

Mark Williams-Thomas

Investigative Reporter

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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 here with investigative journalist and former police officer Mark Williams-Thomas. His BAFTA-nominated documentary, *The Other Side of Jimmy Savile*, finally exposed one of the nation's worst ever paedophiles, and led directly to the creation of Operation Yewtree. A recipient of two Royal Television Society awards and a Peabody, he is a regular reporter on *This Morning* and *Channel 4 News*, and presents ITV's crime series, *The Investigator*.

Mark, thank you for joining me.

Well, thank you for having me.

So, Mark, talk us through, if you can, your incredible journey. You've gone from a police family liaison officer to the star of your own ITV Netflix show. What's the journey been like?

Yes. Quite a unique journey, and I probably don't think there's anybody else that's followed that path.

Not to my knowledge.

Age 19, I joined Surrey Police and stayed there for just short of 12 years. And then I get to a position where I think, "Do I want to become and stay a police officer for the rest of my life, or shall I take a new challenge?" And policing, even then, was very different from when I began. It was starting to become far less proactive, it was very much reactive. You weren't able to do those investigations that you wanted to do in the early days. And the level of work was just immense. I remember, just prior to leaving, having dealt with a very complex case, which was an air traffic controller, for abuse of children well over 15 years, and I was just on my own working on that, I didn't have a weekend or day off for four weeks, and it just got to me. And I thought, "Do you know what? I can't continue to do this for the rest of my life. It's just draining me." I mean, to the position where almost every weekend my pager would go off, I'd be on call, and my pager would go off at night. And I would have to then wake up.

And I always got into a scenario where actually I would wake up, I would have a cup of tea, and then I would make the phone call. Because your first question would be, "What do you want us to do?" And he's like, "Well, I've literally woken up." Hang on a minute. You want me to suddenly think you've got someone dead? What do you want to do? And that takes over your life. And in a way, there's lots of other people. You know, there are doctors like that, there are other police officers. But it either controls you or you control it. And I had to get to a position where I needed to control my life much more.

I'm incredibly grateful, like most people, for the service that the police provide. I mean, you're either going to get punched in the face by some drunk guy if you're British Transport Police on a train or whatever, or you're dealing with the kind of work that you're dealing with, which with the greatest of respect is something that I would never even consider doing. I'm so grateful that you did it and that people continue to do it. But it's not the kind of work I would do. To me, it would be a horrendous day-to-day existence. It's great to bring paedophiles to justice, but you've also then got to wade through images of child sexual abuse and deal with the person themselves. It just seems to be quite a horrendous job.

The problem with the police service, of course, is you can deal with one minor thing to the most serious thing. And of course, you don't know when that's going to occur on your shift. And depending on, of course, the line of work that you would then end up getting into, will put you in more contact with perhaps more horrendous things on a day-to-day basis, whether that be a murder inquiry, whether that be a child abuse inquiry, whether that be a violent assault. And where I ended up at the end was basically working across murders, working across the paedophile unit, so investigating dangerous offenders in that capacity. And where my work, in terms of the family liaison officer, put you in a very difficult position because what you end up doing is being the point of contact between the family and the senior investigating officer. We have to remember, of course, that a large majority of certainly murders occur by somebody known to the victim. And therefore, very often you're almost kind of infiltrating that family environment to see whether or not they have any specific information to give you. And I did one inquiry, I was seconded to Hampshire Police. Surrey Police shot and killed a man in Dorking, they shot him in the bedroom, and I was seconded to Hampshire Police from Surrey Police to be one or two officers working for Hampshire Police where we basically looked after the family. And that was a really difficult one because I moved to a position where... it wasn't about going native, you know, that Stockholm Syndrome, but I did find myself being incredibly sympathetic to the family, in terms of was it right that their father was shot, murdered? And that's just one case. I've dealt with many, many murder investigations, and you're always in a position where sadly the family are left behind, and I think what we sometimes forget as investigators is that it's not just the victim's family that are damaged, the impact on them, but it's also the loved one's family in terms of the offender goes. You know, when that offender comes to justice, they often leave behind a mum, brothers, sisters, even children. And we can lose sight of that. There's a case that I dealt with recently where actually they found out about their daughter being charged on the news. That should never happen. We should get into a position where police officers are at least telling that family, and I think that's a big lesson for anybody is that just remember, when you are dealing with those

situations, is that both sides, both the offender and the victim, have loved ones who will be impacted by what's taken place.

And in the final years of service in the police, did it become obvious as to what the next step would be? For example, I know that even as a police officer you'd started to advise the producers of TV crime dramas about how to bring authenticity.

Yes.

Did you think, "Right, next stop television"?

Do you know, that's really funny, because people say to me, "Well, you obviously planned out your route of where you were going." I joined the police service thinking I'll stay for 30 years, I'll leave at age 49, and I'll have a great life on my police pension. As you go through it, you start to think, "Actually, I don't know if I can do this for the rest of my life." And I'd got to that point after about 11 years, 12 years, where I thought, "Do you know, I can't stay here for the rest of my life." And I thought, "No, it's time to move on. It's time to face other challenges." And I think gone are the days now where you go into a career and necessarily see that career for the rest of your life. People move onto other jobs. And when I left and I took up the role to advise on police dramas – Waking the Dead, Wire in the Blood, Inspector Lynley Mysteries – probably at one stage, I advised on most of or if not all of the crime dramas that were on television, both BBC and ITV. And that was a real eye-opener, and actually, what I moved to is a position where I would say to the writer, "Before you write anything, talk to me because I can give you an overview in terms of how to do it." It's very difficult to change a writer once they've started to write. And I found that fascinating. I did Waking the Dead for six years with Trevor Eve, and it was an amazing programme. I love it, and actually, some of those cases are cases that I dealt with, which I just changed slightly to make it into a programme. And so when you watch programmes now, I always watch them with kind of like the thought process of, "How is that police advising being done?" Listen, Bodyguard, what a success. An amazing success. World Productions, and John Heyman, who's part of World Productions, and I know them very, very well. And they've created something which has now got the public talking. And that's what you want to do. That's what programmes are about. And it's great with a drama because you can make the ending up. Where it becomes more difficult is when you have a real story where you are doing it in real-time. And of course those are my programmes, and that's where the challenge is, is how come we make programmes that are entertaining, that are captivating but also delivering? Because I can't tell you, by and large when I start my programme, what the end will be. And, in fact, sometimes it's important I can't tell you, because otherwise there's no investigation taking place. I've already predetermined what the end is. You can do that in Bodyguard, you can't do that in The Investigator.

