

MND Matters: Episode 9: Dating after MND diagnosis

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Chris: Welcome to MND Matters, brought to you by the MND Association. Alongside, members of the MND community, we bring you stories, information and expertise direct to your ears. Remember to subscribe to ensure you don't miss an episode.

I'm Chris and I'm Director of External Affairs with the MND Association.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne and I work in the Communications team.

I'm delighted to introduce today's guest Mike Sumner. Mike is 36 and lives in Grimsby and, if you're a fan of the television show First Dates, you may be familiar with him. Mike appeared on series 17 of the show. A few months after Mike filmed his First Dates appearance, he was diagnosed with MND so, he's here to share more about his quest for love before and after his MND diagnosis. Welcome along today Mike.

Mike: Thank you. Pleased to be here.

Chris: Mike, some of the listeners probably know a little bit about you already if they've watched the show, but maybe for the benefit of anybody who hasn't seen the episode of First Dates, can you tell us a bit more about your life and perhaps relationships before you went on First Dates - and I guess the intriguing question is what made you apply?

Mike: Yeah, sure. I mean, basically, at the time I applied I'd been single for seven years and I'd had some relationships in the past, only sort of three and, you know, by my age that's not like a high number these days. And I'd just got to that stage where it had been so many years that I'd been single that I had kind of almost switched off that part of my brain and just kind of, you know, accepted that that would be the way going forward for the foreseeable. And I've always watched First Dates as a show and I noticed in the credits one episode that they'd started recruiting for people to go on it, and that would have been towards the end of 2019, so you know I just got my laptop out and just found a few photos to put in my application and filled in some amusing anecdotes and thought, well, you know, I've had a go and pressed submit and thought nothing else of it and I genuinely didn't think for one minute I'd actually get on the show.

Chris: And how did they let you know. I presume they just emailed you or did someone give you a call?

Mike: Well, it was weird because one of the things about me is I'm also diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome so dates and events and things actually stick in my mind quite vividly which can be annoying to some people but I find it helpful. So, it was about 3 days after my birthday in January 2020, I just got a phone call out of the blue. I remember the plumber had just been to service the boiler, but you know that's irrelevant, but I answered the phone and somebody obviously said straightaway 'oh, my name's so and so from First Dates' and immediately you're scrabbling around thinking I can't understand the significance of that and then I realised I'd obviously sent an application about 2 months earlier and realised they couldn't possibly know as much as they knew if it wasn't genuine. So, yeah, I just talked to them for about an hour in the end. They sort of went through all my questions about likes and dislikes and to build a picture up of me and, you know, they said if they were interested in me they'd arrange a screen test by Zoom which they did. At every stage it could have fizzled out if they hadn't wanted me on the show but at every stage I seemed to

either be making somebody laugh I suppose or being entertaining somehow and, I mean it was only early February when I was down in London filming the first part of the show so only a month after I got the initial phone call so it's quite a fast turnaround really.

Suzanne: What were your expectations Mike? Did you genuinely expect to find love on the show or was it a bit of 'it's something to do'?

Mike: No, it was the latter. I didn't expect to find love on the show at all 'cause I mean I'm nothing if not a realist and I realised that, having watched the show from the start, the percentage of people who, you know, go on to have successful relationships versus the ones that either don't get on or just become friends or whatever, you know. So, I expected that, and this is what I said to the researcher, that they asked me what my motive was for going on and I said purely because you only live once and I'd like to just have the experience of seeing a TV show from kind of like behind the curtain if you like and so that was always my motivation to do it and anything else would have just been sort of additional really.

Chris: I'm really intrigued actually because I mean first dates can be a difficult enough experience, I know that from my own experience, but how did you find that? You know, you've got a camera on you as well, do you notice the camera around you, while you're having the conversation or how does that work for you?

