

## Michael Kendrick Transcript

*Mike Kendrick. My name is Jennifer d'Alton. I'm a director of the British Balloon Museum and Library and I'm so pleased to be talking with you.*

*I'd like to know a bit more about your ballooning life and how you became an Aviation Living Legend? How you went from one armed bandits in a prefab, to one legged pilots in the Valley of the Kings. Vintage airways in America. I mean, there are so many things. Mike, your first balloon was when?*

I think it was 1970 69-70. Yeah. Because I checked out in 1972. So that would be it.

*And who checked you out?*

It was Wing Commander Turnbull, a wonderful proper job. Yeah. Well, it was a Western, a Western balloon actually, which he actually made. So with the banana rip, I mean, yes. Pretty unsafe nowadays, but under single burner, of course, and no flexi rigids or parachute rips. So it really was a different aircraft to what it is nowadays, I must admit,

*And you remember your first flight?*

I do because when I saw this balloon on the motorway, I was on the way to see a client called Belstaff. They made motorcycle clothing. And they said, "Would I come up with an idea to get them some exposure to on the Isle of Man during TT week",

So because I've just seen it. I said, 'Why don't you put your name on one of these balloon things?' And they said, 'Is it possible?' I said, 'I'm sure it is. So I'll find out'.

And I contacted Giles Hall and John Gore. So yeah, and I went in my suit for a balloon ride.

I was scared of heights anyway, you know, seems quite difficult, but I remember landing in a field which, when the basket tipped up, it was it was awash this field was with liquid manure. And as, as the balloon went on its side, my arm went out and the manure went straight up my suit arm and absolutely drenched me.

So it was an exciting flight, but I couldn't get over how it works, the simple mathematic of it. So right from then I knew there must be a way of making money out of advertising and with balloons, because everybody, when I saw this balloon Thursday's Child on the motorway, all the cars had stopped to look at it on the motorway. So they certainly caused a bit of a sensation. So that's what got me into it.

*Did you actually do the TT races with John Gore and Giles Hall?*

Yeah, yeah, we did we put a banner on it on the balloon and went up to the Isle of Man for a week. And everybody's very pleased. It was really good.

*What was your next big adventure into advertising?*

Well, what it what it was I didn't actually realize that advertising on balloons was actually illegal.

At that time, a board of trade regulation which was kind of a shock because I bought Thursdays Child balloon from the Jasper group and and then went to Dudley Zoo to get sponsorship.

I did a lot of sort of local Telly for Dudley Zoo and I was a PR man running some quite large accounts for the American Embassy and Swedish steel, boring stuff. But one of my great loves was wildlife and, and so I did a lot for Dudley Zoo.

And then I was told but it was actually illegal to put advertising on a balloon. So I said to the Board of Trade, well, if British Airways, or anybody put the name on them. And they said, they quoted me some point of law that said, only the charter by demise, which I didn't really know what I meant. So it became pretty clear that only the owner could put their name on, but you weren't allowed to run a advertising slogan. So I put just Dudley Zoo on.

And it gave me lots of opportunities, you know, for local telly and news and that we used to get the elephant in the Castle Keep and get him holding it down.

There was a program at the time, on television on Saturday morning called Tiswaz. I did a lot with them. And so we use the animals, the animals and the balloons. An old Indian elephant used to hold the balloon down for us and that kind of stuff. It created quite a furore. But then I I started getting more people interested.

But the problem was they couldn't put their advertising slogan on. So I came up with a way of fixing that.

I formed a company called, *'That's The Wonder of Woolworths Limited'*. And I put that on the balloon, and then *'Nivea, Out of the Blue Limited'*, I put that on the balloon And the Board of Trade by this time, we're talking and threatening to sue me and everything like that.

And I had then I got a large contract with the Milk Marketing Board. And their logo was *'Milk's Gotta Lot of Bottle'*. And I actually formed a company called *'Milk's Gotta Lot of Bottle Limited'*. And so we were okay with that. So in the end, I got a client called Everest Double Glazing and I they wanted a slogan on the balloon too. So I formed a company called *"Everest Double Glazing limited. Ring 021456789 For a Free Brochure, No Representative Will Call limited"*.

