



Cristina Nicolotti Squires

Editor, Channel 5 News

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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 Cristina Nicolotti Squires, editor of 5 News. Starting out at Thames Television, Christina then joined ITN in 1994 where she's since spent more than 20 years. In that time, she has held a variety of positions including editor of ITV's lunchtime news and News at Ten. She's currently responsible for a team of over 50 journalists at 5 News, and her programmes have won an International Emmy, a BAFTA and an RTS award for Programme of the Year. She recently announced that she will be joining Sky News as its director of content in 2017.

Christina, thank you for joining me.

Thank you very much.

That's an incredibly impressive biography!. I always say that to everyone that I interview, but it's genuinely one of the first observations. That's a lot of responsibility.

Yes, it's funny when you look back at things and you see them all together, you think, "Wow, I did do all that, it did all really happen." Yes, I just I've been very lucky I think, and I've worked in an organisation, I've been here at ITN for 22 years now which seems incredible, and it's a company where I've been able to do so much, and I think that's really quite impressive.

How do you feel moving on? Because you've got this exciting opportunity at Sky and you've just shown me round the new studio as well! Tell us about that.

Right. Okay, first thing's first. The new studio, I'm really pleased that we are bringing 5 News back to ITN, to Gray's Inn Road, where it all started in 1997. It's been a project we've been working on for some time and I'm really, really pleased, not only

for the fact we've got a new set and a new studio, which is great, but sort of bringing it back into ITN where Channel 4 News is made or ITV News is made, and where I cut my teeth as well I suppose. It's brilliant.

Because you moved to the Northern Shell building when Richard Desmond owned Channel 5.

Yes. So when ITN got the contract back, we – at Richard Desmond's desire – we moved, we built a whole studio and newsroom right in the middle of his media empire, sort of between the Daily Express and the Star, and then of course a couple of years later Viacom bought Channel 5 and we stayed there for a bit, but most of Channel 5 has moved into the Viacom headquarters in Camden and we've come back here, we've come home, which is great. It'll be very emotional. Finally bring it home.

Tell us about the relaunch then.

Channel 5 had a rebrand earlier this year. They were really keen to show people that they make a really wide range of programmes and they're not just the home of Celebrity Big Brother and benefits programmes, although those do very well, and they've got a terrific range of programmes from GPs Behind Closed Doors to Ben Fogle's Lives in the Wild, some really good stuff, and they felt they wanted to sort of have a branding that felt a bit more broad than it was before. When that happened in the new year they were really keen to make the news feel part of that. It's the one show that's on every day for an hour in total plus the updates, so we wanted to do something that also brought us more in line with the channel branding but also captured a bit of that sort of spirited TV feel to sort of 90s... remember when 5 News came on air, Kirsty famously perched and everyone copied.

Kirsty is brilliant on Desert Island Discs of course now.

Yes, absolutely. So what we've done is we've come up with something which we feel still has that spirit but also reflects a bit the fact we've sort of come of age as well.

Am I allowed to say what the desk does or is that secret?

A secret.

Well, I can assure our listeners that I now know what the studio is going to do – I feel very much an insider at the moment. But like you said the news values haven't changed. I mean, you've been involved with 5 News for a long time, haven't you?

Became the editor three years ago. It's a... you know, it has a really important role, 5 News. The viewers who watch the programmes at five and at six-thirty and the updates as well, they are people who don't typically get their news from anywhere else, which is a really important audience. It's really important for stakeholders, you know, the government, charities, banks, consumer groups, all that kind of thing, and so it has a real responsibility – and the audience is, you know, at home, at tea time, and needs a programme that they can really relate to. And one of the things I've tried to really do is put people at the heart of everything, and actually we did some focus group work recently to sort of, in preparation for our relaunch, to sort of see what people liked what they didn't like. And it was really encouraging to see that people really noticed that we put people, more ordinary people, ordinary people whose lives are affected, at the centre of all our storytelling, and I think that's been really successful.

And do you feel a special sense of responsibility given that it is an underserved market, especially with with the closure of BBC 3 for example.

I don't know how much of our audience would have watched BBC 3, because the 5 News audience is probably not so much into kind of youth, stuff like that. But I do think anyone who works in news full stop, whether it's newspapers, radio, television, mobile, it's only when you stop and think about the job that you do and the responsibilities you have, you know, you're deciding what people get for their news, and that's really quite a big deal.

Give us a whirlwind tour then of your time here at ITN. Like you said, it's going two decades. How do you come to start here? Give us a sense of some of the ventures you've been involved in.

Oh, God! I've been... because I'm leaving the end of the year I've been sort of, you know, thinking about lots of things I've done, and they have ranged from flying over a volcano in a helicopter, that was pretty cool, covered earthquakes, I've worn a flak jacket and been in dangerous places which I kind of, as a youngster always wanted to do, and when it did it, didn't what to do any more...

I can imagine.

... I've edited News at 10. I've edited royal wedding programmes – I'm sure you'll ask about that again a bit more, but that was one of my career highlights. I've just had a laugh. I've just, you know... I've covered lots of American elections, I've covered lots of British elections in all sorts of different roles, and I've just been really, really lucky in that I've just had a kind of eyewitness view of so much of recent history if you like. It's just been brilliant, it's been really good. Really amazing, amazing 22 years to look back on.

You don't seem to have lost any kind of enthusiasm or joie de vivre.

