

## Who Cares? project

### Transcript of podcast episode 6: MARC

*[Music plays]*

Narrator: Welcome to the Who Cares? Project podcast. Who Cares? is an intergenerational oral history project, generously supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

In the spring of 2023, 40 A level drama and acting diploma students, interviewed 12 people, living in six care homes, in South London. What you're listening to here is an edited version of one of those original interviews. This one is with Marc. Additional interviews, with families, friends and carers were recorded by the project producers. The Who Cares? Project was created to give a voice to people whose stories might otherwise go untold. For more information, please go to [www.whocaresproject.co.uk](http://www.whocaresproject.co.uk).

*[Music plays]*

Marc: Photography is something that's changed the world, and I've helped to change it.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: I was born in Hackney, 1928. The family came from France in 1730. The King of France decided if you weren't a Catholic, it was the guillotine. So my family went to Aldgate, where they became linen makers, you know, linen and silks and everything like that. Now I always was interested in photography. Now when I was eight I used to love taking pictures. So my dad bought me a box camera. The first thing I did was photograph the dogs and cats in the street. That built up into people round about wanting me to take their pictures of their animals.

After that he bought me a pull-out camera. It's a camera which pulled out and used film called roll film. 120 was the first one ever and that was used in the First World War as a camera. Then photography developed from there. [Camera clicks]

I heard of a job going. They had a film studio at Finsbury Park and so I applied as a 16 year old and got a job, which was wonderful. I didn't take any films, but I was the person that handed up the film. [Projector whirring] I then learnt how to develop the still film. You go into a dark room, develop the film all in the dark, and then you put it in a thing called a fix, which fix that image so it can be used. Then it went into a wash, what we call a wash, and then you pegged it up, you then hung it up, and afterwards you developed with an enlarger.

[Plane flying over] Then the war came and I was in the air force in the last year and a half. I got a letter to say, we're getting very short of men, question mark with me! I was called up and went through the training. Then I went into the counter invasion into France. It was a terrible business. When you think of men on, whether it's German or us, suddenly you're there and suddenly a man's killed. When a man you had lunch with was shot down, it's very difficult to bear.

I think it hardened me a bit and I got a bit ruder. I didn't trust people so much. Before that I was a, you know, loved everybody and trusted everybody. But I didn't have the same feeling. You know, it's very difficult to explain. It's getting back from a war. But I didn't get out for another three years because they were very short of men that was killed. Then when I was in the air force, when they fly they take pictures of the places, and I got a job in overlap mosaic filming.

I came out and I went to Regent Street Polytechnic. It was the top of Regent Street and they used to teach you all the things of Hollywood. I didn't get on too well with the top teacher because I kept deviating in my own ideas. Then I was put into one film called 'The Cowboy Rides Again'. I've got a still somewhere of me with a shotgun holding up the bank, which I quite enjoyed. [Shotgun firing] Then my dad wrote to my uncle. My uncle was in a place called Hollywood, Culver City, and it was a very exciting place and all the films, black and white films.

My uncle was amongst the first to make movie films. Developed funny films and serious films. David Neal, his name was. My dad wrote and told him, Marc's getting a bit fed up with it all. So he said, send him over.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: When I went there was a very tough Irish man who was working in charge, Mr Ronald O'Casey, who was head of the films there. He said, go into a studio and I'm going to give you one plate. We're doing stills. One plate and you've got to take the picture, develop and process it and then show me a print. If it's satisfactory, you're in, and if you are not satisfactory, I'm afraid there's no chance. They used spotlights in those days. It's a big camera on wheels with a hard light that shoots through. Those were the lights there. I thought, it's not very kind to the person being photographed. So I developed a soft film.

So it's a circular disc, and when you switched it on, it was lovely, soft, as if you were out in the daylight but soft. I'd photographed a girl called Sybil Thorndike. When he saw this he said, this is the stuff. He said, you're in. They liked the technique I had that you could get an innocent sort of new person, and I used to look at their face very carefully and see what's what there, turn the face to the left or right, and that's very important to get that shot, and then take the picture. [Camera shutter clicks]

Fiona: Marc's very good at making people at their ease. He's able to talk to anybody, anytime, anywhere. He's always very relaxed and he's good at getting people to relax, because obviously when you're photographing, that's the first thing that you have to do is to get them to relax and trust you. It's a very intrusive thing being photographed, even if you're used to it.