We're going to talk in detail about that in a second, but I just want to kind of get a grip on how you started to advise TV producers in the first place, because there you are, a copper. Is that something that you sought out, or did it come to you serendipitously? Were you appointed? Did someone say, "Hey, Mark, can you advise Waking the Dead?"

I think one of those things, I don't do much of it, but I love when I get invited to go to schools, to colleges, to universities and give inspiring talks to people. I've had a very interesting journey. I left school with no qualifications, I've now got a Master's, I've got severe dyslexia, but you wouldn't know that from the programmes that I make and the things that I do, because I put in place a very good mechanism to enable me to deal with that. So I have a dad who does a lot of my proof reading for my university stuff, I have a full-time PA who looks after all of my work, so that everything's proofed. I write a lot for newspapers, but you would never know I have that. And I think what I would say to anybody out there is if you have something that could potentially hold you back, think about how you can meet that as a challenge and make it and own it and actually work with that, whether that be putting in place somebody who does your writing for you, your proofing for you, and I'm incredibly proactive. I'm constantly reading things, I'm constantly looking to see where the opportunities are. So for police advising, I saw that there was an article in one of the police magazines, and they were looking for a police advisor. It was actually World Productions, the people who made the Bodyguard. And I contacted them and said, "Look, I'm quite interested in this. I've done a few programmes in terms of the police," and in fact, I'd just left the police then. And they said, "Come in and see us." I went and saw them. And after a few interviews, they said, "Look, we'd love to have you on it. Come and do it." It was a programme for Channel 5 News, it was new series called Murder Suppression Unit. And it was brilliant, it was great. And I remember actually coming home after I'd been given the job, and I sat at the dining room table, and I thought to myself, "What am I doing? How do I do this?" But it was a split second. I thought, "Of course I can do it, it's just advising in relation to police procedures." And what I always say to any person that's doing that police advising, and to members of the public, is that it has to be believable. If you make it too unbelievable, then the public would go, "That's ridiculous. That doesn't even work." Sometimes you can push those boundaries, but it's got to be believable. And the other thing, of course, crucial about dramas, is they want an end. Reality doesn't give you an end. We know that in certain cases. Madeleine McCann, there's no end. Madeleine McCann is a bit of an exception to the rule, because we are still talking about it. But ultimately, it's not a book you can write, it's not a programme you can do, because there's no end to it. What is the end to that? Whereas, of course, dramas you can always write an end.

There's lots of people, though, that have been found to have been held captive for five, 10, 15, 20 years. Might it be that the end, as it were, might be that either she's found safe and well, or unfortunately, her body's found? So there might be an end at some point.

I'd love to think so. I'd love to think so in some way that either they give Madeleine back to Gerry and Kate, and Sean and Amelie, or there is some kind of resolve in terms of someone convicted for that offence.

Closure, as they call it.

Closure. I think the sad reality is, this far on now, the likelihood, of course, of Madeleine being alive is so incredibly slim. Overwhelmingly, within the space of 24 hours, children are dead, you know? So the likelihood of Madeleine being alive now

is very, very, very slim. Almost impossible. And, of course, when you put them into the context of other people who have been abducted and been found, it's not the same. So Madeleine is three years old, whereas the other people who were abducted were teenagers. And then, of course, they were found years later. And the reason why that's massively different is you can reason with a teenager, you cannot reason with a child. So there is a point to which they are abducted, they have to be effective in why they're abducted for the reason, whether that be, you know, as crudely as sexual offences or whether it be for some kind of trafficking element of it, once you've established what that is, but they have to have a value. They have to have a long-term value. And when you have a 13-year-old that's abducted, you can see that long-term value. Particularly if there's some kind of sexual element to it.

Yes, because they can clearly hold them captive. We'll talk about that in terms of the effect that it's had on you as well as of your viewers shortly, but just kind of finishing off the career side, so how did you end up coming to become air-side?

Yes.

There must have been point where you felt, "Well, I don't want to be the advisor, I want to be stood in front of the camera." How did that happen?

Yes. And I think that's one of ... that's probably the biggest thing that people want to know. How do you make that transition from advising to being in front of camera? And I'll tell you how it happened in a very simple way, is that I was doing a lot of advising for Sky and for ITV News around the aspects of major crime. All those elements of it. And I went to Tonight, ITV Tonight, the strand for Tonight, the editor at the time was Mike Lewis, and I said to Mike, "Look, I've got this really good story about this priest in Germany who is grooming a child in Wales for sexual offences. And this child is not actually a real child, it's a covert officer, and I think what we should do is go to Germany and confront this priest." And he said, "Brilliant. Love the idea, it's really good." And he said, "But ..." And I said, "I'd like to do it." He said, "Well, you can't do it. You're not a face on ITV. I'll pair you up with one of the reporters." And I said, "Okay, all right." So off I go over to Germany to confront this priest, and the reporter was on another programme in another country. And he couldn't get there for another two days. And as we arrived in the country, we went to see the police, spoke to the German police, told them this whole story about this guy, we wanted to speak to this guy, he had a load of child abuse material. It was a very bizarre scene, because whilst we were sat talking to him, one of the officers came in and spoke to the boss. The boss showed him a picture, and said, "Oh, this is such and such." And he goes, "Oh, yes, yes, yes. I know him. Oh, God, that's a bit bad, isn't it? Oh well. We'll do that in a week's time." And I said to them, "We are going home in two days' time, so we need to see him tomorrow." They said, "Oh no, we don't have the resources to do that. We can't go and do that." Anyway, little to our knowledge was the next day, they actually went and did it. Which was great. We had him under surveillance, we saw the police come, they took him away, they then brought him back. And literally after they brought him back, he got in the car and he disappeared. We followed him, and he went to an industrial estate, he met somebody in an industrial estate, the two of them had a chat, he then left that

industrial estate in his car, and he drove to the internet café. We followed, we put one of our, actually, the assistant producer, we put him into the internet café, told him to go and sit in there and just watch him. He then reported and said, "Yes, he's online talking to someone. Don't know who it is." And it was at that point I said to my producer, "We've got to go. We've got to go and confront this guy now. I don't know who he's talking to at this stage, he could be talking to this young girl."

