



War Widows' Stories

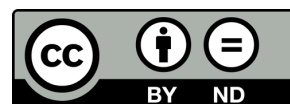
History. Memories. Heritage.

An Interview with Jo Jukes

3 October 2019

Conducted by Nadine Muller

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To do so, and for any other questions about this interview, how you may use it, or about the project, please contact Dr Nadine Muller via email (info@warwidowsstories.org.uk), or by post at the following addressing: John Foster Building, Liverpool John Moores University, 80-98 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool, L3 5UZ.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent / Interviewee

[] = Clarification note

I: Today is 3rd October 2019, and I'm interviewing Jo Jukes. Jo, could you tell me how old you are?

R 48.

I: Thank you. Jo, I wonder if we can start with your childhood. Do you want to tell me a little bit about where you were born, where you grew up, that kind of thing?

R: I was born in Sutton Coldfield. I was premature; I weighed a bag of sugar, and I was born that long ago that they didn't even have formula milk so I had to be brought up on Carnation milk, watered down, which, nowadays, they'd probably hung, draw and quarter you, wouldn't they, for giving a baby that? My mum and dad weren't together when I was born; there was a lot of arguing about ... you know, they were quite young. I lived with my mum; we moved all over. We went to Cheltenham, lived in Lichfield, and then my mum emigrated to Australia when I was five as part of the ... They had like a system for single parents to go overseas; you got cheap travel and then all the children were put in a boarding school. So, I was put in a boarding school at Pinjarra, in Western Australia, from five until I was seven. It's quite well known, this boarding school, because it came out that it was quite abusive and bullying. It was difficult to ... You were met at the airport by someone who ... My mum spent one night with me in a foreign country – I was amazed by the sounds of the kookaburras and the massive spiders that were in the toilet – and then she had to leave. She was given somewhere to live in Perth, which was a day's travel away, so I saw my mum maybe every six weeks.

So, yeah, that was quite hard. You were put in a dormitory with loads of girls. Obviously, I was wetting the bed and things like that and then you'd get punished for wetting the bed. It wasn't very nurturing. It wasn't a very nice place to be. My mum had me back to live with her when she found a house and got a job, so about two years later. Then my Nan came over from England when I was 8 or 9 and, apparently, I said that I wanted to go and live with my Nan, so I was shipped off back to England with my

Nan, and my family were told it was because my mum couldn't cope with me, that I was so naughty and out of control that my mum couldn't handle me. At that time, I was told that my mum would have me back at eighteen. I remember she used to phone me, and I would refuse to take her phone calls because I felt so angry, "Well, I'm not going to see you until I'm eighteen, so what's the point of even trying to have a relationship with you?" She'd write me letters. I'd ignore the letters.

When I was nine, she met someone over in Australia, and she was going to get married, and all of a sudden, she wanted me back. So, she came over to England and took me back to Australia. I was met at the airport by my new stepdad, and I was introduced to him. He'd bought me this dog, who I called Sailor. It was the first dog I'd ever had. He was an Old English Sheepdog. They got married, and my stepdad, he liked to cheat on my mum quite a lot. I think they actually only stayed married for maybe a year and a half, or two years. It turned out that the dog he'd bought me, he'd actually taken one of his mistresses with him to choose and bought her my dog's brother at the same time, and at some point – I don't know how – but we ended up looking after his mistress's dog and our dog at the same time.

When I was about fourteen – when they were going through a divorce – my mum decided to go and find herself on holiday on her own. She went to Singapore. My stepdad said, "Do you know what? Yes, I'm capable, I'll look after her. I'll make sure she's okay. It's my time to prove myself." I remember dropping my mum off at the airport and my stepdad saying to me, "I'm just going to go to my friend's house, I'll be back later with a KFC," because they have KFC in Australia as well, and he didn't come back. He just left me in the house. I went to my best friend's house across the road. Her mum was always quite a nurturing kind of ... you know ... It's where my second home was. I told her and she basically refused to let me go back to the house, and she called social services because, as far as she was concerned, I'd been neglected and abandoned. Obviously, my mum wasn't in the country. When my mum came back, obviously she found out about all of this and she sat me down and she said, "Did anything happen while I was on holiday?" And, of course, as a child, you don't want to be the one that's responsible for breaking up a family, because all I wanted was a family, and I said, "No, no, everything was fine." She went, "Hmm, so you were looked after well?" "Yes, yes, everything was great," and it took quite a while for her to say, "I have been told it was different." I did tell her in the end, that, you know, obviously my stepdad had not been around, and that ended their marriage, which was quite sad really. It was the final nail in the coffin.

So, then she decided that she wanted to come back to England. So, when I was 15, I was sent back to England. I had to do the journey on my own because the education system in Australia is completely different to England. In Australia I was getting ready to leave school, but because of when my birthday fell I had to come back to England and start the last year, so the fifth year of senior school, here, and I had to come back by a certain date, otherwise I'd have to do longer. It was something like that. So, I had to travel on my own, so I travelled from Australia to England, and I was met at the airport by my Nan, and I stayed with my Nan while I did my last year at school here. That was quite difficult because in those days it was the O-levels. GCSEs were just coming in and some of it relied on having to do coursework that had been set over two

years. So, in the last year, I had to do all the coursework and get ready for all these exams. In Australia, it was completely different, so science is social studies, so that that's mixed in with history and some sciences, things like that. Whereas over here it was, if you wanted to do chemistry you'd have to break up all the sciences so you couldn't do "science" as an overall thing. You had to do biology or chemistry or whatever. I think I decided to do some GCSEs, but I was told that, basically, I wouldn't pass because I hadn't got enough knowledge of these subjects. I hadn't studied them for long enough. Then I ended up coming out with probably the basic O-levels that you could get.

And I think I became a bit rebellious. I think because my Nan was quite easy-going and she didn't really care about ... As long as I was okay, she let me do whatever. Then I got into my first relationship at that age. I ended up living with someone when I was fifteen. He was the same age as me; I lived with his parents and him. That finished when I was about eighteen, and it wasn't the best of relationships. He was quite abusive and, you know, he cheated on me a lot, he had an anger problem, and things like that. Then after I'd left him, I got pregnant with my first daughter. I was a single parent, my mum was back in England by then, and I lived in a bedsit on my own and was on benefits. It was quite difficult trying to manage financially, you know, getting all the stuff ready and then bringing her up. Her dad didn't want to know. I would say that he wasn't very interested because we were both quite young, so I just decided that this was my daughter and I'd just bring her up on my own. Then, I'd say when she was about nine or ten months old, I met my first husband. He was quite a bit older than me, and, obviously, you look back in retrospect and think I was probably looking for a father figure, a stable family. I had a thing about ... I just wanted a family; I just wanted to be quite stable. He was 32 and I was nineteen, and he was in the Navy.