Mike: Initially, yeah. I mean when I walked in it was a bit of a weird experience to start with because obviously I'm walking towards Fred from the show, Fred Sirieix, and he already knew my name which, you know, I think they used that bit on the show where he sort of asked me 'oh, are you Mike?' and you sort of think somebody on the telly that I'm used to watching is now talking to me directly and it's a bit weird to start with and at that moment you do seem to see all the cameras they have around. You know, somebody from the production told me how many there were in there and I can't remember the figure now but it's several dozen and you notice it for a bit but, once they sit you down at the bar, eventually it fades. You get so distracted by the fact that it just looks like a normal restaurant that you almost sort of forget in a weird way and, you know, I started talking to Merlin and didn't think about it and then it was probably halfway through the date when my date went to the toilet and I just sat there and realised after about thirty seconds I was staring straight down the camera and that I hadn't even thought about it, then I realised and thought I'd better not do that or they won't be able to use it so quickly looked away and tried to style it out.

Suzanne: Brilliant. So, when Zoe walked in, how was that for you? What was your first impression?

Mike: I mean my first impression, it's difficult to say because like I'd sort of said to Merlin, the thing that gets me it's like a personality thing, you know, where you just click with somebody and it's much more of a deep connection than a kind of physical thing. And, so, when she sort of walked in I thought 'oh right. I wonder if we can have some fun and have a laugh' and that was my initial thing. I tend not, if I can help it, I try not to sort of form an opinion based on the first few seconds because a lot of the time it's wrong. I mean I did a Supercar driving experience the other week and I'm sure that if anybody had seen me walk towards the cars with a walking stick their initial impression would have been this man shouldn't be allowed anywhere near a car. But then, you know, it turns out I was one of the quickest ones driving round there, so, I try and think about that sort of thing and not allow, you know, initial sort of preconceptions to pollute the thinking. But, no, I just thought as long as we can have a laugh and have a good time and share some stories then it will be good.

Suzanne: And she did that very brilliant piece of television where she downed a pint in one on your date didn't she? That was brilliant. That was such a great moment and your reaction was superb. Was that just an off the cuff thing that happened?

Mike: Absolutely, yeah. I mean the whole thing is really. They film it over about 2 hours and then obviously decide to edit down what they want for the content but it's all completely impromptu because none of us are actors and I think if anybody gave me a script that would become absolutely apparent. But the thing they didn't show though was she did sort of introduce it a little bit. You know, they sort of made it out to look like she just kind of sat down and downed it immediately but in actual fact what happened was she said to me 'would you like to see a party trick?'. And I thought she was going to get like a handkerchief and fold it to look like a chicken or something like that, so I said 'yes please' and I didn't realise that the next thing then I'm looking at the bottom of her glass getting emptier and emptier and thinking 'wow, when she gets to the bottom of that I've got to say something really profound or it's going to fall flat' so I was sort of watching the thing go down like a sandtimer and trying to think what can I say when she puts this down on the table and that's why you got the reaction you got. Because, you know, I couldn't think of anything else that would convey how kind of unexpected and impressive that was.

Chris: I have to say your comic timing was excellent. It certainly got a laugh out of me. It was great stuff. I mean you seem to have a really good time. It did seem to be very relaxed, and you seemed to make a connection. How has that gone for you in terms of developing that relationship, you know, beyond the programme? How's that worked out?

Mike: Well, when we went to film the bit afterwards where, you know, you sit side by side and say whether you'd like to see each other again, that was obviously completely unrehearsed. Neither of us knew what the other person was going to say and I think there was a moment on there as well where she says that for a first ever date it couldn't have gone any better and there's a little smile just creeps across my face because that sort of, you know, I was quite touched by that to be honest. So, we knew at that stage we'd got on well enough that we'd stay in touch and, you know, we exchanged phone numbers in the corridor after we'd filmed that. So, you know, we sort of started texting and that was always the intention to stay in touch but, obviously, none of us knew what in March 2020 was going to happen. Only about 3 weeks after we'd filmed it, the world sort of stopped spinning effectively so it then took on a new importance and we sort of kept each other's spirits up through lockdowns and, you know, sort of had phone chats with each other and played little games on the texts and came up with little playlists and things just to sort of keep each other sane. And I think in a lot of ways that sort of brought us closer together though ironically we were miles apart with her being in Sheffield. I think, you know, she sort of helped me through it in a lot of ways and I'd like to think that I sort of helped to do the same for her.