In the end the Board of Trade said *'we give up'*. And that's that's what really started to commercial businesses, you know, so it was, it was good from that point of view. And because I've got an advertising background, I realized it was not enough just to put your name on the balloon, you had to do sort of crazy things to get noticed. And you'd have to work from a spend point of view.

So if a client had got a million pounds in his budget, and he was spending it on TV and getting X amount of views, we had to better that if you like, to give you value for money .

Well, I had first of all, theatre, and then one armed bandits and that kind of entertainment industry., And then formally as a PR man I, I used all of the mechanisms known to the advertising business to measure the rate of audience impacts.

And that became the significant development for me, because if I could show that we could get audience impacts at less than they were spending now, whether it was television or advertising, then it was going to be worth their while. And that's how we built such a large fleet of balloons around the world.

And we also did quite a lot of research and we found that a balloon was very memorable because people want, it was on people's bucket lists to fly. And don't forget there weren't many around there. So we did some research and we found that people remembered what they saw on flying objects. And we got an audience impact ratio. We were we were making impacts for 20p or 30p per £1000 pounds spent and rather than £20 or £30 off or with the printed press, and it went down to about £4 with a big per 1000 Audience impacts with a big TV spend. We were getting it in the end we were getting it down to 2p or 3p per 1000 audience and so the professional advertising and marketing business couldn't ignore us and they didn't. And we did a lot of great things we're proud to say.

*You did some very peculiar things. I read somewhere that you were for Milk' Gotta Lot of Bottle , you were drinking milk in a submersible underwater?*

Yes, we were, yes that you anything. i prostituted myself for publicity. And we actually did take a bottle of milk on the dive, because we did some training over a lake and there was an aeroplane at the bottom of the lake and we took we took a bottle of milk, took off our masks and drank it, made a good picture.

*When did you start working with Per Lindstrand?*

Oh, right from the moment Per announced himself as a balloon manufacturer, we became an agent for him. And it was quite revolutionary actually one has to say that he made a very significant impression. And continued to do so for many years on the balloon market, because all of a sudden, this manufacturer of this Swedish fella was offering balloons that had a parachute rip, two burners, not one, flexibility poles to hold the burner up, and rotation vents. All as standard equipment. You didn't have to buy things extra that you know and he had the very latest in, in the nylon fabric technology.

So this was the way to go. So we bought two balloons from him immediately ,ones for Bluebird Toffee and one for Staffordshire Building Society. And we supported him

along with all manufacturers ,we, we bought from all the manufacturers. But I think that was a significant step for Per.

And then of course, he moved to Oswestry which was quite close to me in Shropshire. So yes, we became friends. And we tried to break the world altitude record but failed.

But it was, you know, a bit of Derring Do new technology, funding from a sponsor that wanted the publicity, that kind of stuff. So, you know, worked rather well. And we became a large 'ish' company in the UK.

You had you had to train with Per, when you were going for the altitude. Were there any tales? Where did you actually train for your altitudes attempt?

We did quite a lot. We were going to be the first people to go in a capsule under a balloon. So a pressurized capsule. So we had to learn the ins and outs of that, of course, Per was an engineer so he built the capsule, but we really didn't know what we were doing. So we enlisted the help of NASA, actually, who took us under their wing and said, Look, we want to help you guys.

And so they did, you know, we flew up to, Per and I, I remember being 42,000 feet in an open basket with these pressure suits on and as I said I'm scared of heights. So it was a bit difficult for me but we could, we were standing in the in the basket, but we could talk through a radio.

I remember and all this was being tracked by a very large cameras from the BBC on the ground. And I remember at one point, things falling off the envelope, pretty scared the bejesus out of me. And I could see that Per was nervous looking around. So I got on the radio said Per what's happening, I thought the coating was coming off the envelope and he started talking to me in Swedish.