So, I was living in Portsmouth at the time, and we lived in Portsmouth for a while. He left me when I became pregnant with my son because he couldn't handle the responsibility of being a father, even though he was 32 and it was his first child. [Laughs] Then we got back together when my son was about six months old. My son's birth was quite traumatic; I had pre-eclampsia and a prolapsed cord, so I ended up having an emergency caesarean, and then the wound got infected and broke down and so on and so on. I've always said he's been difficult since the day he was born because he's a boy. [Laughs] So then we got back together, and I was living a house I was renting from my mum. She had re-met my natural father, my biological father, and they decided to start a relationship. She decided she was moving up to Lichfield, so I rented her house from her in Portsmouth. Then she decided to sell the house because she wanted to move permanently up there, and I was left in a situation where I was either going to go into a council flat, which, the houses I was being offered weren't the best, or I could just get married, and I'd get married quarters. And on the day of the wedding, I remember turning to my dad and saying, "Is it too late to back out of this?" Like I knew it probably wasn't the right person. But I was in a situation where I had no choice: it was either marry him, get a married quarter and everything will be stable, or go into some pretty bad areas. So, I married him, and we moved to Plymouth, because he was in the Navy, and we were in married quarters in Crownhill in Plymouth.

He was a submariner so he was based in lots of different places: he was based at Faslane at one point, he was based somewhere else that I can't remember the name of, but I never moved. I didn't move around with him because I wanted the kids to have stability. So, for me, the fact that we were in married quarters was stable enough, so I wasn't going to follow him around the country; I just wanted the kids to have probably the life that I didn't have because we moved around so much. You know, I wanted them to have friends that they could say later on in life, "Oh, I remember you from primary school," because that's things I didn't have. I think he did twenty ... he finished his twenty-two years in the Navy and we relocated up to Birmingham because my family were all in Lichfield. And I would say within two months of him coming out, the effect of him coming out of the Navy was too much on our marriage because I was used to him not being around that much, so to then get used to someone being around that, probably, personality-wise you're not ... you don't get on that well. You can put up with them at home for two weeks on leave, but when all of a sudden you are around them all the time. The differences in you become more apparent.

So, I would say my marriage lasted ten years purely because he wasn't around very often. We decided to split up, and it took him quite a while to actually go. He was quite an abusive man. I think he was later on diagnosed with PTSD. He couldn't control his money; he couldn't control his drinking; he couldn't control a lot about himself. He'd had a very difficult childhood himself, so he was very jealous of the relationship I had with the kids. Yes, he was quite difficult. He did move out in the end, and he then used to stalk me and follow me around everywhere I went. He used to get my neighbours to spy on me and report back to him if the washing was on the line, if I was looking after the kids. I had a house from Haig Homes, and he used to phone up Haig Homes and say that I was living off illicit means, that I had men in my house all the time, that the children were jumping over these men, even though he wasn't actually in the house. It came to the crux one time when he followed me home from a night out with my friends. He hid in the bushes just down the road, and he came out of the bushes and held me and my friend hostage in the house with a broken bottle. He ended up punching me in the jaw and things like that. The police were called, and he was arrested. He was put on bail conditions to keep away from me and the house, and he was bound to keep the peace in the end, so if he did anything like that again, you know, he'd be charged. But I did go through with the charging, I didn't kind of let it go. When he broke the bail conditions, I always let the police know.

I mean, it's just a shame for the kids, really, because they saw a lot of this, and they saw, you know, a lot of early abuse that has probably stayed with them. I remember someone turning round to me and saying, "Why don't you just leave him? Why are you still with him?" They used to say, "You're so desperate for a family, so desperate to be 'I'm married to this man, and these are our children, and this is my family unit' that you'll just put up with anything." I used to say, "Well, where am I going to go? What am I going to do? I've got nowhere to live. If I leave him, I've got no finances. I literally have nothing, so I'm not in a position." It was kind of like, make the best of a bad job, really. So, after he was arrested and put on bail conditions, I always tried to maintain his relationship with the kids. I never wanted my kids to turn around when they were older and say, "It's your fault that I don't have my dad. It's your fault – you turned me against him." So, he was living on the other side of Birmingham in a council flat and he

used to say, "Well, if you want me to see the kids, you need to drive them to me." Obviously, I was on benefits at the time, but I did. I used to drive the kids to him, I used to provide all their food for him so that he couldn't say, "I can't afford to have the kids this weekend because I haven't got any food." And if they needed anything, I always provided it, purely because I didn't ever want to be that one who had turned them against their ... I wanted them, in the end, to turn round to me and say, "My dad is not a very nice person, and I don't want anything to do with him," and then their consciences are clear as well because it's been their choice. I'm not telling them not to have a relationship. He never worked, so I didn't get any maintenance, so I decided to retrain. I decided I needed a career to bring up the children because financially they could only rely on me.

So, I went to college, and I did an access to higher education [course]. I took A-levels, retook maths, English, went to University and did a Bachelor of Arts in History, Social History and Education at Birmingham University, and then went on to do a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching at Newman University, and then I got my first teaching job. Throughout this time their dad was very hit and miss with when he wanted them and when he didn't, and it did transpire that the kids made the decision that they no longer wanted the relationship with him. I think, mentally, they have been okay with that because it's been their choice. So, I started working, doing my teacher training. Then during my teacher training, my dad had a heart attack. He was a football ref, and I was always very close to him. I was probably closer to my dad than my mum. My mum and I have always had a very difficult relationship. We clash a lot. I think there has never been that bond, that child and mother bond between me my mum, I think, because from an early age I had to rely on just myself so I never kind of looked at her as if, "If I haven't got you, I haven't got anyone". So, it was always quite difficult. But my dad was very more down-to-earth; he called a spade a spade and I think that was why we got on so well.

