

## **I AM STILL ME**

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This video is of my brother-in-law Mike Lynch, who was diagnosed with early onset dementia (Alzheimer's) in 2021 at the age of 57.

Mike was a Chartered Civil Engineer, calculating the quantities of materials required to build bridges prior to bidding for contracts. Mike worked all over the world but mainly Dubai and Malaysia.

Mike is still fully able to make decisions for himself and has given his full approval for this video to be made and shown.

At present Mike is now unable to read or write, he sometimes forgets how to tell the time, his balance and depth of vision have begun to decline, although he still walks around Porthcawl for a hour a day, but now has a walking partner in case he forgets where he is and gets lost. His main frustration is remembering things and getting the correct words out when speaking. Overall, though with the aid of his great mindset and medication, he is fighting the illness and doing considerably well.

Is the video ethical? I believe so, it shows Mike, who was an ordinary family man but is now struggling with simple tasks such as inserting the two last pieces of a twelve-piece jigsaw (Mike used to complete 1500-piece jigsaws in one sitting to relax). It also highlights his struggle finding the right words

when talking and his frustration around this. However, none of this has shown Mike personally in a negative light.

The reason for choosing dementia as a photographic and video medium is I wanted to put across the impact dementia has upon a person, this is close to my heart as I looked after my mum (Susan Sims) until she passed away due to Lewi Body dementia four years ago. Unlike Mike my mum's dementia was aggressive and fast, from full diagnosis until her death was only two years.

The beginning of the video show Mike stating his name, the fact he was a civil engineer and that he has dementia (This took many, many attempts this took).

The video then depicts Mike in early photographs with his family, resent photographs from three different shoots of him around a park, by the beach and in his home in his kitchen, these are mainly in colour but a few a black and white. The main video elements are of Mike doing a jigsaw at the table, then of him stating he used to use a fancy camera but now he must use an easy one and then Mike trying to and failing to say he used to write reports for a living. These videos are broken up into shorter sequences, interrupted by photographs so as not make the video clips long winded and thus boring for the audience.

At the end of the clip there are series of nine photographs following Mike walking away from the camera, up a hill on a very cold cloudy day, the representation of Mike disappearing is a juxtaposition of the disappearing process of losing oneself to dementia.

The final clip is of Mike in his kitchen making a funny face and poking his tongue out, which for me is a powerful image showing he is still himself and not yet fully lost to this terrible illness. It is then finished with the poignant words "I AM STILL

ME”, which of course he is and will always be hidden inside his being.

I believe that the style of images, being close ups and of longer distance shots set over three sessions are a true representation of photojournalism within contemporary practice. As are the representational, styles of interviewing and watching within the video. These were challenging to undertake for many reasons, which include bringing back distressing memories seeing my mums struggles, and deterioration. Knowing Mike for over thirty years and now seeing him fail at the simplest of tasks, having to watch his frustration, but mostly knowing he still has enough comprehension left to know what he is doing wrong and know what he used to be able to do, is deeply saddening and in many ways humbling.

Mike like the 900,000 thousand (Alzheimer’s society, 2022) people in the UK suffering from the many forms of dementia, do not look disabled, and some members of the public and businesspeople (mainly shopworkers) are still clueless of this illness and can become rude, negative, and annoyed with him, although this is getting better with training and more understanding. This does impact Mike does become very self conscious and upset by this.

Hopefully this type of photographic work will keep dementia in the public’s mind and help support individuals with this terrible illness.

This video has been uploaded to youtube:

<https://youtu.be/lciQy8SdTaM?si=J0ASkV2InNVt0gWi>

## Reference

Alzheimer's Society (2022). *What Is dementia? | Alzheimer's Society*. [online] [www.alzheimers.org.uk](https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/types-dementia/what-is-dementia). Available at: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/types-dementia/what-is-dementia>.