Could be arranging flights.

Yes. "We've got to go and talk to him. He's clearly been spoken to by the police today." And the reporter was still abroad. And the editor phoned me up, he said, "Mark, are you up to doing it? Are you up to going to confront him?" I said, "Well, it's easy." I said, "It's what I did in the job. No problem at all. I'm just about to have a chat with him." So he said, "Brilliant. Then do it." So off we get, crew into this internet café, and you can actually watch it online. It's called To Catch a Predator. It's a brilliant little sting.

It's on Netflix, isn't it?

So our bit is actually, was ITV, so I think you can find it on YouTube or something like that.

I see.

But we went to see him, and as I walk into this internet café, go downstairs, and he's on there online, and I said, "Who are you talking to?" I introduced myself. "Mark Williams-Thomas from ITV." And he goes ... and it was like rabbit in the headlights. He's actually talking to that girl. He'd started talking to that girl. "Did you tell the police, because they arrested me today." So I sat there for 30 minutes. And he told me everything, he told me how he's sexually interested in children, he'd just been spoken to by the police. Coughed the whole lot, and then ... and it was brilliant. He just opened everything. And the funniest thing...

Why would he do that though? That's the odd thing.

Sometimes when you confront people in that manner, they just open up. They just tell you. If you do it in a certain way. And the strangest thing was, is once we'd done all that, I said, "Thank you very much," he walked out, and as he walked out, he said to the guy behind the desk, "How much do I owe you for that?" I thought, "That's quite a strange thing." He's just been bubbled by us, he's now going to be world TV, and he's done it. But that was my break. That was the opportunity where I then got to be in front of a camera, and that meant that they couldn't then put that presenter into the programme because I'd done the confront and because I'd done all the follow, it became my programme. And from that point on, I then got the ability to front programmes. And, of course, my main programmes after that were the Tonight where I did a really good programme on Tia Sharp, the murder of Tia Sharp and Stuart Hazell, and lots of other Tonights. I did something on Jeremy Bamber, and then I started to do some of the exposure strands. And obviously the most well-

known exposure strand of Jimmy Savile. And then I got myself a prime time nine o'clock ITV series.

Tell us about the Savile thing there. Did you always know he was a wrong 'un?

So Savile is very strange, because I was going over to Interpol with BBC Newsnight – at that stage, I did quite a lot of Newsnight reports – and I was going over there to do a report for Newsnight. And the producer, on the way home, he said to me, “Have you ever heard of Savile being a weird bloke, being involved in child abuse?” And I went, “No.” I said, “He’s weird.” I said, “But no, never at all.” He said, “Well, apparently, he was arrested by the police.” He said, “I don’t know whether it was your force or another force.” I went, “Okay, I’ve never heard of it.” I said, “Strange that I haven’t heard of it because I would tend to know.” But it is that kind of period of time where I left, so maybe, maybe not. Anyway, I made some enquiries and established that actually it was Surrey Police that arrested him. And my contact gave me a lot of information in relation to that. And then I went back to Newsnight and said, “Yes, he was arrested.” This was it. And it was really bizarre position because Meirion Jones, who was the producer at Newsnight – who I have huge respect for, he’s a very, very talented producer – he then came back to me, and said, “You know, we’re going to do something on it, as far as the investigation goes. We’ve got someone who’s not a victim but telling us about his offending...” And then almost overnight, he came back and said, “They’re not doing it. BBC Newsnight are not doing it.” And I went, “That’s a bit bizarre.” This is where so many people fell over, because what they were trying to do is establish was had somebody failed? Had the police failed in their investigation in terms of not investigating him properly? And what everybody was missing sight of, and indeed there were other producers that made the same comment, and lawyers, is that it wasn’t about failures, it was about this is a paedophile. Jimmy Savile is a paedophile. That’s the point of all of this. And then I said, “Listen, let me look at it.” And so I went to ITV, and I said to them, “Let’s look at this.” And there was ... you know, to say they were concerned would be to underplay it. And we had a big meeting up in the board room with a lawyer and everything, and we all went through it. And actually, Alex Gardner, who was then the chief executive of Shiver, and he said, “Look, I think you’re right. I think there’s something here, Mark. Let’s run with it.”

Brave.

Yes, and he was brave, and we started doing it, it was just myself and Leslie Gardner, my producer, and we started to dig away, dig away, and it was all being kept under wraps. We weren’t telling anyone about it. Even to such degree I made the decision that we weren’t going to put anything on the computer. So nothing was going on the ITV system. Everything was going to be manual, paperwork. I knew how big this was going to be – to some degree. I could never anticipate as big, but I knew it was going to be a big story.

Was he alive at this point?

No. He’d died.

He'd just died.

He'd only just died. I remember in fact, early on in our investigation, watching an auction of his items. I remember thinking to myself, "Do you know what? In a year's time, those things are going to be of absolutely no value of at all." Particularly when things are selling for hundreds of thousands of pounds. His car was something like that.

At this point, just in your own mind, did you know he was a paedophile, but you just had to prove it, or did you still have a bit of an open mind?

No, I had an open mind. Absolutely. There was clearly quite a lot online in terms of him being an offender, particularly in relation to children's homes and things like that, but I was very open-minded. I think that's one thing I am; if I start an investigation, and some new information comes in and takes me somewhere else, I'll go with that. I'm not set on a path. I think that's one of the criticisms of some senior officers is, they have an idea and they have to make it fit.

And they set out to prove it.

That's not how I work at all.

On the continent, they now have an inquisitorial system where it's judge led, and they genuinely do have a duty to consider everything. Whereas here, if the police think they've got their man, then they set about proving that. But as you've just said, that might be to the exclusion of, "Well, maybe he didn't do it."