So, he had a heart attack, and he was brought back to life, but because he was so fit, because he was a football ref as well as he was working, they brought him back, but really probably shouldn't have because he was left in a permanent vegetative state. So that's where that saying comes from: "The lights are on but nobody's home." There was no soul in his eyes; he didn't recognise you, he didn't have emotions, he was basically just a shell. So, they put him on the Liverpool care plan, which is where they withdraw all medical intervention, so included in that is they don't give them intravenous liquids and they don't feed them. It's since been stopped in 2012, and it took him two weeks to actually die from lack of food and nutrients. Yeah, that was difficult to actually just watch him. I mean he, by the time he died, he was emaciated. I would say at the time, I thought, 'You wouldn't treat an animal like this. Why are we treating human beings like this?' Because I was under the illusion that if you don't have water for 48 hours then you die, so I thought it would be quite quick, but it took two whole weeks. I was studying during the day, looking after the kids, then I'd go to the hospital in the night time and stay there until about 3am, then I'd come back to look after kids. I had final essays due in at the time, and I did this while my dad was dying.

I think in the end, I failed one module, and I put into the University that it was ... I hadn't

really told them what was going on, so I put in mitigating circumstances, but the mitigating circumstances meant that I still had to redo the whole essay. I mean, I did redo it, and I did graduate in the end. Then I started my first teaching job and worked in an independent school for twelve years.

I: How old were you when you finished your teacher training, Jo? What kind of time are we talking?

R: I was early thirties. Yes, early thirties when I was starting to become a teacher. My first teaching job was fine. I kind of climbed up the ranks. I did a Master's degree in SEN [Special Educational Needs] education, and I was the maths coordinator. I was one of the senior teachers. And then, I've always been quite ambitious, so I wanted to go further, so I thought, well, I'm in an independent school. Really, I need to go to a state school in order to climb further up the ladder. So, I kind of took a sideways move in my career, gave up my responsibilities to go back to the state sector, and I have been in the state sector for three years to four years. So, it's been a bit of a varied upbringing and adult life, really.

I met Dave in 2008, and obviously, I got divorced in between from my first husband. And at the time, Dave was very erratic. He was a full-on personality – he was very difficult to handle. He lived in Shrewsbury, and I lived in Birmingham, and it was a casual relationship first. I'd become very kind of, "No, I do everything on my own. I will never rely on a man because men just let you down", so I had a lot of barriers. Yeah, he became a bit too difficult. He was a bit too full-on for me, and I wasn't ready for that kind of relationship. He would phone me up at three in the morning. Yeah, he was someone who, I had never met that type of person before. I was used to being around service blokes, but he was very unique in his mannerisms. I made the decision that "I don't want this". He was too much for me. And when I finished it, I remember him sending me a text message, which I found a little bit creepy at the time, and it was a picture of myself that he sent me, and it said: "One day I will marry this woman." I thought, "Is that not a bit weird considering I've just told you I don't want to see you anymore, and you're sending me a picture of myself? You've just confirmed you're a bit ... You're not right".

So, we went our separate ways. About a year and a half, two years [later], I don't know why, but all of a sudden, I thought, "I wonder what happened to him?" Because I think it was bad timing for both of us, and I think a couple of years later, I'd started to think I might, I actually do want someone who's very committed. I'd never really had that in my life, never had anyone who's looked at me and thought, "No matter what, I want to be with you." Sorry ... It makes me upset. [Sobs] And he was that person. I got in contact with him, and he was, "Do you know what, I've been waiting all this time for you to contact me." He said, "I'm seeing someone but I will finish it. I will finish anything to be with you." I thought, "How stupid, you've been waiting ...? For god's sake!" [Laughs] But, you know, I don't think I could ever recreate the love that he had for me. We got back together, and we got engaged within a month and a half, and we were married within seven months. And he remembered the text that he'd sent me, and he said, "I told you that I would marry you, and now I've done it." I was like, "God, you weird man." [Laughs] He was such a weird man. [Laughs] But he was such a committed

person, and all he wanted was to belong to a family, and I think that's why, you know, we kind of met so early and we married straight away. I remember turning to my family on the day of our marriage and said, "You know what, this feels right. This is the right thing to do." And I think it's those memories that hurt.

I: Jo, before I ask you about your wedding day, can I take you back to the first time you saw him, the first time you met him?

R: [Laughs] Yes, it's going to sound really silly, horrible ... It's a really ironic way. So, my daughter, my oldest daughter, was pregnant. Her boyfriend was Dave's son, and they went to a pub one night when they went to visit him, and Dave said, "Oh, what does your mum look like?" And my daughter showed him a picture of me. He said, "Ooh, she's a bit of alright, isn't she? Can you give me her number?" And my daughter went, "No, that's a bit weird." He went, "Go on, just give me her number," and she did, and that's how we met, which is really weird. And he then, you know, he was texting me, messaging me, and he said, "I want to come to Birmingham. I just want to meet up and take you out for a drink." I said, "Okay." So, he came over – we didn't tell my daughter – and he basically stayed the whole weekend, and we kind of fibbed and said, "Oh no, he's just come down for the day."

And we did get quite a lot of backlash. We did get a lot of people who accused of us of incest, though we weren't actually related. They said it was wrong. We had a lot of backlash from his son. We had a lot of people against us for a long time, but Dave was always under the impression of, 'Nobody tells me what to do with my life, and if I want to do it, then you're the one that will go if you don't agree with it'. And he was very, very committed from the word "go". He fought to kind of make sure that we were okay, and anyone that didn't like it, he would cut straight off and say, "Well, you don't need to be in my life, then, do you? If I'm happy, she's happy, that's all that matters." I didn't know that – when I met him and I said he was quite erratic – when I got back together with him a year and a half later, he was calmer. He was a nicer, approachable person. He didn't talk at a hundred miles an hour. He was affectionate, he was a completely different person. I thought "What's happened?" I didn't know that in the meantime he'd been sectioned, and the time when I'd first met him, he was sectioned only about six months later, through a near-fatal suicide attempt, and he was sectioned against his will. That's when he was first diagnosed with PTSD and he was given some CBT [Cognitive Behavioural Therapy] – trauma CBT – and that explained why, when I re-met him, the difference in his personality. He was based up in Newcastle at that time with 39 Battery, and he'd come home at weekends, and he'd come home on leave, and he was completely – *completely* – different.