Haha. No, gosh, you can't work in this business if you don't have a passion for it. It is a stressful business we all work in; news doesn't stick to regular hours, will always happen when you don't want it to, and if you don't like the adrenaline rush and if you don't like what you're working in, then I think that translates into what you do. So I do think I've... I do try. You know. we all have bad days, we have days where you want to get out of bed. But the great thing about working in news is that every day's different – you just don't know what's going to happen.

And what do you prefer? Do you prefer the kind of big spectacular events like the royal stuff that you were talking about, that you can plan for and then, you know, build up the sense of tension and, you know, build all your planning and then get it done, or do you like the kind of day to day news gathering, editing a regular tea time show?

I'm going to sit on the fence on this one. There are advantages to both, and actually I think if I only did one I would probably get itchy feet. Editing a daily show was great. And again, you come in, you do the show... it's TV news, it's not even yesterday's fish and chip paper, it's gone to Mars I always say, and then you just move on to the next thing. But then equally, there's nothing like... whether it's coming up with a new look for 5 News or whether it's conceiving a sort of seven and a half hour royal wedding programme, there's nothing like spending months working on something and actually watching it come to life to give you a real sense of satisfaction. So I'm hedging a bets on that one. I wouldn't say one was better than the other.

If you've got seven and a half hours of live coverage of a royal wedding or royal event, whatever it is, that must be exhilarating and quite stressful at the same time.

Yes, but the stress is what makes it exhilarating really. So yes, but all these things... on rolling news, and this is why I suppose going to Sky make sense to me; on rolling news you're taken along with the adrenaline, and calling the shots and deciding what to go to next and all that kind of thing is exhilarating in itself. And so it's not really... I mean seven and a half hours without any commercial breaks, which I've done three times now in my career, is you know, you do dash to the loo in a quiet moment. I think I had to manage... I did have manage a couple of loo stops on a couple of those programmes, but just the story will take you through it. So I did the election of President Obama. You know there's this tantalizing chance that at 3am in the morning you're going to have this amazing news story where, you know, the first black president United States is elected.

And you're there.

And you're there, and you're carrying it through. So you might flag a few hours later, but you've always got something you're building up to, so adrenaline takes you through all these things. I'm sure the presenters will say the same.

So what about breaking news, even when you're on air with say, 5 News, when things happen in that hour. Is that an extra shot of adrenaline? And is that kind of a bigger challenge to cover in the moment?

Yes, because when stories are unfolding, context is really important. And so something can come up as a flash on a Newswire or a tweet or something, and you know, if it's a tweet it's 140 characters, if it's something on a breaking news service or rolling news, you know, there might just be a couple of facts and you have to decide straightaway is that something we need to cover, how we're going to cover it, how much information do we have. Our view is 5 News is not a rolling news programme, so you have to make sure that you are... you know, people sit down, they want a digest of the day's news; you have to make the decisions with that in context. But yes, it's what all is what all TV news people love – a breaking story. Rip it up and start again.

And you're moving to Sky in the new year of course, which is all about breaking news.

It is. It is. And actually it's funny, having been in television news now for probably about 25 years in total, I've managed to avoid 24-hour news programmes, and here I am at a later stage of my career moving into it. And I get it. I think it's just really exciting. The fact that you got 24 hours to fill means that you are not only sort of live at events when they happen, but you can do so much, and you can try things, and if it doesn't work it's fine – you'll just do it differently in the next hour. So I think to me that's a real a really exciting prospect.

And will you be based at Osterley, right next to the glass box?

Yes, I will. Whether my office is next to the glass box I don't know, but I think what's really interesting there they've built this... in fact when I walked in for an interview and saw it I really was like, "Wow."

The ticker at the bottom of the actual studio itself is very impressive.

It is, isn't it? And I think that to me, it was a real sign that Sky, the big company, is taking news really seriously. You couldn't get a more obvious step that television news means a lot to Sky, the big company, than by putting a studio in a glass box right in the centre of your main European hub. And I think it's a really bold move and

says a lot. It says a lot about their commitment. So yes, I think it certainly has the wow factor.

So what will the new job involve?

Haha. Still working that one out. I am director of content. I have a colleague who is director of newsgathering, and the pair of us report to John Riley, who's in charge of Sky News...

Who's coming on this podcast in a few weeks.

Oh, excellent. In fact, John I go back because we used to work here at News at Ten many years ago. And I will manage 150-odd staff, I think. My responsibility is for the content. You know, how we put out the stuff that Sky News gathers, if you like, how we put out on the telly, how we put it out on mobile, how we put it on the radio, and various documentaries that we make, which could appear on the news shows but also can appear on Sky Atlantic and various other places, so it really is a very broad range of responsibilities. How it works out day to day I guess I might be making up as I go along, we'll find out more as I go along.

How do you balance your time and your responsibilities even with the senior job that you've got now? So for example, we had Chris Blackhurst on here, well over a couple of years ago, editor of the Independent on Sunday, and he was saying that whilst he enjoyed being the editor, with being editor came a lot of other stuff like HR and legal and all of that, and he said he found that a total pain. And whilst overall he still enjoyed being editor, it wasn't anywhere near as glamorous as it is. You mentioned there, when you move to Sky you will have to manage a lot of stuff. Is that something that's a necessary evil for you or do you see that as part of the joy of the job as well?