Marc: Looking at a face and balancing it, it's a bit like, just imagine the people who were painting, the artists, the joy one gets. You've got somebody sitting there and you can create a living image which will continue, we hope, indefinitely. From there I gradually went into bigger stuff in Culver City, and then I was in the film industry, Hollywood, photographing all sorts of big stars, enjoying every minute of it.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: I used to love the musicals. That was my favourite. There was Fred Astaire and all those sort of people, and the beautiful singing voices of those days.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: In those days the people on the films, they used to shout, stills! I was called in, I took my camera, it was a stand camera, and you took a picture, and that's the way it worked in those days.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: Favourite person... I think Marilyn Monroe's one of my favourites. I always looked depressed, you see. When I was small I used to be on the bus and Mrs Jones used to say, now listen sonny, I want you to smile a bit now. I said, I'm sorry but I'm like this always. Marilyn Monroe was coming along and she said, hello honey, why are you looking so bad? I said, I'm not, Miss Monroe. This is how they are. She said, well you're coming to lunch with me. Of course when I went into the canteen they said, ah she's got a new boyfriend. She said, he's a bit young at the moment. So that's my first meeting with Marilyn Monroe. Lovely, and quite intelligent.

*[Film clip:*

*Male: Say, they told me you were stupid. You don't sound stupid to me.*

*Marilyn Monroe: I can be smart when it's important.]*

Marc: She made a film, there's no doubt about it, and she came on the films, everybody liked her, and that was her.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: Before I got married I had a studio at 42 Wardour Street. I shared a studio with a gentleman who got me to photograph British worldwide film, Simone Signoret, who was the star in Hollywood.

*[News clip: Simone Signoret, one of Europe's greatest stars. Two time award winner for the best actress of the year.]*

Marc: She was called over especially for me to photograph, which I thought was wonderful. I liked her.

Fiona: I'm Fiona. I'm Marc's wife.

*[Music plays]*

Marc: Well my wife was a ballet dancer. She was in the Royal Ballet. She came to me to be photographed, and it's a bit of a nice story. So we fell in love [laughs].

Fiona: We have been together since 1964. He photographed a very good friend of mine and she said, you have to go and have your photograph taken by Marc. So that was how I got to meet him in the first place. Then to look at the proofs, because in those days it was all – it was black and white, it was medium format and the proofs came in a sheet of 12 little squares, and from those you chose which ones you wanted to be enlarged. So in order to do this, Marc kind of commandeered a table in the Kardomah coffee shop in Piccadilly, and that's where he met his clients [laughs].

So that was where I chose my pictures. Then after that...

Marc: I went up to see her family in Scotland, because they're very strict there. He said, well let me see your bank balance sonny. At that time I was only earning a small amount. He said, well I'll take a chance on you because you seem to be getting ahead.

Fiona: Then we were married at Caxton Hall in Westminster in the autumn. So it wasn't very long [laughs].

Marc: I never regret it. Wonderful lady.

*[Music plays]*

Fiona: I was a dancer. I'd already pretty much given up because my knees had given out, so I decided that I was going to sort of just carry on and help Marc with his photography, which is what I did. So I became the sorcerer's apprentice really [laughs].

Marc: She travelled the world with me.

Fiona: We just did everything together. Of course at that time it was always – once the photographs were taken, the film had to be processed, and then you had to do the proofs. Then the pictures had to be chosen and then they had to be printed. So we spent quite a lot of time in the darkroom. Marc's a very good printer. He can magically transform with various means that now are done digitally. It worked out very well.

Marc: I was – been sent to Switzerland and Germany and everywhere you can think of. I never stopped taking pictures. [Camera shutter clicks and camera winds]

Fiona: When I look at the old diaries, because I've got diaries going back to about '61, and I look and see what we did, I don't know how we fitted it all in. Because we used to do the photography, go out visit friends, go out to dinner, entertain. Then once all that was over we'd go back and we'd work in the darkroom afterwards, probably until about two o'clock in the morning, if there was still something that had to be done for the next day, and then start again.