I learned then, when, when Per is under stress he reverts, he doesn't realise he is doing this, he reverts to Swedish. And so I prodded him a couple of times, I said, 'press the radio button'. I said, Per you're speaking Swedish to me, anyway, "*ardy ardy doody ardt do*". And that that that point, I, one of these flaky things dropped on my glove and I rubbed it, and it melted. And I realized it was ice.

So there's obviously not a word in Swedish language for what it was because he went, he saw that happening anyway, "*ardy doody ardt do?*" And so we were actually just making a vapor trail because he was going too high. It was very funny moment. But it was a scary one as well.

*How high did you get? Can you remember? Oh, do I want high? How high?*

It was a training flight. So we were at 42,000 feet. And we never attained the world altitude record, that we failed to do that. In the end, the client, we just spent all the

money they gave us and we never really actually got to make the flight. We tried, we went to America to take off.

But Per and I were sitting in the motorhome taking in oxygen preparing the flight and it decided to take off without us and broke the flying wires and took off so that was that.

So the whole program really was fraught with mistakes, honest mistakes, and we never managed to achieve it. But the client was pleased he got masses of publicity. You know, we really did. We did a daily bulletin for News at Ten for several weeks, and it was a big thing. But unfortunately, we failed. And we were criticised for it. But you know if you decide to put your head above the parapet, you know so publicly, someone's going to shoot at it. And so it didn't surprise me. And it didn't stop me doing anything.

*Or nothing's really stopped you doing things but you did. The Mineseeker foundation is quite different. There. How did that start? And how did you get sponsors? Or were they sponsors? Nelson Mandela, Richard Branson, and Queen of Jordan?*

Well, yes, what happened there is we parked the balloons into went into airships because airships were navigable. And there were only two airships flying at that particular time. But in five years, we owned 19 airships. So we grew the market rapidly from two to 21 airships in the world, 19 of which belong to us. And that's because we again, use the strengths, the advertising, and what it really what it really meant.

I mean, if you go to as we did somebody like Budweiser and said, Look, I want you to take 10 million pounds off your TV spend and give it to me for a blimp. They, you know, then they're not gonna do that. So we said they were sponsoring football, a lot of American football. And I said to them, well, it must cost you 20 million to sponsor that event. And they said yep, and I said, Well, I think I could get you more publicity for 2 million and they said how.

This is how we did it. We knew that flying over events caught the eye of people, and everybody wanted to fly in a balloon or airship. But it's not persuasive. It's just a branding thing. It's not telling you to go and you know, put a softener and how to do it in your washing up or anything like that. So it's more about branding. So you had to have direct reference with the public. So for the first time, we actually put cameras onboard the ship. And we actually went into business with one of our rivals Flying Pictures, Colin Prescott? Yeah. And they supplied the cameras.

And we would sit above the ground and get and try and persuade the TV cameras to look at it, look up at it. But I'm really hit and miss. And we used to carry banners on the underneath of the balloon that said, "*ABC camera men are the sexiest in the world*", things like that. So they'd look up.

Again, that was a bit hit and miss. So what we did is arranged for people on the golf tournaments, and on the Budweiser and all the big campaigns. We did a deal with the local networks that we would offer them the footage from airships free, totally free for replays and that kind of stuff. But they had to go up to the balloon or airship twice an hour for 15 seconds and say, "well, thank you, Sandy". "Oh, thank you, Budweiser for these amazing images. Budweiser is the king of beers, and this is their ship" and all that kinds of stuff.

And we drove down the cost of their Budweiser advertising dramatically, absolutely dramatically. And it gave me the idea that every campaign that we should do, we should ask the client to do an independent test, to appoint an independent research company to see how effective we were versus the other media spends. And they all did it. And we all came, we came out better than anybody else by a magnificent factor.

I mean, on the Orange Airship example, I think the research company called was called Millward Brown. And they said that preferred 4% of the entire budget was which was many, many millions our airship got 45% of the awareness for 4% of the spend much bigger, much bigger than the television or anything else that Orange had done. And it's so it was it's not really just about flying balloons and airships. It's about the marketing techniques that you use and understanding the media platform on how to drive people to the product.