I actually really enjoy it. I mean, people are people and they can be joyous and they can be a pain. And I actually really enjoy managing people. I think traditionally – there's a big stereotype here – journalists are not necessarily the best man managers. I think what happens right across the industry is that you're very good as a journalist and you get made a manager, and quite often people don't tell you how to be a manager.

And also journalists are difficult to manage because it's like herding cats. They don't want to be managed.

Yes, but people do need to be managed.

Absolutely.

And I think it's an art... I've learnt a lot from watching people and you learn from good and bad experiences. And I think that to me, there are downsides in managing people, you have to listen to a lot of moans and gripes from time to time, but there is also a huge upside. I love spotting potential in people and developing it, and thinking that person needs to work on this, telling them that, and then sort of seeing them grow into, you know, into other roles. And I really relish that part of the job as well as the news side of it actually.

Do you feel quite a sense of responsibility, though? Because I mean, the decisions are yours to take and the buck stops with you but you also might get it wrong, you might make a mistake.

Yes. Yes. If anyone says they don't make mistakes they're kidding themselves. Yes, there is a responsibility and you can only do what you think is right in the circumstances. And I've made a few appointments in the past which haven't worked out, but you know...

It's life.

It is life. Nobody is right 100% of the time. And all you can do – I always say to everybody, if you make a mistake, whether it's on air or in the news or whatever – the most important thing is to learn from that mistake and find out why you made it, and kind of move on.

So let's start at the beginning then, and go back to the start of your career. Did you always want to be in telly? What were your first steps into the world of journalism?

I was one of those really precocious children who knew from about the age of eight what they wanted to be, and that was a journalist. Probably because my dad was one, my dad was a news editor at the old Evening News which then merged and became the Evening Standard, as it was then.

That is old school!

That is old school, very old school. And actually, interestingly, I've been working in the Northern and Shell building with people used to work with my dad, which is quite funny. So yes, from about the age of eight I knew I wanted to be a journalist, and I used to rather precociously write a newspaper for the family called Family Buzz once a week and all that kind of thing, so I have been lucky to know what I wanted to do, and everything's been basically been the pursuit of that. So when I left school and went to Durham University, the first thing I did was work on the student newspaper with Jeremy Vine, and in fact I kept a letter for one of my tutors, reminding me that my tenancy at Durham University had an academic purpose as well as a journalistic

one. So... and then did lots of work experience in the university holidays, and then luckily got a job from that, so I'm very fortunate in that I had that drive and that vision and knew exactly what I wanted to do. And then telly was... I started off doing a lot of freelancing in Fleet Street on the papers and I found that newspapers is much more lonely. I mean, they work as a pack, so you're all there with each other, you know, people from different newspapers. What I loved about telly was it was a team thing and you go out with the cameraman, and you shoot – in those days you went out with a cameraman, a lighting director, a driver and a correspondent –

Now it's you and an iPhone.

Now it's you and an iPhone! But it was always a team thing and I always really, really liked that. And that's kind of I suppose, was... and also I just think the power of pictures and words, when we see a really good TV report with brilliant pictures and brilliant words, and that's what really attracted me.

So did you get the bug then, for telly?

The telly bug? Yes, yes, yes.

Were ever attracted to kind of go on air and be air side?

No, I'm far too fond of chocolate in the afternoon for that! No, I didn't really. I think again, it's that enjoying working as part of a team and I think reporters are, you know, not lonely, I work with a cameraman, but I really enjoy being at the centre of things, so whether it's being a news editor or being a programme editor or sort of directing things, maybe I'm just too bossy to be an on-air person and I want to sort of be everyone else around. But no I didn't. I've never really felt the attraction to that at all.

What's your view on news anchors generally these days, kind of becoming a bit more emotional, you know, when you're dealing with very punchy stories like for example the recent murder of Jo Cox which was a great tragedy, you know, do you feel that there is a tension of how much emotions journalists and on-air news anchors should show?

I think the job of a news anchor is to bring the story home to the audience at home, and I think showing a bit of that emotion is not a problem at all. It's degrees, isn't it? And we're talking... you show it slightly, you don't start weeping and wailing, likewise you don't burst into peals of laughter, but I don't think there's anything wrong with conveying your shock at the story. And in fact, the fact that the news that Jo had actually died broke during our programme, so we went on air with our top story reported by Andy Bell saying that she'd been stabbed, and the news that she'd actually died broke while we were on air. And so at the end of the programme we

shot on our presenter, went to through to Andy and said, “There’s been some dreadful news that we’ve just heard Andy, can you tell us about it?” and Andy sort of broke the news, and you could tell he was upset by it but it’s entirely appropriate to be upset, and then they went back to the studio and Sian and Matt was sort of reacting to it, and I thought I was absolutely fine. If you don’t show emotion then you don’t show that you’re human.

Because there was a big scandal when Princess Diana died, that Martyn Lewis showed some emotion as he was doing it. I mean, it’s clearly an evolution with news presentation isn’t it, that you know, gone are the days when you had these kind of austere received pronunciation, older white males in dinner jackets. Things have completely changed.

Absolutely. And I think as I said, viewers want a connection with the person delivering the news, so they want to know that the person delivering the news feels it in the same way that they do. So it’s about degrees. It’s not extreme emotions, but I think there’s nothing wrong with it at all. And we’re seeing much more opinion coming across into news as well. You know, we’re not on the on the lines of Fox News like in the States or anything like that, but you know, LBC for example, has some very opinionated presenters on its programmes.