I think that's probably one of the big failings of police investigations. It's about finding out what happened, rather than trying to prove the allegation, and those are two very, very different things. I think when we set out to investigate Savile, I was doing it alongside all my other work. I did a years' work on Savile, and I didn't get paid until the end of it. Just making that programme was everything free. I just started phoning people up, talking to people. As I was doing it, I was starting to realise, "Do you know what? There is something here." Then I got one victim came forward, then another victim. Then it got to a stage where we had five crucial people giving us information. I remember one afternoon, this story had now got into the press that ITV were going to, or looking at doing a programme, in relation to Jimmy Savile. BBC Leeds were very supportive of him. He was a Leeds man. I remember them doing a phone-in. I listened to this phone-in, and the reason I listened to the phone-in, because I thought someone might phone up with a crucial piece of information. Actually, all they did was criticise me. It was quite difficult to listen to that, but I'm quite used to it now. Gone are the days, and you talk to anybody who's got a public profile, it was a long time ago that I searched for my name on Google, because there are some really horrible comments that are made about people.

You are a human being. You do have feelings.

Yes, we do. I think something people forget that. I think with the increase of social media, the increase of anonymity through certain aspects. It's incredible what some people will say about people. Years ago, when I first started to get a profile, my daughter was at school. My middle daughter was at school. And one day she got really upset. She came home, and the teacher phoned home and said, "Look, she's really upset, and the reason that she's upset is, she was searching online. She put her dad's name in, and it came up with this really horrible stuff." This man should be killed. This man should be hung. Pictures of me being hung. That's really quite hard. Off the back of Savile I got sent child abuse material. I got sent a petrol bomb. I've had death threats. Those are the realities of the world that I live in, and not just through the Savile stuff. I have a programme called *On the Run*, where I catch wanted criminals. I've put people away for long times, and these people aren't always happy with that.

Just finishing off on Savile then. A friend of mine used to be the editor of the News of the World, and he said to me, many years ago, he said, "We always knew that he was a paedophile, but in all seriousness that is the most humanity-destroying, never mind reputation-destroying, if you falsely accuse someone of being a paedophile, you've ruined their life forever, and it'll stick. So you've got to make sure, 100%." The lawyers would never let them, ever, run it, because Savile's lawyers were all over them. In a sense, you can't blame them for wanting to be careful.

No, absolutely. I think one of the questions that was put to me, or has been put to me many times, "Do you think you could've done your programme if Savile was alive?" Quite clearly the answer is, "No." No lawyer would have allowed us to do that. Even with the evidential value that we managed to amass, which was quite considerable, I don't believe any lawyer would've passed that. He had to be dead, which is really sad, because that level of justice has now not been through the courts, and he hasn't gone to jail.

It's also rather unfortunate, because that might have had the opportunity to stop some of his offending if it came to light.

Absolutely, and there are other people out there. There are two particular high-profile individuals that I know about, who I'm convinced are sex offenders. I've brought that attention to the police, the police have done an investigation, but it just hasn't got to enough of a level for the Crown Prosecution Service. I know that when one of those people dies, the floodgates will open. That's wrong. We shouldn't be in that world. Actually, this concept of the untouchables still exists. Jimmy Savile put himself in a position where he was untouchable. There is no doubt about that. There are still individuals who fall into that place. Less so, I don't think that any of us in the media world would ever have thought that Max Clifford and Rolf Harris would've been convicted for sex offences, but they were, and rightly so. Their offending was horrific. Rolf Harris is very lucky that he isn't being prosecuted for further offences in Australia, because there are allegations that sit over there. I think what we've got is that we have, as a result of Savile, we've given some power back to victims. We've changed public attitude. When I think back on it, myself and my producer, we've talked many times, and I think in terms of the media world, I don't think there is

probably a programme in the last decade, two decades, whatever, that has made such a difference. Forty-one days it sat on the front pages of newspapers. It's changed attitudes. It's changed legislation. It's given a voice to people out there who never felt confident, and it's put some really dangerous offenders away. Not just those ones that we know about, i.e. the high-profile ones, but up and down the country. We got an email, ITV got an email, from the NSPCC, quite soon after the Savile bubble burst. They said, as a direct result, we can say that at least 1,000 children, both now and previously, have been saved as a result of your programme.

Incredible.

Phenomenal. Phenomenal. I feel very proud to have done that. I feel very proud to have been the engine to do that. I always say this, when I collected my RTS Award, I collected it on behalf of those victims that came forward. That's why I did it. It wasn't about me. It was about those people who had the confidence to allow me to tell their story, and I was able to do it in such a way that it was believable, it had authenticity behind it. In the words of the RTS judges, it was something around, it was shocking but without being sensational. I think that's really ... I think it was sensationalistic without being sensational. It was really good to actually get to a position where the public is saying, "We now understand," and we have some credibility behind that. I think to take Savile on, my mum phoned me up one afternoon and said to me, "Do you think you should be doing this? This is pretty risky." Actually, Leslie and I, we sat down on many occasions and said to us, "You know, we will either work in television for a long time, or we'll never work again." And it did that. We were on the cusp of it. The night before the programme went out, or certainly the weekend before, I was worried. I was seriously worried. I thought, "You know what? If the public don't go with this, if the media don't go with this, I'll be hung out to dry." But I had that confidence. And it's not a blind confidence. Everything's weighed up. You talk to anybody that knows me, if I've got a passion about something, I will follow it. It doesn't matter, you can put as many hurdles as you want in the way, I will get the answer at the end.

It's truly changed society, because there's hundreds of victims of child sexual abuse now that are being believed, and that came forward as a result of this. Many of them thinking that they were the only one. Before Savile dying, Rolf Harris must have thought that he'd got away with it. That he could just do whatever he wants. That must have come as an incredibly rude awakening when the floodgates opened on Savile. He must have thought, "Am I going to be next?"