I: So, he was still in the army?

R: He was still in the army, yes. I think he was doing an FTRS [Full-Time Reserve Service] contract at the time. So, we got married, he wore his uniform. He was always really proud of being in the army; even though he was traumatised by being in the army, he said he would never take that back. I think that was his identity; that was who he was. He didn't have a very good childhood: he was abandoned by his mum at five, and he had a very strict father. He was eventually put into a boarding school because his

father couldn't cope with him. I think all he wanted throughout all these difficulties was just to be accepted for who he was, and I think the army reproduced the family that he desperately wanted. He wanted to belong, he wanted to be accepted, and I think he felt that all of his family never accepted him and never understood him. But he was probably pretty messed up from his childhood. You know, he recalled vividly his mum walking away and leaving him, and she took his brother instead of him. He remembers his mum saying to him, "I'm not taking you because you're so naughty," and that was at five, and he never got over that. He always wanted a relationship with his mum, and he always tried to find her because he never had any contact with her after that. And whenever he tried to find her – she wasn't a maternal person – and I kept saying to him, "You're trying to find someone that doesn't exist. The person that gave birth to you is not a mother. She doesn't want to be your mother." Because she rejected him time and time again, every time he tried.

So, he was quite defensive. If somebody even tried to reject him, he would get in there first. He would hurt you before you could hurt him, and he would be quite aggressive in that, you know, not physically but emotionally and words-wise. He could be a very nasty person if you got on the wrong side of him. And people didn't understand that that was his way, that was because inside him, he was a hurt child, and so he was being defensive because he was protecting himself. I think his mum rejecting him time and time again had a really bad impact on his mental health and his vision of himself and who he was, but I think that our marriage gave him back that little bit of self-worth, that little bit of, "Someone does accept me, someone does love me. I know I'm really difficult but she's still there; she doesn't abandon me, and she doesn't walk away at the earliest opportunity." And the first couple years of marriage were, you know, really good.

When his contract came to an end in the army, he didn't know what to do because, you know, he was a Rifleman, and what qualifications did he have? He left school with no qualifications, and the only experience he had was either when he was out of the army working in a factory or shooting a gun. So, security is the only thing that comes up, which isn't the best-paid job. I think for someone who rises through the ranks in the army to then go to civilian street and go into a low-paid security job where you are just stood watching people, is quite demoralising and quite like, 'What have I actually done with my life, then? I've done all these brave things ...'. He was in every single major conflict, protecting this country, whether it was through reservists or whether it was through his full-time army career and then, you know, he stood with a walkie-talkie just watching people. So, he found out SSAFA had an EFT [Elite Forces Team] services, and Afghan was going on at the time. He said, "Oh, I need to go to Afghan. I need to. It's one conflict I haven't been in. I need to go," and he joined up with them. So, he joined up with the TA [Territorial Army, now Army Reserve], and went as part of the TA over there, but he was in the forward operational bases in Sangin. I remember him phoning me. He'd only been out there a couple of months. And him going was absolutely devastating, because that feeling of when they leave, you don't know if you're going to see them again. The phone calls that people take for granted – "Oh I'll give you a text later!" or "I'll phone you later!" – you know it's not going to happen, and I don't think the effects ... He didn't expect the effect of that, that it would have on the girls and on me. He said walking away that day to go to ... I think he went to ... I can't

remember where the flight was from, but he had to leave anyway.

He said that devastated him, what he was leaving. He'd never had that before. He'd been married before, he's got other children, but he'd never had anyone that has been that affected by him walking away. And it was difficult when he was in Afghan because although, at first, he was at Camp Bastion before he got put in the FOB [Forward Operating Base], if there were any attacks, of course, all the phone lines were taken down for security, and that could be for a couple of days. Then you're waiting for a phone call, so your life kind of stops because the time zone is completely different. So, if he got access to the Internet, which they did every now and again, it would be that we'd never be on at the same time because of the, you know ... I'd wake up and there would be a message left at three in the morning, but of course, I couldn't respond to it until the next day. When he did phone, basically even if you were driving, you had to stop and take that phone call. It wasn't like he could then go and pick the phone back up half an hour later because you've missed the phone call, because, basically, all the other blokes wanted to use the phone, or the phone lines were going to go down soon.

So your life is ruled by them being away on active service, and if you're a civilian and you're not living in married quarters, it's very hard for people to understand the effects of that on you and your family. And he was away for Christmas, and I remember the girls making sure they put something on the table like he was here, but he wasn't here, and they took photos and sent them to him and said, you know, "As far as we're concerned, you're still here." And I think because we weren't in married quarters and he wasn't part of the regular army, but he was doing the same job as the regular army, then the support from the army is missing, there *is* no support. There was nobody in my area, at the moment, you know, at that time he was on active duty, so I had no one to kind of go, "Do you know what, I get it. I understand. If you are feeling a bit lonely, and it's getting to you a bit, you can come round." Obviously, when I was in married quarters, that camaraderie is also amongst the people who are living there because they all understand. And it's difficult because you're left to carry on, you've got to go to your daytime job, you've got to carry on paying all the bills, making sure everything is going okay.

But also, in the back of your mind, you're watching ... You know, Afghan was on the news a lot. And when something had happened, you know where they're based so it's constantly ... So, the families are under the same amount of pressure, and in a way, it's worse because you can't control it, and you don't know what's actually ... So, your mind is the one that's saying, "Well, this could be happening, that could be happening." And he phoned me, about February, and he said, "Jo, I can't do this. I can't. My mind's going. I can't do this." He said, "You know, we're having to shit in bags. It's disgusting. This is worse than Iraq. I thought Iraq was bad, but this ..." He said, "We're under attack constantly. You don't even know who your enemy is," and he said, "My mind's going." I said, "Well, if it is going, see how you feel in a little bit." Because I knew that he wanted to be there, but I was also worried about ... because I knew what would happen to his mind, because he already had PTSD, and although he had CBT, PTSD is like a silent thing that's always going to be there, and if it's retriggered then it could be quite dangerous. He phoned me back up a couple of days later and said, "Jo, I can't. I'm going ... I'm scared of what I'm going to do." I said, "Well, what you do is you

go and tell someone, and you say to them 'I can't do this. I need to go home'." He said, "Yes, but I haven't got a job, and ..." I said, "Do you know what, we'll work it out. Money is money. Money doesn't mean anything compared to if you're healthy and you're safe. You know, we will take a cut. There'll be other things. We'll work it out, don't worry." And, literally, within about a week, I remember I got up one morning, I looked at Facebook, and there was a picture on his wall, and it had that sign that said: "Camp Bastion, one way", and is it Chilworth the other way? Whatever. I was like, "How are you taking that photo?" Of course, he didn't reply to me. Obviously, he was at the airport. He was coming home. He messaged me when he got home and he said, "Can I meet you up at the pub?" He was in full uniform, which I always liked because I always liked his bum when he was in his trousers. [Laughs]