Suzanne: And during that time Mike, you were obviously diagnosed with MND and I think that you had your first kind of symptom that you noticed when you were actually on your way to your First Date didn't you? Can you just tell us a bit about that?

Mike: Yeah, yeah. It's given the show a weird complexion that because, obviously to anybody else it's just an episode, but I'll always know that not long before, about an hour before we filmed me walking towards the restaurant doors, I'd noticed a strange feeling in my left leg. It wasn't anything pronounced, it wasn't visible, it wasn't like a limp or anything but I just knew. I didn't feel like I had the sort of precision if you like and the control that I had had, say, a day before and I just thought well maybe I've strained it, I don't know, I'll worry about it when I'm not filming a show for national television, as you do. So, yeah, it was walking down Deansgate in Manchester and I could take you to the exact spot now where I just noticed something was up and I stopped for a second and, you

know, I thought 'mmm, I don't know about this' but I carried on and I was very aware as I walked towards the entrance of the restaurant that I could feel it and so I tried to walk as nonchalantly as I could to hide it. Looking at the footage now, it's very weird for me because obviously I know what I was going through at that moment and nobody else does and it will always be a bit difficult to watch because, you know, knowing that that obviously didn't just go away overnight, it then led to something much more serious and that was the day like kind of zero if you like where the whole thing began and obviously it's progressed from there.

Suzanne: So that was obviously almost at the beginning of lockdown so what kind of happened next for you? At what point did you go to the doctor and kind of what happened from there?

Mike: I left it for a month or two because obviously the NHS was sort of screaming and in chaos and all that kind of thing and I didn't think that just a little limp was kind of worth fighting the crowds of Covid and all that kind of thing. And obviously we'd been told to stay at home any way so I was like 'well, that's fine. I'll just stay at home, I won't walk more than I have to. I'll get a bit of exercise but I'll take it easy'. And then it was probably around May time, so probably about 2 months later or something like that, I did go to the GP and they looked at it and diagnosed me with like a dropped foot and, yeah, I'd explained that MND was a concern of mine because my grandmother died of it in the early 1990's and, even though I was only 6 or 7, I can still remember what it did and what it was like so I was no stranger to what it could be. And I mentioned that to the GP and she said she couldn't rule it out but it could be other things as well. So, you know, I didn't really have my concerns kind of dealt with if you like, I still had that going on, and then it took a few more weeks and a couple of MRI scans and I was eventually referred to Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield and I went there and from there it was a fairly brisk process. They were all really great and, yeah, they diagnosed me on 11 November last year, so Armistice Day.

Chris: And how has the MND progressed since then Mike, you know, what impact has it had on you so far?

Mike: I mean since then I like to think of myself as being quite fortunate because I saw how my grandma deteriorated, I mean that might have been because of her age and obviously it affects everybody differently, but I remember her speech went quite early on, very early on, and then her mobility and a lot of things fell like dominoes in quite quick succession. Whereas, since I was diagnosed, what are we now, almost a year ago, it's really just the balance and the walking, you know. I've just become progressively more unsteady on my feet and, you know, whereas once I could walk a short distance and I limped a bit, I then had to get a stick and the stick then became slightly worrying as well because I could still fall over with that, so then I use kind of like a walker with wheels on it now for any longer distances so, in that respect, that's the deterioration. But, you know, I've not noticed any change in my sort of swallowing or my eating or my speech or anything like that. So, if it only ends up being the mobility for the foreseeable future then, in a weird sort of way, I think I'm quite fortunate because, you know, there are people out there so much worse off and if I can keep doing what I'm doing and getting by like this then that's probably not the worse thing ever.

Suzanne: When you were diagnosed Mike, obviously you and Zoe were friends so, you know, how did you kind of go about telling Zoe and the other people around you? How was that?