Yes. Absolutely. And Max Clifford. What I always say is, those people out there who've committed those offences know exactly what they've done. What I would say to them, and I've said many times, is that, "I hope you sleep very, very lightly at night, fearful that that next bang on the door is going to be the police." They know exactly what they've done. They know their offences they've committed. I hope that the law one day catches up with all of them. It won't. I know it won't. The reality is that it won't. But if we can at least chip away at those people who have changed people's lives. Being a victim of any crime is horrific. Being a victim of a personal

crime like sexual offences, and particularly if you have your innocence taken away from you as a child, it changes your life.

The sheer brass neck of someone like Rolf Harris or Stuart Hall, or these people that they thought that the way that celebrities are treated in society meant that they could go to those depraved depths. The mind boggles as to how they even got away with it.

Yes. And of course, society has a big role to play in it, because we create these monsters. We create these opportunities. Offending is all about access and opportunity. You have to have the access to a child, and you have to have the opportunity to offend, to get away with it. Of course, what we allowed with Rolf Harris, Max Clifford, Jimmy Savile, is we created the opportunity and we gave them the access to children.

Well, Savile presented the key children's show for decades. Jim'll Fix It. You couldn't make it up.

No, and actually, you know I said ... I did a big article in Radio Times about this. I said, "We will never know whether that was a vehicle that he created for his offending, or whether it was just great luck."

Who knows. You took your experience of working at the centre of those kind of high-profile investigations into other crime stories, like the Oscar Pistorius case. Tell us how that developed.

Oscar is a very interesting story. Obviously, February, he shoots and kills Reeva Steenkamp, his girlfriend of only a short period of time, some six months, and massive news, breaking news, around the world on the day after Valentine's Day. I remember looking at it and following the news. Of course, I think we probably, I'm very sporty, but I think we probably all knew about Oscar in some way.

Because of the blades.

Yes. If you knew anything within that world, there are three of the most well-known people in the world in South Africa is Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Oscar Pistorius. They were the three most famous people in South Africa. When that story broke, I looked at it and I remember following it. Quite shortly after that, Leslie said to me, "Why don't you make contact with him? Why don't you see if they're interested in doing something?" So I did, I made contact through his PR lady, and we started a dialogue. Quite quickly, we started ... they were quite happy to engage and talk, and of course there was a lot of processes as far as the media, and it was quite clear that actually I was in a fire pit with the biggest media outlets. ABC, Oprah, 60 Minutes. These big players, massive players. There I was, little lowly me, for ITV, making a pitch and saying we could make a really good programme with him. As it developed and went on, they started to actually quite like what I was suggesting. What I was effectively suggesting is that, what I will do is an investigation, and we'll look at some of these aspects that are being talked about in terms of the police case. We got up to a point just prior to the trial, so this is the initial trial, where I was driving down the

motorway and I got a phone call from his PR agent. She said, "Look, I can't tell you it will be a deal, but what I can say to you, if you wanted to come over next week, I think it would be very worthwhile for you." So I said to ITV, "Let's do it." So I jumped on a plane. I remember that was a Friday, and I jumped on a plane on the Sunday. I arrived in Johannesburg, drove straight to the lawyer's office and I met with the lawyer, with two of the lawyers, with the PR agent, with Oscar's uncle, and Arnold. We're all sitting around this table, and I put my proposal and said ... I have to say, I thought it was a done deal, and I think they thought it was a done deal. Only the problem was, the lawyers weren't so convinced. And ultimately, they said, "Look, we just can't do it before trial." I remember the family, the family I think wanted it to happen. In fact, I know they wanted it to happen, but the lawyer, they had to go with the lawyers' view in terms of we shouldn't do it before the trial. They wanted to put all their evidence in the first place there. They didn't want to, and they didn't challenge any of the untruths that came out. There was a lot of stories that were put into the public domain by the police, which were wrong. Which were complete lies, were inaccurate. What the Pistorius camp never did is challenge them or correct them at time, so they became truths, although they were untrue. I flew back to England, and I continued to talk to them. I remember one day I was at home and I suddenly got this text message from Arnold, who said to me, "Are you still up for doing an interview? Let's do it." So I phoned up ITV and said, "We're on." They said, "Right, go." So I went over there, actually I went with, at this stage I'd started to work with Syco, with Simon Cowell's team. I remember phoning Simon up and saying, "Look, we're on for this." And I'd talked to him a few times about Oscar's case. I flew over with Nigel Hall, who is head of TV at Syco. We went and spent a weekend in South Africa, talking to the family, talking to Oscar. Spending a lot of time with Oscar. We agreed and said, "Look, let's do this." He showed us the letters from Oprah, from CNN, from CBS, from ABC, from 60 Minutes. Everybody offering big dollars to do this. But we weren't offering anything. We were just saying, "You know, we'll do this interview." But they liked it, and I think they liked ... I know what Arnold said to me. He said, "Do you know what?" He said, "Out of everything, you never gave up. You never gave up." He said, "Your persistence is one of the reasons. It's not the main reason, but it's one of the reasons why we came back to you and said that ... you never gave up. And the way you were going to do your programme was a very fair programme. It was just basically sitting there and putting the evidence out, not taking a side either way." Then we got it commissioned, and off I went over to South Africa to start to film. And of course we had to keep it really quiet. We couldn't let the British media know that we were going. We had to keep it really quiet in South Africa as well. It was actually a really interesting occasion. Because I was down with Oscar in his ... the uncle had a big house, and the bottom below the garden was an area where Oscar was living. A two-bedroomed kind of flat. I was down there talking to Oscar. The team were up in the house setting up to do an interview with Oscar. I was suddenly downstairs and Oscar's aunt comes down and says, "Correctional Services are here. Correctional Services are here." He was wearing a tag, and the tag kept going off faultily. He complained, and anyway, they sent Correctional Services out. The head of Correctional Services, and that was about four people entourage with him. There was a real worry that if we were there as the media, although he was allowed to do an interview, they would have probably put him back in jail. So there was a real fear for him for that. I said, "Where should I go?" I did that kind of run around the spot and thinking, "Where do I go? Do I go into the bedroom? Do I hide? Will they come down here?" Anyway. I said, "I'll go up to the top," and I legged it right

up to the top of the house. I got to the top of the house, and as I got in, I opened the door where we were setting up, and the whole of the crew on the floor. And we had quite a big crew there. Everyone was just lying on the floor. I said, "Why is everyone laid on the floor?" They whispered, "They're just outside there." Literally just outside, we were in this big landing area, literally just outside was a staircase, and that's where they were. We had to be really, really quiet. Then I said, "Yes, but they can see our lights from here." We then had to get some of the big boards, and we had to put them up on the window carefully, so people didn't see. Anyway, we laid there for two hours. We just couldn't move. We had to wait there for two hours until the Correctional Services left.