- Marc: I took some pictures one day for one of the Queen's daughters.
- Fiona: Princess Anne with her dog.
- Marc: Because I always loved animals and I was introduced to some people in the Kennel Club. Then I became their head photographer.
- Fiona: And still is a member of the Kennel Club and did a lot of photography for them latterly.
- Marc: Then the Tatler asked me to take pictures of all the famous stars with their dogs. So I did a whole series there. I also did people's cats, which they liked. I love cats. I'm very fond of them. I've got a lot of champions. I had a cat called Fittleworth which we found in a farmhouse.
- Fiona: It was a beautiful longhaired, semi-longhaired red, very, very clever little cat. He always wanted to be where everybody was. So he'd go and sit on the chair in the studio just when we were expecting someone to come for a sitting. The cat would be sitting there [laughs] say, it's my turn. Then quite by accident he got a part in the West End, the cat. So he did a year and a half in the West End in three different theatres in a play called Spring and Port Wine. He didn't get his Equity card. No, he should have done, shouldn't he [laughs].
- Marc: Then she said one day, oh I think I'm expecting a little one. I said, my God that's a bit of a shock.
- Fiona: It was quite a surprise. Marc is quite a joker. He said to one of our neighbours, he said, oh well you know Fiona's having a baby? They said, oh go on, don't be ridiculous. Stop telling silly stories [laughs]. They didn't actually believe him. Of course it was true.
- Marc: Then she had Fleur, small, small girl.
- Fiona: It was quite difficult, but we managed and we got some help. Then when she was a little bit older, Marc was doing photography for some cat books and we had to go abroad to take some photographs of particular breeds of cat. So I spoke to her teacher and I said, do I get somebody in to look after her while we're away? So her teacher said, no, take her with you. So we did. But this was in January so it was quite crazy. What was she, five? Five year old? She thought it was wonderful.
- Marc: Then we sent her to school and I made certain that she went to, you know, a good school. Because in England, come what may, a good school makes a difference to a good job. Then unfortunately as the years went by I was in the wrong side of a car and it hit me. After the years, I found it very difficult for my wife to cope with me, because if she was away out shopping, I was worried when she was going to come back. She was worried about me when she was out in case I fell down the stairs. Then eventually I came here, which is a pleasing place. The staff are nice.
- Trina: I'm Trina. I'm the wellbeing leader. Marc is a very articulate man. When I was getting to know him when he first came in, I asked him to describe himself. It's always stuck with me of how he described his humour. He said, you know Trina I'm very near the knuckle and I can be perceived as quite dark with my humour, and some people either get it or they don't. Actually that is very true to form to the Marc that we know. He's unapologetically himself but he is very good in social circles, he's a very keen gardener. He's taken the lead

on many gardening projects that we have here. He knows what he wants, he knows what he likes and he certainly knows what he doesn't like.

Fiona: He's a very positive person. He's very much his own person. He knows exactly what he wants to do and when he wants to do it. That is still the case. I think that's probably why at 95 he's still very much in his own skin.

Trina: He's very polite. He interacts more with staff, I would say, than other residents. He will talk a lot because he has a lot to say. We do residents' meetings here. He's a massive part of those. He's very, very good at feeding back constructive criticism as well as praise, and is very knowledgeable about everything that goes on within the home.

Fiona: He wants to transform the garden here. They took him to the garden centre, down to Squires, and then one of the carers phoned me and said, Marc wants to buy this bird table, is that all right? So I said, yeah ok. They put it in their car and they brought it back for him. That's what he's like. If he wants to do something, he will persuade people that they should help him to do it, and they do [laughs]. He is going to take some pictures.

Marc: I've got one of my old cameras and it still works well, and carry on taking pictures, because that is my love. I love taking pictures. Looking around this place, and a lot of them have asked me, people are interesting. Everybody is a personality. I can photograph anybody and make them look a star. I still sit here at one in the morning looking at my film, at my pictures and saying, will you be here tomorrow? What's the next move, Mr Henrie? I often talk to them at night and the pictures don't answer back. I thought, I will be here tomorrow, and I hope to carry on 'till the end, because there's nothing like it. Photography has changed the world. [Camera shutter clicks and camera winds]

*[Music plays]*

Narrator: The Who Cares? Interviews were recorded by students from Burntwood School, the Norwood School, Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal, with additional material recorded by Rachel Edwards, Sasha Neal and Nic Wassell. This episode was edited by Clare Lynch and directed by Rachel Edwards and Sasha Neal.

*[Music plays]*



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