So when Kraft came and said, Well, we've got a very boring cheese product. I'd like to try and see if you can do something with us. And so I put on the side of the Kraft blimp balloon, 'ring us and win a flight in this blimp'. And we had a call centre set up but it was overflowing we couldn't handle the calls.

So we had to close it down immediately. And two weeks later reopened it with the proper thing. So of course when the people phoned up they were told 'well to win a flight all you got to do is going to the Kraft store, a particular Kraft store. You don't have to buy any cheese, nothing like that.

We just got them to enter a competition and that's how we were and it drove sales up. Unbelievably even though they weren't compelled to buy any food or any cheese. So, so great was the desire to fly in a blimp.

We did the same thing in Australia, with the company, a Chocolate Box Company. And we took Cadbury's off the number one's brand slot in 180 days, and that was the only form of publicity.

Of course, we did back it up by doing really silly things like creating UFO stories and they would turn up and say, No, it was only us and things like that. And anything that made you story carrying celebrity celebrities. We did it.

Our teams on the ground were briefed before they entered a town to phone up the local press and said, and say, we've just seen the blimp over the Whats-it building in Philadelphia or wherever it was. And so we drove the calls for UFO encounters. And that really worked. And the whole thing was an astounding success. I have to say, Jen, I'm very, very proud of that, we changed the way people looked at flying objects, if you like.

*Yeah. It's very, very different. So what got you from balloons to airships or blimps? Could airships carry anybody? Or are they only pilot only?*

Well, that's a very good question. And it was a question of being certified to carry carry passengers.

Now, because we were Virgin, we couldn't break any rules at all. And we entered the passenger carrying business very late.

Because it was technically illegal to carry passengers for hire and reward. So we had to get that law changed and which we did before we got into the passenger carrying business but mostly mainly it was advertising although we did of course start passenger carrying in balloons over the Valley of the Kings, which was tremendous, tremendous product.

And we did a blimp flights over the, in various parts of the world. In Las Vegas over the strip at night. That kind of thing. Very, very nice. And we took we took airships to 38 countries, I think it was and balloons.

Yeah. So where they'd never been before. So every time we went there, we had to certify them or get them registered. And it was a lot of bureaucracy. But if we saw a rule we had, we always vowed to not break it and find our way around it.

*How did you meet Branson to get into Virgin and to run the Virgin ones?*

Well, that was strange thing because Virgin had balloons. When we're not I was running. Me, by my age, my balloon company was called Lighter than Air limited. And my competitors, of course, was Fying Pictures.

And they were ballooning for Richard. So their marketing manager contacted me one day, and said he wanted to go into business with me. And Hugh Band his name was and so he left. He left Virgin to do this. And we started flying for other other airlines.

And then one day I just got a call from Richard saying, I'm going to you know, what can you do for me? I'm going to fly around the world. That's my ultimate ambition. He said have you got any advice?

The first bit of advice is guys don't do it. It's too dangerous. And it's very expensive. But he said 'well, I'm gonna do anyway.'

So it was it was really coming together with Richard, Richard and I, and Hugh Band. Of course because we were in the balloon business then, we got to fly all the Virgin balloons. And our first big client, really, big client was Lloyds Bank, who was 15 years with us. And the way I got that piece of business is because Virgin were Lloyds Bank as well.

The Virgin bank has been threatening to close the Virgin account. And with the, because, you know, I wanted to bank on a list of clients. And so I said, it's gonna look rather stupid if you're the banks, and you're the Virgin bank

And, you know, we're flying for National Westminster or something. So it was, we had a trip, it was a lot of fun, very boring, large bank, people who became absolute supporters of it. And we had a wonderful time with them. And so, you know, it was, it was a big moment in my career, getting rather large clients, and instead of, you know, flying balloons, as we did in the early day, for 100 quid a day, with your name on it all over lately. It became a multi million pound industry. So and it was fun. It was always fun. Sometimes, irresponsible, but always fun.