I would say that was when his PTSD started coming back, from that tour. And I remember Stephen Morgan spoke about Dave's story in the comments, and I remember someone from the army standing up and saying, "I'm sorry that wouldn't happen. He wouldn't be sent to Afghan with a PTSD diagnosis." And I've got evidence that he was sent to Afghan. He had PTSD, and that was the point that his PTSD returned; it triggered everything that was in his mind. I don't think Dave realised how much it changed him, but I noticed a big difference in him. I think it's an advantage and a disadvantage that I knew him before he was sectioned and I knew him afterwards, because I knew what he was like when PTSD was at its worst. I also know the person he became after he'd been sectioned and he'd had CBT, so I could recognise some of these traits that I saw the first time around. He became very easy to annoy, little patience, wasn't sleeping well and was very down about himself, and he'd spend days in bed. He put it down to, "Yeah, but I'm struggling to find a job," which obviously doesn't help.

I think it took him two years to find a job, and it did get worse, his mental health gradually... It doesn't happen overnight, like boom! And, all of a sudden, you've got severe PTSD. It's a really gradual decline, and I think the longer and longer it is left, the worse it becomes in the end. He had a great reluctance in actually going to the doctors. I know he went to the doctors with erectile dysfunction, which is a sign of mental health problems, but it wasn't picked up that, you know, "Hang on, this bloke has been sectioned before. He's saying now that he's got these problems ...". And Dave was a little bit reluctant to kind of admit it. I think he thought you can only get PTSD once. You get treated for it and then you're done. He did get a job. He got a job down London because he couldn't find a job in our area. He became a security manager of a big construction site; I think he needed that for his own self-worth, and he threw himself into that job. He took great pride in people recognising that he was, he had value and he could do a job, and he would not sleep until he'd done a job. So even if it meant he was working eighteen hours a day, he would work eighteen hours a day to make sure that the job was done to a high specification and it was completed, and he took great pride in that.

But it became a bit obsessive for him and he started to put work before family. He started to like the praise that he got from work and the satisfaction he got from work. Because family is completely different, because you don't get that recognition, and he found being in a family, although it was what he wanted desperately, there's no rules

and there's no... He used to say to me, "But you expect different things from me than someone at work," because, you know, predominantly he worked with ex-service personnel. He'd say, "I don't quite know what I'm supposed to do at home. It's a totally different set of skills I haven't been used to, and even though I want to do it, I can't. I just don't know how to be that person that you need and the girls need." And I think that caused him great distress because I don't think he liked the person he was when he was at home. He basically recreated the army life, so when he came home at weekends he came home on leave, without being in the army. So he surrounded himself with army base people. He worked away and he came home for little bits and pieces, and I think that was basically because he couldn't cope with home life on a full-time basis because he didn't know how to be an emotionally-giving partner. He didn't know how to do that. And that's not a reflection on him as a person; it's just because of his childhood and because of his long military history, so that's the person he had become. Luckily, I'm a very independent person so it didn't get to me. I was used to someone being there but away quite a bit because that's what I've had in all my adult relationships. I mean, Dave used to joke that I just needed RAF next, and I'd be tri-services. [Laughs]

But his mental health went further and further down, and he started drinking more. And in 2012 ... My daughter has autism, and she was struggling with the transition from Year 6 to Year 7, and she ended up having quite a few overdoses. At one point it was quite a severe overdose, and she was in the children's hospital, and they were talking about sectioning her. That was hard to support her and also supporting Dave, who was going downhill as well, and I was working full-time.

I: You were teaching at the time?

R: Teaching at the time, yes. So, she ended up on home treatment under CAMHS [Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services], so therapists came in a couple of days, a couple of times a day. I used to have to scour her room for any self-harming implements. I used to wake up with nightmares imagining her swinging from the rafters. You know, for your own child to say that they no longer want to live at twelve years old is really, really difficult because you're thinking "Why? I'll do anything to make you happy", but there's nothing you can do to make them happy because it's inside their own head, and it's inside them as a person. She ended up being referred to James Brindley School, so she wasn't in a mainstream school anymore. She was in a small referral unit, and it took a lot to get her to even ... At first, it was only an hour each day she could manage, and then it gradually built up.

Then, at the same time, Dave's mental health was getting worse. He used to say to her, "I don't understand you. I don't understand your mental health because you've got nothing to have mental health about, but I have," and then he'd relay all the combats he'd been in and what he'd seen, and therefore he'd think that he had justification for being the way he was. But it'd be, "What justification have you got?" which then caused, you know, difficulties between the two of them because she felt like, "Well, what *have* I got to be sad about?" He then started not coming home so often because he couldn't handle the mental health of her and his own mental health, so he would stay away. I managed to get her back into school full-time. I had to take a while off

work, so six weeks I had to take off, and then I was just getting ready to go back and I ended up with, something in my stomach burst and apparently it was from stress. They all told me how rare it is, and even rarer for it to burst, but I had an ulcer in my stomach that I didn't know about, which then burst, and I just carried on, thinking, "Oh, it's just a pulled muscle. I'll be okay". But, you know, literally, I couldn't even move, it was that excruciating. I thought, "I can't take any more time off. I can't, I've got to go back to work." So, I laid up. The pain got a bit easier, and I went to work, but I was being sick every single day. I then ended up being sick with my own poo. I went to the doctors and at first, they thought it was just irritable bowel, then they ran some tests, and I was anaemic. I was still going into work every single day because I thought 'I've taken time off for Kayleigh, I can't just go and say, "Now I'm sick."' And I remember, one day someone came up to me at work and said, "Jo, you are grey. You are being sick every day. Go home. What is wrong with you?" And I went to the doctors. It turned out that I had what is called gastro-colonic fistula, so my stomach and the top of my bowel had joined together and they were communicating with each other, so sometimes I would be really, really thirsty. I would drink maybe six bottles of pop, I was so thirsty, and it would just pour out of me.