Mike: Well, I mean, stupidly, it sounds naive now but I went to the hospital on the day not thinking I was going to get a diagnosis. I'd had some tests done a few days before and I thought I was just going to get the results and it would be like an ongoing diagnostic process but I went on my own, all the way to Sheffield in a taxi which in hindsight was foolish. I didn't think of it, so, I was hit with that

and then I just remember sitting in the back of the taxi on the way back just with my phone, you know, messaging people and, yeah, my phone just basically lit up. I was sort of sending these messages to close friends and family and, yeah, they were all sort of so shocked. So, I basically spent the whole hour and twenty minute taxi journey not really able to put my phone down 'cause there were people asking questions, you know, 'are you okay?', 'what does this mean?', 'can I do anything?' that kind of thing. And it was a bit of a blizzard that I hadn't really thought of in advance, and then obviously there's the fact that I've still got to get my own head round it, let alone everybody else so I don't think I truly came to terms with it probably until the end of the year, you know, another month or so later.

But I made a particular effort to ring Zoe the following day. I mean, I'd messaged a lot of people on WhatsApp and things like that but, you know, because we'd become so close, I'd sort of thought, well, the absolute least I could do for her is tell her in person so she can try and digest it and ask me questions. It's not the sort of thing I thought I could do on a phone screen.

Suzanne: And what was her reaction?

Mike: She's quite a pragmatic person, you know. She doesn't let emotions get the better of her and she didn't again, you know, she gave quite a sort of stoic answer, but I could tell in her voice that she was slightly shaken by what I'd just told her and I mean, you know, it's understandable but she did say something unrepeatable which I won't say on here but it was similar to my reaction to her downing the pint, put it that way!

Chris: And, because at this point we were still, we weren't in full lockdown at that point I don't think, it's so difficult to remember now, it's been such a rollercoaster the last 18 months hasn't it, but have you managed to see much of Zoe? I mean, obviously you kept in contact with her, but have you managed to see much of her over the last year or so?

Mike: I have now, yeah, I mean from the first lockdown for the following 15 months we didn't see each other, so until June this year. Obviously, there were tears and there was this lockdown and that lockdown, you know, you were banished from this and that and it was so restrictive it just wouldn't have worked so I was really grateful for modern technology allowing us to be on the phone and, you know, WhatsApp and messages and pictures and things like that. So that kept us a bit sane but then from June, once things opened up initially, enough to go and do things, we didn't waste any time. So, she came over to Grimsby for a day out and I showed her around my home town and things like that and then I was over in Sheffield and, you know, went for dinner and just trying to basically cram in what we could have done over 6 months, there was a period in June/July where I think we were meeting up like every weekend or every other weekend, pretty much doing something different, so it became quite, you know, full on considering we hadn't seen each other for such a long time so it was then kind of like from the famine to the feast, you know.

Suzanne: So was that on a friendship basis Mike or was there something that was kind of growing, you know feelings were growing from there?

Mike: It was on a friendship basis in June when she came to Grimsby for a day trip but then we went to a comedy night at the start of July in Manchester that I'd got as like an online experience thing and it was for two and I invited her because obviously we were close and we were getting on well and it seemed like she had the same sense of humour as me so I invited her along and to this day I still don't know what did it but there was something about that weekend. I don't know why but something just hit me that, you know, I started to see her in a different way and I started to notice all the little sort of qualities that she had that I maybe hadn't before and it just started to really

affect me emotionally, spending time with her, and I realised that basically I was in trouble because it was apparent to me that I was falling quite hard and obviously I was concerned that she might not be interested or whatever and so that worried me at the back of my mind but from the start of July it was apparent that was what was happening from my side.

Suzanne: So, do you mind us asking how that kind of revealed itself in the end?

Mike: Yeah, basically, it just got stronger and stronger and, you know, I went up to Yorkshire to visit her aunt and uncle and grandma 'cause I know it sounds weird in hindsight for people who were just friends but genuinely they just wanted to meet me. They'd obviously heard about me on the telly show and that kind of thing so I went to meet them and we had a really nice weekend together, it was fun and that just made it build even more because it felt so right and everything felt so sort of fitting and everything. And then I was round at her flat on September 11th and I just came out with it and explained everything to her thinking that basically even getting rebuffed would be better than having to just constantly drive round with a head full of feelings that I couldn't do anything with and, yeah, to my surprise, she told me that she'd felt the same way for some time.

