any big organisation is the bureaucracy and the speed of which decisions are made.

Could you see yourself walking outside the BBC? So far you've been a bit of a BBC lifer.

Yes, I'm sure I could. I love the BBC, I'm so passionate about the BBC, and its aims and objectives and what it delivers, but of course, you know, of course it's a possibility. But right now, I'm genuinely loving my job and loving what we're doing, and hopefully making a difference.

Or maybe promotion? I mean, James Harding's leaving... I doubt Tony Hall could survive another series of W1A! I think we're already at season four now. Do you look at it as a kind of ladder, a corporate ladder? I mean, some people really want to go into that management field and then others want to stay as close as possible to programme making.

Yes. That decision making is a real struggle, because the stuff that you enjoy the most, or the stuff that I enjoy the most, in my job is the programme making, and is the direct involvement in the journalism and the shaping content, but equally a management side of that job can be really rewarding - seeing your ideas flourish from a distance, or seeing development of staff happen, or the big strategy thinking. So yes, both can be equally rewarding and challenging, but I'm not quite sure what the next job will be yet.

What advice would you give to the next editor? I mean, to someone who aspires to take your job when you're ready to move on in sort of 10, 15 years from now, whatever it is, when they're starting a career in journalism. They really admire what you're doing. What advice would you give that person?

Don't think you can't do it. Believe in yourself. Have ideas. Devour news. Care about stories. And work out what your unique selling point is going to be, what are you going to bring that will be different to the thousands of other journalists that already exist and that will pretty much think in a very similar way.

Last question, then. What's been the worst day of your career so far and what's been the best?

The worst day of my career was, without a doubt, very early on in my career when I was a producer at Three Counties Radio breakfast programme. It was around the

time that Ulrika Johnson had alleged she had been sexually assaulted by someone, and all the papers were speculating whose identity that was. The presenter for the programme that I was producing went on air and accidentally named that person.

I remember that happening.

Well, you don't! Because a few hours later Matthew Wright also named him on Channel 5.

Didn't he say the BBC had named that person a few hours earlier?

I don't know if he did. Well, if he did...

I must have misremembered it.

If he did it never reached me, so I'm pretty sure he didn't. Matthew very luckily took the heat totally out of that. But I remember that morning just thinking, "Oh my word, I'm going to lose my job." It's something that I couldn't control.

So it's a heart in mouth moment.

Yes, absolutely.

But it wasn't even your fault?

Yes, but ultimately, if you're in charge of a bit of output you take that responsibility, and I remember just that real feeling of feeling absolutely sick for hours and hours and hours, until luckily Matthew Wright saved me. That was the worst day, and it's been a great thing to have happened early on in my career, because it's always made me... kept me on my toes. Realised how much things can go wrong.

Of course now, you just go on Twitter and find out within five seconds. And the Mail Online even say, you know, "This person has been named on social media," so they're basically inviting you to do a search on Twitter so you can then know who it is and you can go back to the Mail and read it. But it's completely irresponsible. Best day?

I've had so many good days, so many days where I'm just so proud of what I've achieved, or what we have as a team and the programme have achieved. It takes a lot to top winning a BAFTA though.

What's it actually like to win a BAFTA then? Presumably you go to the ceremony, and do you know you're going to win it in advance?

No.

Do you have your three-course meal and a few glasses of foaming ale and all that? How does it actually work?

Well, first of all you have absolutely no idea you're going to win it. I didn't think for a second we'd win it, I was convinced someone else would win it. It's actually a really long day. You have a few pre-drinks and then you go and sit down in the theatre where the awards ceremonies happen, which go on for hours and hours and hours, and there's no alcohol. We won our award about a couple of hours in, and it was the most amazing feeling, but then of course all you want is a drink, and there's no booze. And I think we got into the theatre about six or seven in the evening and finally got out at 11, at which point you then have a three course meal and an after-show party, and that's all amazing. But I do remember thinking, "I really want a drink to celebrate," and not having one for a few hours.

You should have taken a hip flask in.

The other thing is, the BAFTA is really heavy to carry.

Do you not collect it and then they'll just DHL you it the next day?

No!

So you have to physically walk down the street with it?

Yes. Which is no hardship really, is it?

Well, not really.

Yes. It was an amazing experience.

That was a hugely enjoyable interview. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you very much.