*Any really scary moments?*

Oh, yes. You know, I mean, I think, ballooning, as you've probably know, is, in the early days, it's, it was very scary. I mean, there's long, long moments of pleasure punctuated by moments of terror, I think.

And, you know, we all remember falling out the sky, and not knowing what to do. And on my, on my solo flight, actually, I took off and went in entirely the wrong direction, according to the Met, and had a fire on board!

In those days it was a steel cylinder, completely different situation today, and I, the only way I could, I switched everything off, except for the pilot light. But then there was gas leaking everywhere, you know. And I realized that the pilot light was going to catch up this gas because we were going in, so I turned everything off. And, of course, it was my solo after I'd checked out. And the only thing in front of me was a tree. So I actually deflated the balloon into the tree that saved my life.

All I got was, I broke my little finger. That's all I did. But it was very scary moment. And, you know, all us all balloon pilots have all good stories like that. Yeah,

Yeah. Just Velcro was the way to ties on it, to hold it in. Because of course they've been deaths in Birmingham when I've got the name. Two pilots were killed but that was a circular rip. But then the velcro came undone. So it was a bit iffy, was a bit iffy, but and they used to say, you know, a good landing is one when you walk away from it, we've all had difficult landings

*But then you got into looking for mines?*

Oh, yes. Yeah.

*Tell me a little bit more about that. Because that is a totally amazing project. And I think it had a bit of a lapse, and then you've gone back into it. Is that right?*

Yeah. What happened there is that. Of course, Princess Diana, she was a friend of Richards. And she was heavily into the landmine problem, which is very complex. And so she actually approached Richard and then me to see if anything could be done. I mean, I don't know why.

So I looked into it. And there was I contacted the The Secretary of Defence, can't remember who, and they put me onto some technology that they owned, which was ground penetrating radar that couldn't really be used in aircraft or helicopters, because of the vibration, but they thought it might work with an airship. So they not only told us about it, but they gave us the rights to the technology.

But, so we got to test it really to see if it worked. So where do you find the only way of testing it is applied over

A) An area that is a landline area.

B) if it can detect them

But of course it doesn't tell you about the ones that you don't detect.

So where do you find a minefield? Where every mine is known about? And the answer was in Kosovo, after the Balkan War, or just right after, because they've got training areas that they've planted, every type of mine.

Most of them are plastic, of course, it's not like looking for metal objects. So we flew an airship all the way down under United Nations banners to Kosovo, and we flew over this large landmine area. And, unbelievably, we found absolutely every single one, there's lots of them.

'I thought we probably find 90%, but we found 100%, every every single one. So that was very good. But there's a huge political problem in finding mines that I was faced all the time with. And that is the people that made them, the armies that laid them are obliged under the law to remove them when the conflict is over. But they never do. So no one was owning up to anything.

And the problem was very bad. Because every 20 minutes, someone stepped on the mine, usually a woman or child, and they ,if you tread on a mine, what happens is the mine explodes, it shatters your limb, and sends shrapnel at the rate of 400 miles an hour, some of which is made up of your own bones into the air. And where that shrapnel goes, easily penetrating the body in the groin area that goes through the body. Where that goes, determines whether you live or die. Either way, it's horrific.

So I was dedicated to doing that. And then of course, I went to see Mandela about it, who was a hero of mine. And he got behind it. And we became great friends actually really great friends, we had a lot of laughs together, even though the subjects that we were dealing with were horrific.

We then realized that there was no future in using airships for this particular program because they were too slow, too expensive, can be shot as easily. And we therefore developed a way of carrying it and deployed it in Croatia. And then, of course, not long after that COVID came across. It was it was a big political problem because many, many 1000s of people were involved in digging these mines out individually. And even at the rate, even at the present rate, it's going to take seven hundred years to get all the mines out. And no one wants to accelerate that politically, because there's been too many people employed.

But I'm happy to say that there's drones now carrying the the equipment, and we had to stop for some time, because of COVID. And everything, we can't even go into these areas.