We’ve had about half of them on this podcast!

I’m sure you have! And you know, Tom Bradby at News at Ten you know, has a certain... bit more opinion in it, and going to Sky News programme, The Pledge, I don’t know if you’ve seen it, it’s a debate programme without any moderator. So I think there is a trend, if you like, to try and get a bit more opinion out – obviously all regulated, because the broadcasting news industry is regulated – but I think that it’s an evolution that we’re going through. So yes, I think the emotion thing is absolutely fine.

And Sky News is obviously quite chatty, even in the evening output with the paper review, you know, other than The Wheel when they do just kind of straight rolling news and repeating it like at the weekends or whatever, it is quite a chatty conversational style even there.

Hmm. I mean, the paper review is one of the most watched bits I think actually, in the entire day’s output. Again, maybe probably because of the style, people like a bit of, you know... people like presentation at their level; they need to trust the person that’s talking, they need to know that they’ve been around, they’ve been a journalist, they understand it. Increasingly, there’s so much stuff out there you kind of need a respected trusted person to kind of say to you, “This is the stuff that really matters.”

To curate it.

To curate it. Exactly. But equally I think people, if they see a presenter that kind of feels too remote and unconnected with their lives, then they think, “Well, that person’s kind of talking down at me,” and I’m a big believer in sort of delivering news at your audience’s level, not talking down. Because you don’t have to talk down.

Just accessible.

Yes. Yes, exactly.

And you think the BBC have got a bit to learn about that, because you look at how Tom Bradby for example, on News at Ten, he’s quite chatty and quite accessible whereas Huw Edwards, who is also an amazing broadcaster that I have huge respect for, but it is that... it’s a more traditional news show isn’t it, where he says, “Good evening,” and then he reads the news, and for a couple of stories he might stand up next to that news graphics wall. But other than that it is quite a straight news show, isn’t it?

Yes but that’s what it’s meant to be. I mean, you know, the thing that’s incredible at BBC News is that yes, you have Huw delivering a traditional straightforward news programme at 10 o’clock which is hugely popular, you also have Newsbeat on Radio 1. You have the Eddie Mair Show on and on Radio 4 and PM on Radio 4, and you have the Today programme and you have Jeremy Vine on Radio 2. They’re all BBC news, but they’re all completely different. And I think that’s what’s brilliant about the British broadcasting scene; there is room for all of that.

Do you think that television news, and journalism in particular, is more accessible to women these days than it was say when you started out in your career? I think it’s less sexist?

Interesting one. I think that we are all much more aware. Society is less sexist, I would say, than it was in the 70s and 80s – well, I wasn’t around in the 70s, but in the 80s and 90s.

I was around in the 70s.

No, you weren’t! Only just.

I was only a toddler.

Exactly. I think that society is less sexist and therefore the industry has become less sexist. You know, there is behaviour that was standard when I first started working which now would see people disciplined. We’ve become a lot, you know, but then that’s not just television news. I mean look, there’s a whole inquiry going on isn’t

there, so sort of you know, how people behaved in certain places, and we were not going to go into all of that! I don't know about who viewed television back in the 80s and 90s, I bet it was still the same in terms of demographics in that it's women, generally speaking, most news programmes have got more women than men watching them. And so it makes absolute sense to, you know, to cater for your audience whether they're male or female. So I think there have been a lot of changes. There's still some way to go, you know, diversity is at the top of all of our agendas, making sure we reflect our audiences. We're making great strides as an industry. Are we really there yet? No. Will we ever be there? I suspect it'll always be evolving – but we are much more aware of the things I think than we ever used to be.

So do you think the glass ceiling is more of a kind of mental thing now rather than an actual accessibility problem?

Yes. I gave a talk to some girls a few years ago, it was for International Women's Day.

About your daughter?

It wasn't actually my daughter, it was the fact that my daughter, who I think was seven or eight at the time, and thought was sexist that she wasn't chosen to play cricket in the school cricket team. And I said, "Well, it is a bit of a boy's game." She said, "There's no such thing as boy's games." And so I then gave a talk to a lot of 17 and 18-year-olds, and the idea of a glass ceiling just isn't in their heads. This glass ceiling thing, I think we kind of... we sort of... as we get older, we become perhaps a little bit more, a bit less... not aspirational, but we kind of... our eagerness sort of goes a bit, and I think sometimes we kind of... sometimes we can use it as a bit of an excuse. "Well, I'm a woman so I couldn't possibly do that." And so I think sometimes a glass ceiling can be in people's minds, because I honestly say, you know, we started off this interview of you talking about what an incredible range of stuff I'd done over the course of 22 years. My gender's just not come into it at any point. And in that 22 years, I've married, I've had two kids, and it is, you know, it's not the easiest thing in the world but it's all totally possible. So I think I think the glass ceiling thing is it's often in in people's minds rather than in reality.

This is not a question to you as a woman but as a parent. But I was just thinking you know, you're editor of the 10 o'clock news. That must be difficult for family life if you're not home until quarter past 11 every night.

Yes. Yes it was not ideal. But then, because you do really long hours, so then you did... in those days I came in at nine in the morning and left at 11. You did three days a week. So there are seven days in a week and for the majority of them I was at home being a parent, and for three of them I was doing very long days producing

one of the top news shows in Britain, and you know, that was a balance that was fine for me.