Chris: Ahh, that's really nice isn't it?

Suzanne: Fantastic. What a relief as well I guess?

Mike: Yeah, I did say that to her. It was an enormous relief but I was genuinely thinking I was just going to put my feelings out there and be shot down and I have been in the past so, you know, I was sort of expecting it. I thought it was how it would go but I was just absolutely staggered when she sort of said to me, well, you know, I've been thinking that we should probably have a relationship as well because all the things I was saying to her she said it kind of felt the same to her.

Suzanne: And did the MND kind of come into that conversation because obviously she'd been with you on the journey as it were so, you know, it's there, you can't ignore it. How did that kind of manifest itself within that conversation?

Mike: Well, she said that's part of the reason why she hadn't said anything sooner because, I mean it turns out now having spoken about it with her more in depth that I thought I was hiding it at the comedy night in Manchester but apparently she noticed something had changed to me that weekend and realised I'd got something else going on that I was trying to deal with and obviously knew that was a possibility. And she said that the reason it took from sort of July then to September before she'd admit it to me was because she was weighing up the whole pros and cons and working it out and figuring out whether she could handle it basically I suppose and whether it was probably worth it. I don't know but, you know, I like to think it's a credit to the sort of chemistry that we've got and the way that we get on that obviously we are where we are because, you know, if there was any doubt in her mind I'm sure she wouldn't have revealed what she was feeling to me.

Chris: And are you still in different parts of the country now? Are you sort of meeting up as often as you can?

Mike: Yeah, yeah, we are the moment. I still live just outside Grimsby and she's still in Sheffield. However, I mean I'm going across tomorrow and I'm going across for about a week so I sort of stay, you know, at her flat for several days at a time now. It became like a one day thing, then it became like two days then three days, you know, ultimately it keeps stretching because you're thinking 'well, I don't want to go home yet' so, you know, there's that. I'm going across tomorrow but we have started looking at flats and property in Sheffield so we can move in together, you know, and that's

become a bit of a trial because it's harder than you might imagine but we're doing what we can because we both realise that we just, as clichéd as it is, we want to spend as much time together as possible so being in Waltham, outside Grimsby, doesn't seem like the solution, and I can't ask her to move because she's got brothers and sisters and, you know, a job in Sheffield so the obvious thing is that I up sticks and move to Sheffield which I'm more than happy to do for her.

Chris: Yeah, it's brilliant, fantastic. I was going to ask you, talking about the impact of MND, now I know that you were, I think you'd done an advanced driving test and you were going through the process of becoming a driving instructor, and I'm guessing that's changed now and I just wondered how, you know, obviously that as an ambition and how that's impacted on you.

Mike: Yeah, I put that on ice once I was diagnosed because I realised that, as much as I'm still able to drive perfectly fine at the moment and, you know, I hope that continues for the foreseeable, I couldn't like rationalise it in my mind that I could teach other people to drive when, you know, in my own self, I knew that I would sort of be heading downhill at some point and, not only that, there's the realisation that you know time has taken on a new significance and it's more precious to me now so, do I want to sit in a car for 2 hours teaching a 17 year old to reverse park? Not really. So, I'd much rather be, you know, in a nice restaurant with Zoe having a nice time so, the weekend just gone we were away in Lincoln and we had a great time. It was fabulous and I'd much rather be doing weekends away and trips like that. A few weeks before that we were in the Cotswolds. As I like to say, I'm basically cramming about 10 years into about 2 is how it feels but I've just had to kind of reassess my goals now. I don't really have any work-related goals now because of the situation. It wouldn't be safe for me to work anywhere as I can fall over at any moment, you know, I don't even have to trip over, my balance can just switch off and I can go.