But I am working with an American company now to develop, not just a finding mechanism, the mechanism of exploding them from the air is very exciting.

*Amazing. So after you met Mandela, and Richard Branson was also involved, and Brad Pitt. Was that right?*

Yes. In fact, there's a picture here with Mandela and Brad Pitt and Richard. And there's me standing there because I took Brad down to Joburg to Richard's there to meet Mandela. And Brad is very keen to help with the mines as well.

So that that was a funny story. Because Mandela, Mandela, you know, he had, he had a great sense of humour. And I mean, a fabulous sense of humour and he was very mischievous. And he had a studio, a facility at his house in in Joburg. And he, they started to record it. So there I am introducing them for a TV show. To Mandela, Brad Pitt. And Richard already knew, of course.

And he looked at Brad, and he said, so you are a singer? And I said, No. Mandella. Brad is a very famous movie star. He knew this, of course. He said, But you're an American. And I said, Yes, sir.

He said, Oh, do you know that the American army parachuted into the forest and killed my friend?

This is all going out live on television. So I'd very quickly tried to change the subject. But Mandella was having none of it. He said, Yes, They made a mistake. There was supposed to assassinate the leader of the terrorists. They got it wrong. And they killed my friend instead. Nobody knew that. That was completely new news. And it

made him very, very famous for a while in California. But it's very mischievous. But he was a wonderful man to work with.

*You have actually started an airline, you're the first Englishman to own an American airline. Is that right?*

Yes, that was Blimey, you have been doing your research. That was a company called Vintage Airlines. And I was told, you know the British, well, I think it may still be the case actually, you cannot take planes into America, freedom of the skies it has changed a lot. But you can't run an airline internally unless you are American owned. But I found a way of doing that. And I was negotiating for a very long time.

And in the end, the FAA said we've run out of arguments either way, what else to say to you, but you know, we can't argue with the way you're doing it, and that was by me forming a voting trust in England. So the company was owned by me, basically.

And we flew tourists flights from Orlando to Key West. And every day on the flight was May the eighth 1945. And basically, we spent a lot of money turning these two DC3s into art deco luxurious passenger carrying flights. And we had big band music on the way and it was very nice. Oh yeah, we had a dog called Skippy who was the Captains dog and that that that was important because it's very luxurious the interior but one of the rules that we couldn't get around was the Captains for the DC3s had to walk down the fuselage and lock all the passengers in. And this looked very odd to me.

So I solved this by training a dog called Skippy. And basically, he was taught he met all the passengers at the lounge before they got on. And everybody patted him and nodded. And when we got all the passengers seated, Skippy was trained to run up the fuselage and scratch on the cockpit door. And the air hostess should say, Oh, I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen. But Skippy wants to come with us, but you're not allowed to come under FAA rules. So she's a one man dog. So I'll have to get the captain to take her off. So the captain did come out and said 'you're a naughty girl Skippy, come on, off you go.'

And she'd walked back down and he pulled her out and he closed locked the door. So that function was missed.

And everyday was May 8<sup>th</sup> 1945. And on the taxi-ing out, we would read the news. And we had 30,000 copies of The New York Times, original ones in the backseat, you know, in the and Kathleen, all of the air hostesses were called Kathleen, would read out the news of the day like Lauren Bacall and Bogard were just getting engaged and all that, or getting married.

And there was a big craze going on at the moment with a thing called chewing gum. It's getting very popular and all that kind of stuff.

“But the real big news, Ladies Gentlemen is that it looks like the war in Europe is coming to an end”. And of course, everybody was dressed, all our staff and the pilots , were all dressed in 1945 uniforms. And so we played music after this going to play and go to the stores and into the something like that.

And take off with the Andrews sisters singing a waltz and a prayer appropriately. And I didn't want to serve coffee and tea or food because it's sticky. And it's all you can mess up the inside they can. So when we got to the climb the captain came on and said Well, when I mean onto cruise altitude “Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope you are enjoying the flight. Actually, I do have some news for you. We've got some news from the White House, so let me just plug you into the White House.”