I'd have had a little siesta!

We were so worried that they were going to come in. They would never have led them upstairs, but we were so worried.

It just looks guilty as well, doesn't it, if you're all hiding up there.

Well, that's the problem. And actually his lawyer said, "Look, he wouldn't have got into trouble for that." But you just don't know. The system in South Africa, and there was a lot of personal anger against Oscar. I think the system could well have decided that they would have put him back in jail.

Was justice done then? You know more than anyone then where the truth of the matter lies.

I think it's a really difficult one. I think that you have to understand Johannesburg. You have to understand the whole concept of firearms over there, and house invasions, and there are people who will go into houses, who will take guns and they will shoot the occupants. We have many, many occasions where occupants will shoot the offenders who come into the house. There's a very sad case over there where there's a former South Africa rugby player, and he wakes up in the early hours of the morning, and he goes out, and he's woken because his daughter's car is being driven off the driveway. He gets his gun, he sees the car driving off the driveway, he shoots at the driver, thinking the car's being stolen. He then goes and looks in his daughter's bedroom to tell her, and she's not there. He's just shot and killed his daughter. He didn't get charged with murder, and the decision from the prosecutors over there was that he's suffered enough torment, he shot his own daughter. But what that did for me is, it kind of set the scene, is that sometimes it's shoot before you think over there, because you are literally having to respond to your life. Car hijacks are very common over there. So I think that night, to be very clear, if Oscar had not have had a gun, i.e., guns were not available, Reeva would still be alive. We know that because some month or two months before Oscar tweeted to say, "I went into Rambo mode." When he heard a noise downstairs, who actually was a friend coming to use his washing machine. He said, "I pulled my gun and I could've shot him." That was his reaction, and we've also got to deal with an elite athlete who has to make split second decisions. And crucially, it is a really important point, his vulnerability. This is a man who's on stumps, and he wasn't stable on it. He was incredibly unstable in that aspect, and it added to his vulnerability. And he had had

some threats against him. I think when you put all that into it, you create the vulnerability. I don't believe, and there is no evidence that says he deliberately shot in there, believing it was Reeva. He'd been seeing her for six months. They were very, very close. They were still in a courting relationship. What he did was wrong. You can't get away from that. He killed somebody. But when I speak to Oscar about that and I've made that very clear to him, he said, "Do you know what? I have to live with that for the rest of my life. I've killed someone that I love. I have to live with that."

So he knew that he was killing someone, but he believed that it was an intruder?

Absolutely. Yes. And that's his point, and I think there's strong evidence to support that. And Masipa, the original judge, believed that. There was no evidence to support that he deliberately set out to kill Reeva. There are questions, of course, which is when he woke up, why didn't he check that she was beside him? Why did he turn the light on? Why did he shoot into a door which was shut?

All questions that can be answered in a leisurely way with hindsight that are easy, but in the moment ...

In the moment with adrenaline, with stress ... if you put three people in a room and you were presented with the same scenario, you could almost guarantee those three people, without pre-knowledge, would probably deal with it in a different way. Some would run away, some would fight.

Some would freeze.

Some would freeze. You know, that's that whole thing and he reacted. Take the gun, Reeva would still be alive.

How do you maintain a dispassionate kind of objectivity in the moment? Because you've dealt with Oscar directly. It would take a pretty strange kind of person that would not want to empathise having known and heard it from his point of view. Obviously you didn't hear it from Reeva's because suddenly she was shot. Do you have a mental exercise that you have to be objective?

Totally. I mean my whole starting point for any investigation I do is to follow the evidence. Follow the evidence. Don't follow your heart, your passion. Don't follow the pre-determined information that's given to you – particularly if you're reviewing a case the police already looked at, because there may be a determination at the end where they've already formed a conclusion. Jill Dando is a classic one. But when you look at the evidence around that, Jeremy Bamber, when you look at the evidence to support that, it throws up different theories, and then you have to explore those theories and say, "Well, what is the evidence that supports that? What is it that contradicts that?" And I think once you do that properly and you assimilate it, you are then in a position. And this goes back to the point of, if you start with an open mind, and continue with an open mind throughout, rather than look to prove the case, you will often come to a different conclusion.

I mean you're uncovering paedophiles and murderers, do you think that some people are intrinsically evil?

Yes. Yes, I mean, I think there are some people out there who are very dangerous. I think there are some people out there who you wouldn't want anywhere near anybody else, and they are very dangerous in a very sly way. I think this concept of, is everyone capable of killing? I genuinely believe they are. I believe everybody is capable of killing, and I think there is a number of people out there who are responsible for murders who would still remain at large. I am my worst enemy. I could never be a millionaire because I help too many people. I'd just say, "Oh yes, I'll do that and I'll help you." Luckily, I do enough jobs that enable me to be able to do that, but I help far too many people. And how do I wake up in the morning? I'm a dog with a bone. I'm passionate about what I do. I wake up every morning, I think, "Do you know what? I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. I want to go and get this person, I want to go and get that person." I juggle probably at any one time about seven, eight cases. So at the moment, I've got two podcasts I'm doing. Two Miscarriages of Justice, one which is an incredible Miscarriage of Justice. This podcast will be out at the end of November. It's a murder, and this woman should not be in jail. So that's an incredible one, and I've found new evidence in relation to that, and then I've got another podcast, which is actually a terrorism case which is quite fascinating. I'm going to give you a bit of an insight into the intelligence world, MI5 and that, which was quite an insight. And then I've got two cases. I've got Nicola Payne, Lee Boxell, where I've done quite a bit of work. And then I've got the Ursula Herrmann case from Germany where we're still doing a little bit of work. And then I've got a programme that's just been commissioned, which I can't talk about at the moment, but it will be broadcast next year, and we've got some fascinating new evidence.