And what's it like in the moment as you are the editor of a national news programme when you're on air, because clearly you've got the anchor, you've got the journalist, the studio director. What's your role when you're on air?

Well, I watch it and critique it.

Do you talk back into the anchor's ear?

No, I'm not interventionist like that. I mean, if something's going really badly wrong or I think something really important we need to say, I will get on the squawk box and say something like, "Have you seen that story," or whatever, but most of the time... the structure is... the way I work is that I take the meeting in the morning, we talk about the journey we're going on that day, what we're going to do, how it's going to turn out. We have a meeting later on in the day where we update on that. The way I work is I like to think that I hire good people who know what they're doing. I provide the sense of direction and the leadership and they can get on with it. But you know, we all work together. I mean, I'm a big believer in collaboration.

So an hour before you go on air you've largely got the running order of the product completely sorted, and barring any breaking news, you know exactly how it's going to play.

Yes.

And is most of that kind of diary-based announcements and pre-planned stuff that you knew that that Wednesday the inflation results sort of come out, or is a lot of it, you know, you're in conference that morning and you think, "Right, what's happening?"

Yes. Yes, sometimes, yes. Quite often things become talking points, you'll suddenly go, "Yes, do something on that." Whether it's the ice bucket challenge or something has been mentioned a lot on social media. Some stuff's diaried, yes, you know that inflation figures are going to come out, they're probably going to go up, how should we... you have a discussion with your...

Balance the payments, whatever.

Yes, and you have a discussion with the planning team about how we can best illustrate that. But quite often you wake up in the morning, you've got two or three things that you've planned but you've got to find some more, and you just sort of think, "What are people talking about today?" and, you know, "What's the news?"

And naturally, that brings me to my next question which is where do you get your news from? So you wake up on a morning, do go to Twitter, do you go to the BBC News website or ITV News, or 5 News? How do you how do you actually become aware of what you're going to cover?

I'm one of those dreadful people who wakes up and grabs their iPhone and starts looking at Twitter.

Isn't that everyone these days?

I know, it's not good for us, is it really" I worry about the psychological damage it's doing to us, you know, before my eyes are even opened. Weirdly, I can see without my glasses at that time of day, but anyway... so you know. I look at my phone. I have a quick look, I'll have a scan of basically ITV, BBC, Sky, everyone's apps, have a quick look. Quick look at Twitter. Get in the shower, I have the radio on in the shower, I've got it loud enough so it goes over the noise of the shower...

Is it the Today programme? 5 Live?

Literally, it does vary. I'm not just saying this, bit of 5 Live, Bit of the Today programme, I then get downstairs and I will literally flick between... see what Good Morning Britain's doing, see what Sky is doing, see what BBC 24 is doing, all the while trying to chivvy children to get ready for school and email my office about what our plans are for the day. But I'm in pretty early anyway so we have plenty of time to do that.

Would you describe yourself as a news junkie, even now?

Yes. Yes. I mean, I'm pretty good at turning off, when I go on holiday I can turn off. But I do have this... yes, I do. I mean, I suppose it's ingrained in me. I can't go to bed without watching News at Ten, whether it's on the BBC or ITV, or you know, a news programme before... which is crazy because I've been in office all day and I know exactly what's go on in the world, but I still feel I've got to sit down and watch programme before I go to bed.

So do you watch that as a kind of normal person watching the news or are you still watching it as a professional where you think, "They've done this shot, they've chosen this editorial stance, I wouldn't have done it that way, I would have done it this way." Or are you just a person who's just thinking, "Right, tell me what the news is."

I think I probably look at it with an eye of a professional as in, “Really like that, don’t like that, that’s a good idea, might nick that.” So, yes, I think you tend to. There can be some shouting at the telly that goes on sometimes.

And you said they are quite good at switching off, then, so what do you do to switch off what when you’re not kind of in the news or in the news industry? What are you doing?

Oh well, you know, I’m a working mum, I’ve got a husband and two kids, there’s always plenty to be done. We go on holidays quite a bit, which is nice, because that’s the only way you can really get away. I’d like to say I’ve got an hobbies but I don’t, which is really bad.

I don’t have any hobbies either, this is my hobby.

I know. I mean, that’s the thing about news, it does consume you from when you wake up at six in the morning to go to bed at 10:30. I’ve been living and breathing news all day, and at weekends, you know I will still read as many papers as I can at weekends. I don’t watch political shows on a Sunday morning. I sometimes record them watch back later, I’ve got hand on heart there, but yes, family time, most of the time.

It depends who the guest is. If it’s the leader of a party I’ll probably watch it.

I mean, I like to try... you know, when I’m not working, the rest of the time goes to family.

And that actually brings me to an interesting question there about how people have changed the way that they get the news. Because you know in the old days you’d go and do a day’s work down the mine, then you’d emerge and then you’d watch News at Ten and then you’d go to bed. There would be one or maybe even two teatime news, and then the evening news. But now, you know, there’s rolling news on Sky, there’s a plurality of Twitter and Instagram and all of these apps and everything. Do you think that in a sense you’ve got it’s slightly different because you were catering for a unique audience on 5 News, or are the viewers of that programme also just in the mix of Twitter and Facebook and all of that?