My consultant was like, "This never happens. I don't understand how this has happened. We've never had it in this hospital," and the QE [Queen Elizabeth Hospital] is massive. I ended up with an operation where they took part of my stomach away and part of my intestine, so it was quite a major operation. Dave was there for that operation. I remember seeing him crying when I was brought up, and there were so many tubes and things coming out of me, and he visited every day, and he was really good. When I came out of hospital, obviously, I found it really hard to walk. I mean, you don't even realise how much you use your stomach muscles – even to sit on a toilet. It's something you take for granted but you don't even realise that actually the basic things of what you do in life, even sitting up, requires your core muscles, and, of course, they'd all been cut. I had been discharged and my wound had started coming open, and it had started coming open more and more, so I had district nurses coming in. Dave couldn't cope with it, so he went back to London, and I was left in the care of Kayleigh, who had just recovered from mental health. She used to get up at seven in the morning, make me some toast, make me a flask of tea because she was worried about me. She didn't want me getting up and me trying to go downstairs and things.

I: And Kayleigh was 12 at the time?

R: Yes. So yes, he couldn't handle it, he couldn't, and he started coming home less and less, because he couldn't face how ill I actually was. I ended up where the wound completely came open and then I had to have ... I think I ended up with seven operations in the end, where the wound was so infected, they had to keep cutting it away and then leaving it open to heal from the inside out. It ended up at one point where it was so open that I ended up on negative wound therapy, so I had like a vacuum attached to my stomach 24/7. That went on for about four or five months, and all this time I was under the district nurses. In that time, Dave started taking cocaine to cope with his mental health.

I: Whilst he was away?

R: Whilst he was away. Because he knew I am very much against drugs. I have never taken drugs in my life – probably because I’m too controlling. [Laughs] He wouldn’t tell me. I didn’t know, but he started asking for more and more money. He’d never been good with money anyway. I think that’s a standard army thing, a services thing, you know. They’re never very good with money. It ended up where he was addicted to cocaine, and we ended up £10,000 in debt, where I had to find a way to get these drug dealers off his case, of funding this. I was then put onto half-pay because I was off for so long. I was off for nearly a year with illness. He would lie about his wages. He would get advances of pay, and he’d be like, “Oh, I didn’t do as much overtime”. But, you know, I’d always find a way of finding out. I have a good gut, and I kind of knew things weren’t quite right. I went back to work. I still had a hole in my stomach, and I developed two massive hernias as well from where it hadn’t healed properly, so you could basically see my bowels working through my skin. I mean, it was like a party trick, really, but I needed another operation where they basically had to reconstruct the whole of my abdomen and put mesh in to strengthen it all. That was due in the October, so I went back to work in the September and in the October, because I had to have specialists involved in that reconstruction, I had to have more time off work.

Dave became addicted to cocaine at the time, and my relationship with my mum had completely broken down because Dave, because of his PTSD starting again, he was very much, “If you annoy me, I will tell you. I will tell you everything,” and he didn’t like the way some of my family weren’t taking very much care of me when I was ill. I don’t know if that was maybe some of his guilt as well because he knew he was doing that, so he was like, “Well, I can’t do it, so why aren’t you there instead?” Maybe he was projecting a little bit onto other people. He sent my mum a message and asked her why she didn’t treat me as, you know, I’m the only daughter – “Why do you not treat her like ...” you know, “Why are you not proud of everything? Why are you not there for her?” And my mum took great offence. Because Dave could be offensive but, actually, for him, it wasn’t that offensive. [Laughs] Because I know how offensive he could be. There were no swear words, which, for Dave, that’s him moderating himself because every other word was a swearword.

My mum phoned me up and said that I needed to control my husband, “I can’t control my husband because he’s a human being and whatever he says is his business, but it’s not my fault that he feels that way.” And I got accused of, “Well, he would only think that way if you were the one telling him to feel this way. It’s your fault for the things you obviously say.” “No, I think it’s things he’s observed. He’s a grown man with his own thoughts and feelings, and this is what he has seen.” It ended up where I was asked to choose between Dave and my family. I chose Dave because I thought “Well, you don’t pay my bills, you don’t help me bring up the girls. You’re not there on a daily basis. What right have you got to try and make me choose between you and the man I married? I married him and you need to respect the fact that whether you like him or not, he’s my husband”.

And I haven’t seen my mum since. Even in his death, I still haven’t seen my mum. So yes, that was difficult but necessary because our relationship was never good. I would

try to make it good; I even offered to go to counselling with her to try and, you know ... What is the reason we don't have the relationship I see with other people? You know, I'm an only child as well, so ... But it just didn't work out, so she's not part of my life. So, Dave, when he became addicted to drugs, he was a different person: I didn't matter, family didn't matter. Nothing mattered, except for drugs and getting drugs.

It was a very difficult situation because in my job I can't go to work and say, "My husband's addicted to drugs. I'm finding this really hard, and I'm finding the money aspect really hard and finding the stress of it all really hard." I had to keep that quiet because there is a stigma. Even though it's not me, I'm not taking drugs. I've never been a drug addict, never would take drugs, it's not me. But there's a stigma, whether we like it or not and whether we say it's okay to not be okay, it's actually not very true. And it was really difficult, he told me he wanted a temporary separation, but that wasn't because he didn't want to be married; it was because he wanted to be left alone to get on with his drugs and because I was on his case. I was kind of like, "Why is this money going missing?" and, "Why this, why that?" And he said, "I want a temporary separation so I can get on top of this drug problem." He'd admitted he had a drug problem, and he told me later that that wasn't true; that was just to get me off his back. He ended up with a deviated septum and growths at the top of his nose where his cocaine use was so much. He said that he actually trying to kill himself through drugs; he would take four grams of cocaine a day and he would swallow speed at the same time. He was blacking out at work, he was having fits.

He was covered up for by a lot of people around him. Not one of them phoned me and said, "Jo, I'm really worried about him," because it was that whole, kind of, "He's my mate, I feel like I'm being disloyal." And my argument for that would be, "You're actually being more disloyal by *not* telling me." Because if I'd known how bad it was, I would have said, "You get out of London and you come home."

