

So How Was Your Day?

Mark Welford



Stephen Wicks and Mark Welford of Bloomsbury Flowers

“The worst morning of the week is Monday when I have to get up about 3.30am. In the summer it can be lovely but in the winter it gets a bit grim, apart from Christmas. I have a steaming cup of coffee at about 4.00am and aim to get to the shop for 4.30am. I start unpacking, on average, between 15 and 20 crates of flowers delivered from Holland. Our shop is situated in an area where there isn't much footfall, so we knew from the start that we would have to get loads of contract work. The first shift of staff get in at about 5.00am and we do an 11 hour day on Mondays. We all leave 'dead'. I don't really eat breakfast as such, but I do eat an awful lot of fruit. It sounds very righteous but it's slow release energy. Sometimes at around 9.30am I have a bacon sandwich.

“A fairly normal Monday is to come back home about 3.30pm and have a nap. Having three children though, I usually end up having to go out to collect Molly from ballet. No florist really sleeps easily on a Sunday night. I think the routine is easier to relate to, having been a dancer, but when we first opened we thought we wouldn't have to get up too early. As a dancer you get up relatively late. Getting up at 7.00am seemed like purgatory. However, it was a huge learning curve and I soon realised that, on Sundays, particularly with kids, there is no way of getting it right. Of course sometimes we all turn up feeling rough or I get completely wired and get a double energy burst. Then it really hits you like jet lag the next day.

“One of my guilty feelings is about not going to the gym. Cannons asked us how we would feel about doing their flowers and in return they would offer free membership to Stephen and myself. Although I am the boss, it's difficult to get out of the shop during the day, so I have to admit, I've only been once. I don't miss dancing. It was a fantastic full stop for me when I married Sarah and left in 1994. I was feeling positive about leaving. I was probably at the end of my shelf life/sell by date. My wife is far better at swinging a leg at home and doing a barre. Strangely, for a dancer, I quite like the obsessive monotony of gym machines, the treadmill. I enjoy it even though there

is no music. Pilates leaves me completely cold. I'd rather eat my youngest's nappies than do that.

“The flower shop was Stephen's idea, although originally we thought we might open a restaurant. But with flowers we thought we could start out with a tap and a bucket, so we spoke to the Dancers' Resettlement. We went on a training course for four weeks, which I was crap at. Fortunately Stephen had always been good at arranging flowers, so we negotiated the lease, did a two day bookkeeping course and then opened the shop.

“We've had some very romantic customers. One said he wanted to cover his bed in rose petals. You want to know what's going on. I don't think it was just a romantic gesture.

“We once had a man in fake armour standing in the shop. I jokingly said, “if you've left your dragon outside, make sure it's not on a yellow line”. He said he'd made an arrangement with his girlfriend's parents to take her for a walk in Hyde Park at a certain time. He'd hired a horse and was going to propose to her.

“One guy said he'd just seen our details on the Internet, turned up in stretch limo and told us to fill the car “now” with red roses as he was going straight to the airport. We have regular customers too, such as Jennifer Saunders and Jamie Oliver and I think we're good at doing themed bunches of flowers, for example for the Opera House. The colour and attention to detail has to be right.

“My mood very much depends on our customers. We generally have a complaint-free day. Unlike being a dancer, you are rewarded with “oh how wonderful” and “you've made my day”. It's instant gratification. You feel quite buoyant. I love cooking as that's part of my relaxation. I've got into *Eastenders*, much to my wife's disgust. Sarah likes to energise herself with other things but because I've been dealing with people all day, a bit of *Will and Grace* is fine. I go once in a while to the ballet. I have just been to the panto with my children and there was some ballet of sorts in that. I love travel books. I'll read a couple of pages of Bill Bryson and tend to pass out any time between 10.30pm and 11.30pm.

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Bloomsbury Flowers in Covent Garden was started in 1994 by Mark Welford and Stephen Wicks, who both danced for many years with the Royal Ballet companies. www.bloomsburyflowers.co.uk

INTERVIEW BY DEBORAH WEISS