Again, we did some research, so I actually speak from knowledge here. The 5 News audience, the audience of the people who watch the news on Channel 5, may have kind of dipped in and out. They might have had the radio on in the car, but it wouldn’t be the Today show, it’ll be like their local radio station, Heart FM or whatever, so they’ll pick up bits of news bulletins, but it’s kind of background to them. And so at five o’clock it’s kind of like, “Oh, right – this is what has been going on all day.” So

yes, that is very different. In terms of the sources of news, there is so much of it, but again that's brilliant because it gives people so much opportunity to work in this industry. And you know, I'm not fazed by mobile journalism or digital platforms or however you want to describe it, it's just storytelling for a different audience and in a different way. And it's just like another kind of programme really – you have the same content but you cut it, edit it in a different way, you write the words in a different way and you show more pictures than words, and it's... and again it's a bit like that analogy, the same story on Radio 1 Newsbeat and on the Today programme – same story, told differently. And I think that's one of the exciting things about digital platforms.

Because when I turn on News At Ten on an evening, I actually know what the news is already; I'm not expecting to be told new stuff that's happened. I'm expecting to get, you know, an opinion or an insight or for them to have spent three or four hours considering it with their journalists and then giving me an analysis of it, really. Do you think that news programmes now actually do less actual new news?

I think... well, everyone wants to do original journalism and investigations, and I think that is still at a real premium for newspaper and telly people, but for telly people, what you really like is when other telly people, other news companies are kind of, you know, running your stuff because it's so newsworthy. So yes, but then again, you know, we do lots of live interviews, and live interviews we can get good news lines from people. So you're generating news all the time. I think there is that kind of end of the day feel if you like, where people want a bit of analysis, so I know this has happened, what does it mean for me? So I think that's really successful, but I think again it's... there is just so much news out there that people still like, you know, still like to sort of... some people still like to sort of... you know, see it on the telly. And interestingly, we found that in our research that people kind of... they feel that... they'll see something on their mobile or on a Twitter feed or Facebook or whatever, but it has more authority if they see it on the telly as well. So for example – and I'm talking about Sky because I happen to know this, because obviously I've been finding out about it – when things like the Paris attacks happened, loads of people will be seeing it on Twitter and stuff and various digital feeds, but they put the telly on. Sky doubled its audience because people wanted to see it happening live on a telly screen rather than just on Twitter or Facebook or whatever.

And so they double screen. Sky and Twitter.

Yes, they do. We all do. People who say television news is dead, it's changing, its consumption is changing. I don't actually think it's dead. It's just changing.

It's an expensive business though, isn't it?

Hmm-mm.

Because, you know, you can follow someone on Twitter who just happens to be there and film someone on their phone. Eddie Mair on PM can actually just ring someone in Mosul who's was on a satellite phone and other than the actual cost of the person being out there it's, you know, it's not that much more. But with telly you've got to get a camera person out there and a sound, you know, someone with boom and all of that. And also, have you ever been frustrated where, you know, a big story just isn't suitable for telly for some reason because there isn't the pictures? Does that ever happen?

Yes, you always get stories that don't work so well for television and they're great newspaper stories, but sometimes they're so big that you do them anyway, and you have to be clever and creative about how you do that. In terms of the content, you know, things have really changed. When I started, as I said earlier, you know, you went out with five people, but now quite often there are journalists who are going out and shooting and filming and editing and reporting all themselves. So the costs in a way have come down, but there's more stories to tell, there's more news to tell, there's more outlets. So it's... yes, television is different from radio in that logistically it's harder to do. But again, that's part of the fun because I love a problem to solve and television has more logistical problems I suppose than perhaps others.

Tell us some of the highlights and lowlights. I mean, when we briefly mentioned it, but what are you most proud of in all the 22 years ITN, and also give us some of the blooper reel as well.

Well, it's not about a blooper reel! I'm not just been corporate about that, because I thought about this, you know, what are my highs and lows. Basically the story of ITV's coverage of the royal wedding was that when William and Kate announced their engagement I was a pretty lowly programme editor at the time, and I went to knock on my boss's door and I said, "I've got an idea. We need to do it differently from the BBC. How can we make it different on ITV? Let's marry – excuse the pun – our news presenting talent with a bit of a ITV showbiz." I said, you know, you could have all of our newscasters plus Phil and Holly, Ant and Dec, you know, blah, blah, blah, and he was like, "Okay, I'll take that to ITV." A couple of days later came back and said, "They like the idea and they're working on it." And a few days later he came back he went, "Yes, they're going to put Julie Etchingham and Phillip Schofield together. They think all the others is a bit too much but that's a good combination." I said, "Great, great, great." And then he said, "And they're thinking about somebody who could like, you know, you can be involved in the programme but they're trying to think of somebody who can work with you on it, you know, keep you in check." So I was like, "Okay..." slightly disappointed, went off, 24 hours later he came back and he went, "They thought long and hard and they've decided that actually there isn't anyone better than you to do it. It was your idea, go and do it."

Wow.

