

articulate

To connect by a joint, to speak distinctly.

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Buttercup Bounce!

The Great
Get Together

Team Talk:
Critical Care
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Redevelopment
Update

Mark Lane: GARDENING GREATNESS



I was born in Hertfordshire but grew up in Brighton & Hove. School was not an enjoyable experience. Whilst I didn't struggle academically and was always at the top of the class for just about everything, my only salvation was in music and art.



A keen flautist and artist from a young age, I steered towards architecture and horticultural therapy as a profession but went on to study Art History at University College in London instead. I continued playing the flute and became principle flautist for the university orchestra.

After university I went into publishing and worked my way up to the managing editor position at a leading international arts publisher. It was at this time that my car accident curtailed my career and I had to review the life I had and what I enjoyed and how I was going to go forward in this new position.

With my love for gardening and art background, I decided to study landscape design. As a child, I had followed my grandparents around their large garden with string, a pair of blunt scissors and a small fork and trowel tie in the clematis and runner beans, deadhead the roses and sow seeds. I have a sneaky suspicion that Grandad cared for the seeds when I wasn't there as I was always amazed at how well they had grown.

I spent a long time at RNOH following a car accident 17 years ago. Amongst my many therapies, I met a wonderful horticultural therapist who told me that I had to go forward and to champion being in a wheelchair. After a four-year rehabilitation, I left the RNOH and I started looking for horticultural courses and visited many schools. If I was shocked at the terrible layout of the campuses and limited options for someone in a wheelchair, I was horrified to be told that they would not be able to validate the course because I wouldn't be able to do the physical side of the course, for example, dig holes and complete site surveys. With a strong and dogged determination, I looked online and found a suitable Open Learning course.

Even as an established garden designer, I have had to explain to clients that I have help to undertake physical side of site survey and digging. Sometimes I have bad days which mean I will be unavailable but every client has been welcoming and understanding. Finding something as meaningful to me as garden design, has really helped remove the spectre of depression that hung around my shoulders after my accident. Of course I still have down

days but with the right medication I know I can continue, albeit at a managed pace.

To help me negotiate muddy sites, I have two all-terrain wheelchairs to help me. At home I have a height adjustable desk and a wheelchair desk chair. Other than that, I suppose the biggest adaptations I have made are from within. I am more determined, level headed and passionate about what I do. In a strange way for me, becoming a wheelchair users full time has been positive. I probably would not be where I am today if I had carried on my publishing career.

My first professional commission was a large garden for a lovely retired headmistress, whose brief was low maintenance; it would help with her physiotherapy and be a joy to look at 12 months of the year. I designed two circular lawn areas with a pathway wrapping around the two in a figure of eight.

I have not looked back from taking my first nervous steps as a garden designer. After designing numerous gardens, I started writing articles for magazines and which were picked up by a BBC research team. This opened the door to my BBC presenting work. Whilst I do not class myself as a celebrity, it is surreal watching myself on TV and people asking for photographs and autographs. I have thoroughly enjoyed the presenting work and hope it continues for years many to come. More importantly, if someone with a spinal condition sees me doing TV work, undertaking landscape designs then all the better. Hopefully it will inspire others to get on with their lives.

I was honoured to be asked to be the Health, Wellbeing & Community ambassador for Groundwork, a charity which focuses on improving communities by addressing environmental issues and improving deprived areas of the country by either building, redeveloping or maintaining green sites. Thrive, a gardening disability charity to which I can relate to, bestowed the title of ambassador to me, and centres on positively changing lives through horticultural therapy.

I am where I am today because of the very wise words of Linda Exley and Viv Williams, RNOH horticultural therapists. Thank you so much for your words of wisdom and encouragement – it would be great to see you again. I owe so much to the RNOH and their incredible staff.

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