But I didn't know, so I hold some of those people as accountable, because some of the people he got involved with were providing drugs, and then Dave was doing things that were morally against what he would normally stand for, because he needed to feed this addiction. And when he did actually turn round and say, "Do you know what, no. I'm not going to be involved in some of these things anymore," that's when they said, "Well, you owe us ten grand." He knew that that would be the consequence and he... I would say the people who feed you drugs or drug dealers are *never* your friend; they're doing it for another reason. They will make you think 'oh, let's just have a bit of a party' and 'I just want you to feel okay' and 'oh, I know you're feeling a little down, here's a little bit, and it's free'. It's *never* free. There will be a price to pay, whether it's financially or whether it's eventual, "I need a favour from you now because I've been giving *you* favours." But people who are addicted to drugs don't see that. They think, "They care about me, they want to be around me. I'm fun, I am". And because Dave had such low self-esteem and he wanted to belong. They were feeding into that – they knew he just wanted to belong. So, for him to be involved with these people who were quite well-known and big, and he was one of their muckers, you know, for him that was, "Yeah, I'm great, I am". But he wasn't great.

I: How were you at the time, Jo? When he requested temporary separation, how did it make you feel?

R: I was absolutely devastated. I couldn't even get out of bed because I was so worried about what he was going to end up doing. Everything I did was a shock tactic, so I went to the solicitors, and I made sure that I checked in online, as a shock tactic for him to, you know – "Pull yourself together. This is not what you want". I booked a hotel for our anniversary because this was July and he was like, "I won't see you now until October on our anniversary. Let's now have a break. I'll get on top of this, and we'll go somewhere for our anniversary." So, I booked a really nice hotel, thinking we haven't seen each other for 3 ½ months. He'd told me he was getting clean, and I knew, I *knew* that when we went to that hotel, he was not clean. He was itching ferociously because, obviously, his liver was reacting to the fact he couldn't take cocaine when he was around me, so that's why he tried to stop coming home as much, or he'd create an argument so that he could go back to London to get his drugs. Yes, he was itching, he was very volatile – very, really quick to anger; he made me cry when we were sitting in the restaurant. I was just thinking 'I just can't be around you. This is torture.' I loved the man, and I wanted to be with him, but being with him was torturous. And that's very conflicted; I didn't want a divorce, I just wanted him to get help and I just wanted him to go back to the person I married. I don't think I ever saw that person again, and it's those sort of memories that really hurt. [Sobs] Sorry. Yes, he required a lot ... required a lot of sacrifice to be with, and he required a lot of help.

I: Was he getting any help at that time?

R: I referred him to PTSD Resolution. Because we went on holiday together, and we'd never been on holiday before with each other – we didn't have a honeymoon or anything – and we went on holiday, and I swore after that holiday, "I will never go on holiday with you again – that was torturous. I can't be in a foreign country with you." Because there was nowhere to escape to. He'd admitted he was still on drugs, and it was because he couldn't get the drugs that I was getting the person that I was subjected to on holiday, and he was mean. He was horrible. But that wasn't him; that was because he was desperate for drugs and he was craving them so he couldn't control his reactions. But from a personal point of view, I could not put myself in that position again, and I stuck to it; I think I went on holiday with him on his own just before he died, and even then I was about to cancel it. In hindsight, I'm glad I didn't because I've got those memories now, but I wouldn't put myself in a vulnerable situation like that with him.

So, I referred him to PTSD Resolution because it was his PTSD. He made some online videos at the time as well saying how much he was struggling, and that he had the fight of his life to get his family back and to become the family man that he could be. He admitted at the time that the reason he kind of emotionally abandoned me when I was really ill was because he said he was angry. "I was angry. How dare you nearly die!" He said, "You were going to leave me, like everybody else in my life so I had to leave you first." He said, "That's what kept me going – anger. Anger towards you. How dare you show me that you are the same as everyone else, you're going to leave." I mean, that's how messed up his head was. In some ways, it was like he tested me to

see how much ... “How much will you put up with? How much do you love me? Will you stand by me through this? Will you just give up on me?” He didn’t want me to give up, but he wanted me to prove that I wouldn’t give up. And I think I referred him to every single mental health place I could possibly think of to get him some help, and he was really bad, mentally. You know, if my family couldn’t be around him and they found him hard ... Even my doctor said to me, “He doesn’t fit in normal society. He is a very difficult man to deal with.” Dave actually used to stand up for the family at these appointments and say, “Do you know what, if you can’t deal with me for 10 minutes, how do you think my wife copes with me and my daughters? And what support have you ever put in place for my family? It’s all about *me* and how *I’m* going to get better and what you can do for *me*. I don’t want you to look at me; I want you to look at my family and see how much they struggle, because they’re the ones who keep me alive, not you.” But there isn’t any support, there’s nothing out there to help the families.

So, when his mental health got worse and worse, I think he eventually came off cocaine – well, he *said* he came off cocaine, but I’m not so convinced about that now, because mentally he was addicted to it. Because, apparently, when you’ve got PTSD, it has a different effect on your brain. So, kind of like if a child has ADHD, when they’re given medication, it’s actually like a speed-based medication but it calms their brain down, and that’s the effect that cocaine has on the PTSD brain – it calms them down. Instead of making them more hyper, which seems ironic because everyone thinks that would make you really hyper, but it does actually, it calmed him down. He ended up with an operation on his nose as he had growths in his nose, and he ended up with an immune system problem because of the amount drugs he was taking. It was some immune system issue that comes up positive in your blood, so he was always ill, he was susceptible to everything because his immune system had been knocked from so much drug-taking. He told me he used to have to wash his nose out all the time with, like, syringes and stuff because the operation started breaking down.

He was always blowing his bloody nose – all the time. It was like Nellie the Elephant being around you. I used to hate it, and it was a reminder that, you know, this is all self-inflicted. He used to say to me, “Why am I alive? How can I have done what I’ve done to my body and still be alive? How is that even fair?” That’s what he wanted: he wanted to die from it, but his body wouldn’t. He was a strong person, he worked out a lot and he was very fit. That aspect of him started to go downhill – he stopped working out, he wasn’t fit enough. He got out of breath just walking up the street, which he found very hard to deal with, you know, because he was always known as... there was a joke when he was in Newcastle that you’d always see “Jukesy” tapping along 24-hours-a-day, always tapping along, like, “Come on ...” Because he took great pride in how fit he was and how much he worked out, but that went towards the end.