So I didn't do it on my own, obviously, there was a huge team of people that kind of did all the logistics and everything. But I remember the night before, moaning to one of my colleagues, "I bet the BBC producer of their programme isn't writing the links for every lead in," and she said to me, I remember it really well, she said, "Yes but our show is going to be like, one vision." And there were loads of people involved and I'm not going to take the credit for it at all – but I loved the fact, and why I think ITN is brilliant – I love the fact that I was able to have an idea, knock on my boss's door, somebody said, "Yes, do it," and we did it. And it was just brilliant. And all the things I wanted to achieve were the things that we were praised for. I wanted to give it, you know, I wanted my audience to feel that they were there. I wanted just to be on a level with them. I wanted to feel like a kind of joyous, relaxed, happy occasion, but also still love the solemnity of the fact it was a wedding in a cathedral. So that was definitely... I remember we got them into the church – it sounds like I carried them! – we filmed them getting into the church and we'd seen the dress and all that kind of stuff, and I remember the service was obviously a very straightforward, you know you know the running order the service, there's no decisions to make on that, there was a pool feed inside the Abbey...

She had a decision!

Yes, but I didn't have to do anything at that time, we just had to stay on the pictures. I was literally running around to all the staff in the gallery going, "Oh my God, it's so much fun! And we've got another four hours to go!" So that was great. It was a real sense of satisfaction, and I really... it was a huge team thing but it was my proudest moment of my career I think, in terms of conceiving things. Down days... I mean, they've got to be... you know, some bad things have happened. I've lost friends. You know, the day I heard that Terry Lloyd had died I was actually on maternity leave, my husband was out filming – my husband's a cameraman – and he was out filming out there with him. And when he rang me to tell me that, you know, Terry had gone, I actually went "Gone? Gone where?" He said, "Terry's gone." I said, "What do you mean, he's gone?" And I remember literally falling to my knees. And when that happens to a newsroom, and we're family at ITN, whether you work for Channel 4, ITV or Channel 5, we're all family, and that day when Terry died, and Fred, and Hussein, the interpreter, was with him... Terry was a really good friend of mine and there's been... sadly there has been too many of those. You know, when I was clearing out my offices the other day I've got a folder of all the memorial services. And it's become a more dangerous world, you know, too many of our colleagues, you know, I was talking to my husband about it the other day. Journalists are a target now that they never used to be. And yet accidents will always happen, you know, we go to dangerous places. But there are, you know, increasingly there are people who actually want to literally take a pop at journalists.

That's what I was about to say, kind of so-called Islamic State do actually want to stick the journalists in an orange jump suit and then execute them.

Yes. We've never heard anything like that. Never heard anything like that.

The traditional rules of war year seem to have been...

Yes. When you covered the Bosnian war or whatever, yes, you know, the front line was a bit fluid and you got to the checkpoint you know which side were going to be dealing with, but they weren't going to look at you and go, "That's a white woman, I'm going to put in a jumpsuit and cut here head off." And so I think it's become really, really dangerous. But we still have a real duty to tell the story.

So how do you reconcile that? Because if you're going to send someone out to the Middle East or wherever it's going to be to cover it, you're putting them in much more, even though they're willingly doing it, you must feel a sense of huge responsibility.

Yes, you do. You do.

Is there ever a tendency to think, even though the story needs to be told, "Actually, I'm going to play safe here."

You should always play safe. You know, we risk assess everything, so we are all very aware of the risks. You take all the measures you can do to mitigate those risks and then you have to decide whether taking those risks is worth it to tell the story. So that's why, you know, I mean... there's been some fantastic coverage from inside Syria, not by journalists going in there because we can't, but some really brave people inside Syria in places like Aleppo, kind of telling their stories and, you know, smuggling footage out and doing interviews on telly, and all that kind of stuff. So thank goodness to them, we've been able to kind of tell the world sort of what's going on. Journalism has always been about covering the bad stuff that goes on in the world as well as the good stuff. And yes, it is a risky business but it does seem to have become that, you know... losing somebody... when people get killed in any accidents of any sort it's really awful, but when you've got to – and that's a hard thing – when one of your colleagues has been killed you've got to carry on telling the news; you can't all just not make programmes the next day. It has been really, tough. Really tough.

How do you feel emotionally after 22 years at ITN and moving on? I mean, it must be bittersweet for you. You're kind of an institution here, aren't you? That's meant as a compliment!

There are people who've been here even longer than me, believe it not! And it will be bittersweet. I can't quite believe I've done it. I always said I wanted to leave in a box, didn't think it would be a Sky box!

A glass box.

Yes, but also, you know, jobs don't come up very often. Really senior jobs. And sometimes it's good to kind of have a look around and see what else there is to be done. And I've learned so much, I came here at 27 I'm leaving at 50 – all right, I might have got the maths wrong there – I've grown in that time and I've had a family, and my husband worked here, so everything's been grown in ITN, but it'll be bittersweet. Emotional, but you've got to move on and do things.

It's interesting that you moved to Sky as well, because you've had the agility of ITN here and that commercial, you know, smaller team, moving to something similar to Sky, but some of the people that we've spoken to in that chair have moved to the BBC where they found it, you know, a lot more kind of burdensome in terms of the bureaucracy and, you know, it can be quite a challenge really. Was that something that you wanted, to stay in the commercial sector?

Yes I mean I don't think I'd sort of consciously thought ever, "Oh, I won't go to BBC because they're not commercial," but there is something attractive about being able to work in an environment where the chain of decision is short and you can go, "Should we do this? Yes, let's do this," and just do it. And again, you know, going over to Sky as sort of joint number two, I'll be able to do that. And I think in a similar way – I mean, it's funny how many people there that used to work here, and John being one of them – I think that, you know, that that sort of fast turnaround, just do it at attitude is quite similar there as it has been here.