And, so, I've really just made it about doing things like this and trying to just, where I get the opportunity, trying to do any good that I can. I'm involved in several sort of clinical trials with the hospital. I'm doing a drug trial and, you know, anything that I can do where I can maybe make something positive out of it then that's the sort of angle I've taken of it now.

Chris: That's really interesting actually that you've been able to compartmentalise, I managed to say it, what you were going to do as a career but actually you've now, since your diagnosis, you've switched your emphasis onto other things, giving yourself a full a life as possible I guess is the way to do that, and, as you say, you're contributing back into society but you are also fulfilling that relationship with Zoe. You know, it's really interesting I think.

Mike: It's one of those things where I think where if somebody asked me a couple of years ago could I do that or how would I do that, I wouldn't have had a clue but I think, once you're in a situation, and I say this all the time to people in the medical profession, so I mean doctors who I see quite a lot as you can imagine, that a lot of the way I am I think is down to stubbornness. I've never liked the idea of being beaten by something and I've never liked the idea of giving in ever so, ultimately, it comes down to that. It's a case of do I roll over and just accept a kind of, a sort of, substandard way of life and just give in, or do I keep fighting it and fighting it until it becomes obvious I can't do something. And that's the way I've chosen to go which is why I'm still driving around, I'm still walking about, I just have to do it in a different way but, ultimately, I don't feel as though I've sacrificed any quality of life so far and that seems like a way for me to kind of balance it. Because obviously there are some dark days and it is difficult sometimes but I think, in no small part, Zoe has got me through some really difficult stuff. I mean whether she knows it or not she has and, yeah, that does bring a lot of light into the darkness.

Chris: Yeah. And it's great that Zoe has managed to support you through that process actually. That you made that connection and have been able to do that. How are you finding that wider support network that you've got? Do you find you get the support you need from that wider network as well?

Mike: Oh yeah, I mean I've been blown away right from when I was diagnosed, sort of family and friends, you know, people have all been sort of been really great. There's people where I wouldn't have expected to hear from them and I've heard from them. You know, when I'm out with friends now, they're all aware that there's this extra risk that I could fall over and they're all on it immediately, you know, and the NHS people have all been sort of fabulous and it's been really, really humbling to be treated so well. And I mean, for example, a couple of weekends ago I went to see 'Back to the Future, the Musical' at the Adelphi in London which, you know, I was meant to see 18 months earlier but something happened, I don't know if you know, but I went to see that and genuinely I was terrified about the idea of going to the theatre because it was an old theatre. I knew it would be really steep steps and all that kind of thing and the staff there couldn't have been nicer. They were absolutely superb, you know, they carried my walking frame up for me and they were helping me and holding on to me and they kept popping up at half time to check if I was okay and they genuinely couldn't have been nicer and it sort of opened a door in a way that I didn't realise how accommodating and lovely people could be until I was in this situation and now some of the every day kindness that I encounter is just absolutely, you know, truly humbling.

Suzanne: Do you get people looking at you and saying 'were you the guy on First Dates?' Have you been recognised from that?

Mike: Yeah, it's only happened a couple of times and weirdly it was on the same like trip. Basically, a weekend or so ago, Zoe was staying here and we went to Brigg Garden Centre and we were just walking around and there was a guy just moved out of my way so I could get my walking frame past and he sort of moved but then kept staring at me and he sort of looked at me and said 'I've seen you on telly the other day haven't I?' and obviously I knew what it was about and sort of stopped and, you know, spoke to him. He was very lovely, very polite and really interested and it was only a second or so after he started talking to me that he realised Zoe was behind me so he kind of got both of us at the same time and so we talked to him and then went our separate ways and we'd only just got around the corner about another 10 yards and this other guy got his phone out of his pocket and started looking at me and smiling and then said pretty much the same thing, you know. He said 'I've just seen you on telly the other day' and we had the same sort of conversation and then he said 'oh, you know, my wife's a big fan. Can I take a selfie so I can show her when I get home because she won't believe who I've met' and I thought to myself, well, I'm not Tom Cruise, you know, it's not that impressive. I'm just some guy from Grimsby that happened to get on the telly, it's not like a filmstar but so obviously I did the selfie so he leaned in and Zoe got a selfie of both of us so, hopefully, you know, that amused his wife. But that was it. That's the only two occasions it's happened. I've been in and out of McDonalds and I've been to like the Wetherspoons occasionally and literally nobody cares!