Are the police largely supportive of your work? Do they see you as welcomed resource to try and bring people to justice? You're already smiling because I suspect the answer's probably, "This man is a bit of an irritant." Particularly if you're trying to clear someone's name that might be falsely accused and is in prison now, because you're going to undo their work, and criticise their work, clearly.

I think it's an interesting one. I have some really good contacts, senior police officers, all ranks of officers, and I think I can sometimes be seen as a thorn in the side, but I think I can also be seen as a huge support. So, West Midlands Police in relation to Nicola Payne, they are working really closely with me, sharing all their information, and there's a real partnership that's taking place. Whereas other police forces sometimes aren't so helpful. I think it's all about having them being able to look at the wider issues, and senior officers now are far better than they used to be in so much as they really do want to find the truth, they really do want to catch the baddies, and if I can offer something that enables that to be done, then they'll work with me. But I will be critical. There are investigations that take place. The last Investigator we did, we looked at a case of Jessie Earl, and the programme goes out, and part of that programme with regards to the family was that they felt, they'd love to catch the killer, but one aspect they wanted is the coroner's inquest to be changed. They believed strongly that she was murdered, rather than as it was found, an open

verdict. And they're absolutely right. This case was then determined to be a murder years later. And I've said, "Look, I'll help you with it." So I said to the family, "You don't have to pay me anything. I'll work with my colleague, who's a lawyer, and the two of us will put a case together." So we're just finishing putting that case to the attorney general and we're going to ask the attorney general to refer that back to the coroner and overturn the inquest. Now the evidence, one would... if you look at it on paper, this is a case that was originally dealt with as a missing person. Her body was found naked in a bush, hands tied with her bra. And you have to look at that and go, "That's murder." There's no other way. You can't kill yourself in that fashion. There's nothing to support that, and actually, the coroner ruled out suicide. So therefore, it has to be an unlawful killing. He determined an open verdict. The family were never happy. What we do know at the time is a senior investigating officer specifically said, "This is not to be treated as a murder." A review was done in 2001 and that review by the new police officer said, "This is clearly murder." So you have the police record this as murder, yet it's a coroner's inquest saying it's an open verdict. It has to be clear for the attorney general to refer that back, and the family have said to me, "You know, if you do that, that's all our Christmases come together." So it's about trying to give justice back to people, and using my power and influence, and my contacts, to be able to say, "I'll do that." I think this is where I'm different in the police service. I'll talk to anyone. I'll challenge anybody. I'll question anybody. And I'll go anywhere, if it's necessary to do that. I've just been to Kuala Lumpur. At Christmas, I was in Kuala Lumpur. The family of a young girl, Ivana Smit, who was found on a balcony, some 14 floors below where she was having a party that night, and the police said that this was a suicide. Nothing more than that. Either that, or she fell off. And the family said, "No. This is not true. It can't be." So we went over there, went over with my lawyer friend and everyone spoke to us. And it was quite clear this is a homicide. No doubt this is a homicide. So I put a report together saying it was a homicide, went and spoke to the Malaysian police, told them it was a homicide. An inquest which was open two weeks ago has now, and it's still ongoing, but so far, the evidence is overwhelmingly saying this is a homicide.

Do you have an eye on the optics as you're doing these kinds of investigations? And how does it work if you're going to investigate three things, does one of them become a programme or do you envisage all three of them becoming ultimately a programme?

All three, yes. I mean I think some things are better done in a different way. This is why I'm going to start to do this podcast, because I think sometimes, there's one thing getting someone to talk to you to write for the newspaper, there's another thing getting someone to talk to you to go on the radio, because they're not visual, but getting someone to go on camera, give up their anonymity, speak, be seen forever, is a big task. So there is a balance sometimes. And I think sometimes they're easier to do in other ways. But when I set off to do something, it is about trying to open up and use my influence. And the media is very powerful. The media tool. And Savile is a classic one of that. If we hadn't have had the momentum from the programme, we wouldn't have been able to change not just legislation, but change peoples' lives. That changed the face of the BBC. The director general resigned as a result of the actions that followed that. Rightly so, you know, it's a different guard in there now, but you have to say, "What were the BBC thinking about?" I wrote to the director general and I said to him, "Listen, give me an interview, and I'll put these allegations

to him.” Any PR advisor, you’re a PR advisor, anybody would look at that and go, “It’s not our watch. It happened years and years ago. What I’ll do is I’ll give you an interview.” And I’ll say to him, “This is shocking. We will look at this, we will launch our own investigation, and we will get to the bottom of what’s taken place and if offences have occurred, we will go through the right channels and refer it.” All he needed to do. If he had done that, that would’ve saved face from the BBC. But because he didn’t give an interview, and then because they started to try and justify it and try to explain in certain ways ...

Game over.

Game over. Be honest, be straight. And it’s always very easy when it happened years and years ago. It’s an old guard.

What’s the stickiest situation you’ve been in? Because I mean I grew up watching Roger Cook doorstepping anyone and he ... the late, great Roger Cook, he used to doorstep these big, burly criminals and you know, it was genuinely incredible television. That guy had balls.

No, we do. And I think we miss that. I do think we miss that. I think journalism has changed massively now. Investigative journalism is very different. We went through the Roger Cook era of really having those challenging people, the Donal MacIntyres, those types of things. We don’t have those now.

Even Watchdog used to doorstep people and then chase them down the street. Now it’s all very studio-based.

Oh, yes. And I think lawyers are now more and more scared in terms of doorstepping people. I mean, we’ve got a great programme that’s going out in terms of the Birmingham bombings where they are going to doorstep the alleged offender, but that’s very, very rare now. Getting a doorstep is a luxury. And I think we ... I’d like us to move back into that confrontational position, because there are people out there who need to answer questions and not hide behind a lawyer. But yes, what’s the most dangerous? I’ve been confronted in Thailand. I went to Thailand, and went undercover in Thailand, and I’ve been surrounded by some heavies who basically say, “I’m going to smash your cameras up unless you give us the card.” I was in Cambodia, where I’ve had people who have confronted me again. I think if you spoke to people who work with me, they’d go, “God Mark, you do loads of dangerous things.” But I suppose from my point of view is that they’re always very balanced in terms of where I’m coming from. I suppose the threats that I get. Receiving a petrol bomb, that’s pretty scary. Receiving child abuse material, that’s pretty horrible. The threats that I get ...