What kind of advice would you give to someone who was starting out on their career as a journalist now and wants to be the next to you, as it were?

Because in many ways – I've asked this question a few times of people sitting in that chair – is it more difficult if you're starting out in a kind of career in TV journalism, or is it easier? Because in one sense you can make a name for yourself more easily by doing your own blogs or podcasts or whatever, but in another sense there's much fewer jobs and opportunities available to everyone. It's a smaller pool to fish in.

Yes. I mean, the whole journalism industry has gone through a radical change in the sort of 25 years I've been working in it. You know, local newspapers have shut down, regional news rooms are smaller in staff sizes than they used to be, but equally there's more platforms than there ever were. You know, when I went into telly, there was news on Channel 4, there was news on ITV, and there was news on the BBC,

and then Channel 5 came along and there was news on that. But you know, 24-hour channels didn't exist. Look what there is now! There's Russia Today, there's Rise – oh, that's just folded, hasn't it – there's a Turkish... there's so many different outlets.

There's a lot of channels.

There's a lot of channels – and it's not just all on telly, there's the digital platforms. You can be writing news for Snapchat, you can be writing news for Facebook, you could be writing news for Twitter. You can be writing news yourself. You can set up a blog, you can become a, you know, a one-man phenomenon or a one-woman phenomenon. So I think in a way, the opportunities are broader and not so traditional. You still need the same skills as you always did. You know, you'll go far in news, full stop, if you are passionate about what you do, if you are inquisitive about what you do and if you are prepared to ask the right questions and never take no for an answer. And that was the same 25 years ago and it's the same now I think, so... as I said, my advice to people listening to this who are at college now, just keep knocking at doors, make a name for yourself, tell stories – you've got the platforms out there to do it, just make some noise about what you do.

Where would you gain or even lose, if you were to... I mean, for example, you know in the old days, if you read this 10, 15, 20 years ago, you might read the Daily Mail, you might read the Sun, and they would compete for the same kind of audience. But you might lose a viewer to BuzzFeed, they might give up on television news entirely. Or will you acquire a viewer from scratch, someone who doesn't watch TV news, so they're not necessarily watching the BBC, but you then turn them onto your show.

Are you talking about 5 News? I don't think the 5 News viewer is necessarily somebody who's going to be engaged with BuzzFeed because BuzzFeed is a much younger audience than I think we've got. Look, people are fascinated by what's going on in the world, and they will sample it how... you know, what fits into their lifestyle. So at five o'clock, a lot of people, a lot of our viewers, are coming in from work or they're getting the tea ready, or they have been looking after kids all day, or they've retired people, and they're kind of... we've got sort of our audience are divided; they are either people are sitting down with a cup of tea digesting it all – not the tea, but the programme – and are very avid viewers, or they are coming in and they're getting dinner ready and then they're nagging the kids to do their homework, and there's lots going on. So we work very hard to kind of reach out. We cover the kinds of stories that really engage them, we have a focus on UK domestic news but we tell foreign news when we need to, we commission lots of kind of investigative series on things like growing up in Britain, growing old in Britain. We did a lot stuff on the NHS last year because we know it's the kind of stuff the audience really cares about. We work really hard with production values to make things pop out of the screen, so that for the busy people who've got it on in the background, they'll go,

“Oh, that looks good, I’ll get drawn into that.” And also to make sure that we are, you know, we’re covering the stories that really matter to our audience and to the things that kind of affect them. So it’s, you know, it’s stuff you work hard at to kind of keep the viewers and bring them in.

So final question, then. What’s going to be the next big job after Sky? Is global domination the goal?

Oh, I don’t know!

Lying on a beach somewhere?

No, I’ve been really, really lucky. I look back on it all and I’ve, you know, things like this is when you look back, and I’m coming to the end of my time at ITN, and you look back at the things you’ve done. None of it’s ever been really planned. I’d like to say I’ve had this kind of plan since the age of eight, you know, that in 1994 I would join ITN and in, you know, 2010 I would edit News at 10, you know? But it’s not been planned like that at all. If you’d said to me six months ago I’d leave ITN and go and become director of content at Sky News I’d have gone. “Don’t be so silly.” So I don’t really have any idea where I’m going to be in 10 or 15 years’ time. I’m 50 next year, so that’s a bit of a milestone. I think the days of us retiring at 60 are long gone, so...

It’s game over!

It’s game over, isn’t it? Yes, with our children still living at home, exactly. So I don’t really know. I don’t know. I mean, I keep thinking to myself that maybe I won’t work in news but I still really love it.

Actually, that is an interesting question. What would you do if you weren’t in news?

I’d like to carry on working in telly. I think there is nothing... I just like making stuff. I just like leading a team with people to create great content. So whether its on the telly or on a digital platform, whether its news... I always had a passion to be editor of Blue Peter, but I suspect that’s probably passed me by now! So I don’t really know. I mean, again, one of the attractions of going to Sky is that it’s a massive company. I mean, who knows, I might be running Sky Arts or something, I don’t know. I genuinely don’t have a plan. I think I’ll start this job and then worry about the plan after a few years in this one.

Well, I think we should have you back on 10 years from now!

Find out what I did.

Christina, it's been a great pleasure to have you on the podcast. Thank you so much.

Thank you very much indeed.