

Julia Dalby Transcript

I am Jennifer d'Alton and on the 31st of October 2023 was lucky enough to interview Julia Dalby at Cameron Balloons. So Julia, thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me for a few minutes. As you know, the museum is putting everything online including audio.

Yes,

The history, is people behind the scenes in ballooning not just people who fly them.

Yes.

You've been at Camerons for 33 years. But how on earth did you get into it?

So, I came in cold if you like Jenni, because I was working in Bath. I studied languages, and I worked overseas in Europe, in the travel industry for a few years

I came back and got a job in Bath, and I was working for a company that made office furniture. It was it was okay as a job, it paid the rent, so to speak, but it wasn't very exciting.

So I was looking for something else and found an advert in the Bristol Evening Post about the job of sales coordinator here at Cameron Balloons, and the person to contact with our dear old friend Phil Dunnington.

So I sent him my application and CV, and had an interview, came and saw the place, and yeah, was lucky enough to get shortlisted and finally offered the job. I do remember that for research, because although we - I'd grown up near Bristol and seen the Bristol Belle flying, you know, during my childhood, I didn't know anything about balloons.

So I went to the Bristol Central Library and got out Don Cameron's Ballooning Handbook before my interview, to give me a little bit of background. Yes.

And then all since I've learned about balloons I've learned from all my colleagues here over the years. So with Tom Sage and Nick , Phil, and so many other people who've been lovely to work with Jim Howard, Lindsey Sadler, and so the list goes on.

So you've really seen it grow from not a very big balloon manufacturer, to really the world leader.

Yes. So they were already experiencing a very busy time when I joined, there were lots of orders, were lots of people.

The top floor, which used to be the artwork floor, there was lots of young people working there, many people working, students in their holidays, and so

on. Because of course, we didn't have all the machines that we have now that make it so much easier and less labour intensive.

So there were a lots of people and a lot of orders. But yes, it was certainly around the boom time of all the Flying Pictures days.

So when did you get a flight? I assume you've had lots of flights?

Yes. So my first flight was that October. So I started in July that following October. And I flew with Giles Lantos, he was the pilot.

He was working here in the engineering department at the time. Hayley Strawbridge came, she was our receptionist who many, many people will remember and, and also Hayley's sister and her friend.

And it was a very memorable flight because we crossed from Ashton Court over the Severn and we landed in Wales. So it was yes, it's astonishing, you know, and, of course, an amazing experience.

And then I had, I think, my next flight in Le Puys later that year, because we got a last-minute chance to go down there. Because I think Don was supposed to go but wasn't well, when we went down to the lovely Le Puys Balloon Meet.

And speaking French was a great help.

Yes, yes. We met some lovely people. They're one of the people which later became one of our dealers in France, and yes, I've always had like a real affinity with France and love the French balloon meets and other French customers.

So, back here again, you ran the reception desk for many years, although you were not actually a receptionist, you were there, and people must have asked you lots of weird questions. What was the weirdest request you had?

Oh, gosh. That's a hard one. Yes. So I think probably some of the things that that people come up with, you know, the usual questions about ballooning. If we go on a balloon flight, well, we will we come back to where we started off and so on. But, yes, I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I'm sorry, Jenny on that one.

Oh, don't worry. I mean, you must have met so many people.

Yes. Lots of curious people.

And children too.

Yes. Lots, lots, lots of people. So people from all around the world used to come at that time. And, yes people, we used to have those open days. During the Fiesta, people used to come with their balloon teams. We, still have we had then this worldwide network of dealers, which is one of has been one of my main responsibilities, looking after the dealers and some of their accounts over the years.

And it's just so special, because everyone who's involved in ballooning. Or most people anyway, do it because they love it and the opportunity to meet these people who do something they love, and also to, to travel to their countries and fly with them and see their country from that special perspective is a unique and I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to do that. Thanks to my job here.

And how did you meet your ballooning husband?

So we met when we were working, when I was working here and he was flying commercially and he was ordering some balloons at the time and he had the Bertie Bassett balloon. And that's when we got to know each other .

Now, he's now very strong and very important in the ballooning world, and has two ballooning stables to look after Cameron's and ..

Yes, so it's obviously I support him and his business. So he flies commercially still. He's got his Taittinger client who is his main contract now. And you know, he does other exciting things sometimes like the Red Bull thing, which you'll have seen about last year. And so yeah, we go crewing the rest of the family help out as well.

Hannah, Pete's eldest daughter, she's a balloon pilot herself. We've got a little family balloon. So we go out and Pete and Hannah fly together which is, which is lovely. And it's always been a good thing, which has brought us together as a family to go ballooning.

Peter and yourself are involved in the Fiesta quite heavily aren't you?

Well, Peter is. Yes, yeah, he is on the committee, one of the directors of the Fiesta. So that's a voluntary role like many of the people who are involved with the Fiesta and he's been doing that for the last few years. And as you know, it's ever more difficult to put on big events like this. But yeah. Well, I'm in the background. Now I'm in the background. Yeah.

Can you imagine what would have happened if you hadn't seen an advert in the evening Post?

I don't know. I don't think I'd be here now.

You have a magic magic position here. Working with incredible people who value you so much. I've heard nothing but wonderful things about you. And I think that you're part of ballooning history over the last half a century. You're very important.

Very kind. Well, I always try and do my best for all the customers. And, you know, I've got lovely colleagues, again, a lot of whom have worked here for a long time. And yeah, it's a real team effort here.

It's wonderful. I can't thank you enough Julia. And I hope everyone listening to this tape will realize what a very special person you are.

Bless you. Thank you so much Jenny.