Why would someone do that? I mean obviously they’re clearly nutters if they would do that and I don’t think there would be a sin explanation, but why would they bother?

Yes, I don't know. I think people become very passionate about certain things and I call them the Green Ink Brigade. This is what makes our country great and the world great.

What, the nutters?

Well, people are different, aren't they? People are different. If we were all the same, that said, it'd be great that those nutters didn't exist, but they do. And I'm quite an outspoken person. I'm very clear in terms of what my views are. I will listen. None more so... I mean, probably the one case I've dealt with that gets the most abuse is the Madeleine McCann case. I get huge amounts of abuse when I talk about that, and that's because people are very divided in terms of their view. It's emotive. I mean, Gerry and Kate, I think probably one of their biggest failings, and I think this was a failing from their PR team right at the very beginning, or their advisors from the very beginning, was that what they should have done is come out and said, "We've made the biggest mistake of our life. We should never have left our child in there. We now have to suffer that every day." Rather than try to justify some of that, you know, "It's like leaving them in the back garden," or, "We could see there." And there was never any justification for that. Sadly, there are people who do it. But thankfully, 99% of those people, nothing ever happens. Their children are fine. People have got a viewing relation to that, "Oh yes, my parents used to leave me, etc, etc." They were wrong. And I think that's where some of that backlash has come from. And of course they then became suspects and it's moved on and it's taken a life of its own. And because there's no closure, people then want to fill that void, and that's what it's about. If you don't get an answer, that void gets filled, and the media is brilliant at that. When we're covering a case, if the police don't give us anything, there are some outlets that will just make it up, and just fill that void, where it's like, "Hang on a minute. If that partnership..." And that's where police officers, that's where press officers, really earn their crust in terms of being of value in terms of the public, because if a major crime happens, and I always say this to the press officers, is that it's not for you to limit the amount of information that gets out, it's about you facilitating that information. And we are your facilitators in terms of the eyes and ears.

So what we can do, you know, there's only a certain amount of police officers out there and about, what we can do is give the picture to the wide audience. It's not for you to sanitise that. It's not for you to control that. Yes, of course, some information shouldn't come out – it's really important from an operational point of view. But to be belligerent and to be evasive and to not answer the phone or to not give that information, I think is really, really awkward and I think there is ... one thing I would say in terms of police press officers, is that there are some very good ones out there, but there's also some really bad ones. I remember going to the Home Office Select committee after Cliff Richard's raid, and the chief constable of South Yorkshire Police was there. And of course, that was the force area that was involved in the case, and I remember him saying, he said, "You know, we were really surprised that all the press turned up in terms of the house, and everything like that." I thought, "Sorry, are you on the same planet as the rest of us? Cliff Richard!" And I remember Val saying to him, "Well did you think there would be more than one photographer?" He said, "Well, we thought probably a photographer and perhaps a camera crew." It's like, "Hang on a minute, are you on the same planet?" And I remember tweeting

that day and saying to the force and said, "If you ever want to come and spend some time in a news room, I'll facilitate it for you." You know, mad. Seriously mad. And I think that when you get into that mindset, you're creating a real problem. I mean, the relationship between the press officer and the journalist was mad, was seriously mad. There were kisses being put on the end of text messages, there was sharing ...

It was almost coercive as well from the BBC guy, and to the police.

No, absolutely. What I found really strange is, and of course I knew about that investigation many months before. I actually remember talking to a colleague of mine, another reporter, and I remember saying to him, "Is this ongoing? But at this moment, I'm not quite sure where it's going." Because the Metropolitan Police had it and then gave it over to South Yorkshire to deal with. And then suddenly you've got this individual at the BBC who's basically saying, "Oh we've got this great thing." And I'm going, "It's been around for months. It's not even a story." It's not a story unless you make it a story. Well done, police. You made it a story. I mean, it was nothing. Could you just simply go back to them? How many times have I been to the police and told them something and they go, "Yes, we can't comment one way or the other. It's an ongoing operation." Fine.

What future plans do you have? Is it more telly? Is it more stuff in America? Are you going to move back into fiction and start writing your own stuff? I mean, clearly, the world's your oyster.

Well, I love getting the baddies. I love catching the baddies, and I think so ... I continue to do that. I've got a programme that will be out in early part of next year, 2019. I've got something else very exciting that I can't talk about at the moment, which will be out next year. I'm in talks with an American channel in terms of doing a crime programme or series for them. Obviously, I've got my ongoing ITV commitments in terms of The Investigator and my This Morning commitments.

It seems to be doing very well on Netflix as well.

Yes. Netflix, I mean Netflix is brilliant, translated into some 38 languages.

Incredible.

And I think if you'd said to me years ago, "What would you love to do?" And I'd go, "Well I'd love to have a programme on Netflix." I've got that now! So I can then think, "What's the next thing?" You know, listen, I've achieved some amazing things. I'm very grateful. And it's not just me. I have an amazing small little team around me. My producer's amazing. I've got a Peabody Award. Those are really rare, and it's a great honour to have that. RTS Award, I've been nominated for BAFTA, and ...

You've been on the Media Masters Podcast.

And I've been on the Media Masters Podcast. So, where is there next to go?

Well, only down, I think. This is the pinnacle.

Yes, listen, I love the work I do. I'm passionate about it. I will continue to strive to get people answers, give justice to people, and be honest and true in terms of the work that I do. I think my moral compass is high, I think my values are high, and I want to be able to allow the public to make up their mind. And I think that's what it is. I think we as broadcasters, as investigative journalists, it's our role to put the information out there and ultimately let the public decide. It's not for us to dictate to them.

Mark, you're a legend, and I've really enjoyed this. Thank you ever so much for your time.

Thank you.