So we did that and they announced the end of the war in Europe. Which case Kathleen would run up and say, ladies, gentlemen, this is a champagne moment means my husband's coming home, he is in the RAF or flying for the RAF. So it's going to be just champagne.

So became a champagne moment and the Captain came back and on the radio and said Oh, that's great news, ladies. Yes. Particularly for Kathleen and it means your husband's coming home. Let's bring all the boys home with some good music and Chattanooga Choo Choo and that kind of stuff. It was a wonderful themed product and I mean a lot of celebrities so I talked about this recently but John Travolta, he bought the flight, he bought all of the plane just to take him and his dog down to Key West. He loved the flight and everybody looked really good. We sold it .

*Well done. So how did you get from I mean you own Wolverhampton airport you've got an airline in America. How did you become a flight director for Richard's round the world attempt and as well, the Pacific.*

Again, that was a bit of an accident because Richard and I have always had a very good open relationship. And I was very critical of some of the things that they were doing on the transatlantic flight. And the way things happen, it is very difficult without getting talking behind people's back, or running people down. there was a lot to be said about the structure of the plan, put it like that. And so at the end, when it seemed like it was all going wrong, the Virgin management said, can you go and sort them out, they're in the they're in the tower in London, the BT Tower.

So I went up there and knowing that was going to be very difficult, because nobody's going to like me doing anything. And I didn't get involved too much, except that when they came down I was looking after the comms, if you like, and he was told - it's in my next book, actually, - Richard doesn't mind me talking about this, because it's, it's true.

He was told that, by the search and rescue people, that they'd seen parachutes, and that they'd jumped out of the aircraft, which is totally untrue.

And I said to I said them at the time, you really want to confirm that before you start announcing it to the press because it will be a bit too late by then. So anyway, they came down and crashed in Ireland, which is what really happened. And I said, look, announce that was the crossing and the landing, now that they had managed to fly the Atlantic, don't talk about it as a crash anymore, say that they had touched down and broken the record. So that took a lot of criticism out of that Richard was very thankful for that.

But he still did then decided to fly the Pacific against my advice, because I didn't think the way that we're doing it, I said there was too much danger in it.

Nevertheless, he went ahead. And when they ran into a major snag in Japan, they called me and said, I'm sorry, can you take over this.

So I went in and rebuild the whole thing the whole project from the ground up. And it became very successful, almost not though, almost critical. In fact, we thought we had lost of Richard and Per at one stage.

But we got them, we got them down safely. And then of course, from that period on, I'd also got involved in lots of aspects of the Virgin business. And we went around the world. Again, didn't really liked the plan. Because I didn't think that that was the right type of aircraft to use. And I recommended to Richard that he goes with the Cameron the one that Bertrand flew, and but no, he was determined to fly with understandable reasons that Per had got a wife and a family, he built the balloon and had made very sure it was safe. And he felt comfortable with that, understandably, but I didn't.

And so. As you know, we didn't make it around the world. In fact, Bertrand came to see perhaps after we aborted and running very calmly. deservedly. So we still got a lot of publicity. I mean, we got millions of sponsorship. You know, it was very exciting but stressful part of my life.

*It was amazing. And I think Richard put you forward to be a Living Legend didn't he?*

Yes, I think what happened is that some of the living legend I know, though I didn't know then but some of the legends in America And once you've been nominated, and unknown to me, they contacted Richard, and said, Would you officially nominate him? Which he did. It was a big surprise to me,

*It must have been so exciting for you and Joan.*

Well, I was very humbled by that because, you know, I sit there with, there's only 100 of us, alongside Richard, and Buzz Aldrin, and you know, some very famous people, and I think how did I get that.

So I was very humbled to be asked to join them and I'm actually now starting to work with them, to use the Legends in a more objective way of raising money for charities, in particular cancer.

*Well, I think it's fantastic. I really do. Mike, you've given me nearly two hours of your time, we did have a dreadful start with this zoom thing because of my technology, and being old and nerdy. But I can't thank you enough. It's, it is amazing. And I can't wait for your next book.*