Suzanne: What was it like for you? So, you mentioned when you watched yourself on television it was a bit double-edged because it was the day that you had your first symptoms, so how was it for you and Zoe perhaps watching that together when it went out, you know, because obviously it went out 18 months after it was filmed didn't it, so it was quite a long time.

Mike: Yeah, that was weird because it was a weird thing that I think we both said it was probably fate because with the show normally being on a Monday night, me and Zoe are never together on a Monday night at the moment, I mean obviously if we live together we will be, but at the moment I

tend to go from like a Wednesday for the weekend or Friday to Sunday or whatever so we'd always assumed we'd watch it separately which would have been a shame but then a chance message from an old work colleague when I was sitting in Zoe's flat on Thursday evening the week before it came out said that my episode was on the All 4 Catch Up Player right now and neither of us had any idea so because of that, you know, random message we were then able to get onto it while I was sitting in her flat and we watched it both sitting there together and exactly how really it should have always been, you know, where the two people who are concerned and who were there at the start could see the end result and, yeah, she wasn't too impressed about how it looked like she was a lush. You know, she didn't like how quick she was doing that pint without the introduction of it being a party trick. But, yeah, I obviously found the walking towards the restaurant door a little bit weird. It gave me an odd feeling because I knew how it had felt at the time and now to see it 18 months later having seen none of the footage before then was a bit hard but I was pleased with the way we came across.

Once it actually aired properly on the Monday, we've both been inundated by a lot of lovely comments from friends and family and people who'd seen it, you know. They thought our chemistry was great and that we got along well and I've not had one sort of negative thing and I know she hasn't either so I can't ever say I'm not glad I did it because obviously it gave me Zoe so I'll always be grateful that I pressed submit that day on the laptop.

Suzanne: And you have MND and obviously it's affecting you physically. How has that affected your relationship and the intimacy of your relationship with Zoe?

Mike: I mean we had conversations about it before we sort of got into anything like that to sort of understand each other. As I've already said, I'm quite stubborn so I was never of the opinion that anything should be avoided just on principle, and so we've now sort of, you know, worked through that and we've found a way basically is the best answer because there's more than one way to go about something. And, you know, I mean we've had some sort of fun trying things out where you sort of go, right, that doesn't work or this does work or whatever and I'm obviously not probably as strong or as able or as agile as I would have been, say, five years ago but at the same time I'm still here. So, my attitude is there's no point in just crying about it and being sort of miserable for the things I can't do, I prefer to sort of rejoice the things I can do which, you know, there's still plenty of. So, I genuinely am sort of really thankful for the way our relationship has turned out because, you know, we get on so naturally, we've got such a natural understanding of each other, the chemistry's great, we have all these sort of smutty jokes with each other which is sort of brilliant. Yeah, I'll tell you something I said to her on the day when I sort of explained my feelings to her on 11th September is that I said to her 'really, I've never met anybody who's more perfect for me than her' and that is still the case now.

Suzanne: That's absolutely lovely Mike and what a perfect way to end I think. Thank you so much for your time. It's been an absolute delight to speak to you and many congratulations from all of us to you and to Zoe and long may you continue to have lots of fun and enjoy each other's company and thank you so much for coming.

Chris: Yeah, thank you Mike and thank you for talking to us and, yeah, really best wishes for the future for you and Zoe. It sounds like you've got a really fantastic relationship there and it's so nice, having watched the programme, knowing that the relationship has blossomed makes it even better actually so thank you so much for that.

Mike: Thank you, nobody was more surprised by it than us I can assure you.

Outro: You've been listening to MND Matters, a podcast from the MND Association. Find more information at [MNDAssociation.org](https://mndassociation.org) and if you've been affected by any of the issues raised in this episode contact our helpline MND Connect on 0808 802 6262 or email mndconnect@mndassociation.org