Yes, his mental health really did deteriorate. We went on holiday. He got sacked in July, the July of last year, he got sacked from his job, which didn’t help him mentally. He went into crisis, and during his mental health crisis, there was just no support – for him or for me. I mean, I was trying to work full-time and take care of him and the amount of things that he needed was beyond what I... I mean, I used to sit at work, and I used to sit in my car and think ‘oh, I don’t want to go home. I just don’t know what I’m walking into today’. I used to sit out in the car and really have to kind of bolster myself up to

unlock that door, because if someone had annoyed him that day or if something hadn't gone right, then we would know about it for the whole night. You know, the impact that living with someone with severe PTSD has – it's not just that day; it's years and years of trying to keep them alive, trying to give them a reason. I mean, Dave had been cut down from a noose in 2016 and, you know, he'd had multiple suicide attempts that hadn't worked. In 2016, he'd said to his friend that he was stood on a chair with a noose; he was about to put his head through it at one point, and he said he looked over and he saw a picture of me and he said it completely broke his heart, and he thought 'I can't do this. I can't do this to her'. But he used to carry around a noose that he had as his "friend" and he said that that made him feel safe, that he always had the option there. He said in the morning, he had like a ritual where he would go and hang it in a room, and he said, "I used to kneel on the floor and talk to it like it was some sort of cross. I used to tell it my problems, and it made me feel safe." He said, "If anyone touched it or anyone moved anything, I'd be really, really angry, because, you know, that's my option. I know that's there." He was cut down from the noose by one of his mates. I think a lot of his really close friends were becoming really ... They didn't know how to help him. I know one of his mates phoned up a couple of the charities and said, "Look, he's going to end up taking his life," and the charities just said, "Well, you take him to A&E then if you're that worried." And when he lost his job, his mental health went down significantly, because his whole identity had gone: he had no job anymore, he wasn't this provider – even though he wasn't a provider because he kept taking all the money – but in his head he was. But the way he saw things were always completely different to the way that, realistically, they happened. He was given a settlement figure by his work and a gagging clause to not say anything about the things that had gone on.

I: Is this for his work in London where he was a construction manager?

R: Yes. He started to become very erratic, very unpredictable. He was always unpredictable and erratic, and I think that's what... I think that's why living with PTSD is so difficult because you are always on eggshells; you've always got this ball in your stomach of: "Oh God, if I say it like this, if I do it like this, it's going to annoy him and I'm going to have a whole night of him just sitting there going on and on and on at me. So, if I just make sure everything is nice and calm, if you've gone to bed, kids, don't make a noise. Don't wake him up because I don't want to deal with the after-effects he's woken up and he's coming downstairs..." But with Dave, his triggers altered daily, so it's not like... I don't know, if I said the word "coffee" that could be a trigger, so I won't say the word "coffee" and everything will be great – it's not like that. Today, it might be "Well, you've just said this and that's really annoyed me," and it would end up with a whole day and night of Dave being annoyed, and he would sit you down and you weren't able to get up until he had said chapter and verse about why you'd annoyed him, what was going on in his head, then it would go onto what kind of things he's seen, what kind of...

So you'd be picturing everything he's seen and done because he's told you repeatedly, chapter and verse, because it affects him so much. He'd sit there sometimes crying, you know, about Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and I don't think Bosnia and Northern Ireland are recognised enough for the mental effects. You know, we talk about Iraq

and Afghanistan, but Bosnia was a brutal war, and I don't think any of them should be compared to each other as more or less than they were. But there were effects from every single combat that he'd been in, and he'd been in every single one of them. So, you know, he had a lot of memories to go over. When he went into crisis, I'd referred him Combat Stress, so he went to Combat Stress, had an assessment and they said his scores were out of this world for his PTSD, and he was diagnosed with service-attributed severe PTSD with disassociation. That was in the January, and they said they would refer him to TILS because they couldn't cope with him; Combat Stress couldn't treat him because of how agitated he was about being in a group setting, about being with new people, and he was quite difficult to get on with. Dave was very aggressive verbally and body language-wise but he would never actually get up and punch you – there was no need to be afraid of him. I used to tell people that – “He won't, he won't...” But I suppose if you don't know him, just his mannerisms and the way he spoke was probably quite alarming. So, Combat Stress never actually referred him to TILS, they didn't follow through on that, and when he went into crisis I went to my doctor's and said, “Look, he needs an appointment.” You know, he was lying in bed, he couldn't get out of bed. He was threatening to throw people out of windows when he went to places, you know. Whenever he was around people, he was causing arguments. He was walking down the street shouting abuse at people; he was really not well.

I asked why the Veterans Covenant wasn't being upheld for him, said he needed an appointment that day – “There *are* no appointments.” So, I said, “Right, I'm going to go home and write a complaint, because he's a veteran with a service attributed mental health condition, and if he needs a mental health appointment, then he needs to be given one today. I'm not saying this just out of, you know, trying to get any attention for him.” So I did, I put in an official complaint. There wasn't a mark on his doctor's records, even though he'd been with the same surgery for 9 or 10 years. He'd never been referred anywhere by the doctor's surgery. They said, “Well, you've had psychiatric appointments.” “Well, no, he had one with Combat Stress who said they were going to refer him somewhere else but they never followed through with it so I wouldn't say that that's effective.”

We ended up getting a joint interview with the doctors about his complaint, and the doctor said that, you know, he didn't fit into normal society, that he wasn't adjusting. I referred him to TILS [Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service] because the doctors didn't refer him, so I referred him to TILS. He did get an assessment with TILS in the first couple of weeks; in the meantime, the doctors had written to TILS to say that Dave had been in and had been quite aggressive to one of the doctors, that she felt intimidated by him, and they wrote TILS a warning letter about Dave – “Do not see him on your own because he's quite dangerous.” So he had to wait a couple of weeks before they had two people to interview him. I couldn't be at that because I was at work, so I wrote TILS a massive long description of what living with Dave was like, because Dave was very good at ... If you asked him how things were, “Great.” “How are you getting on with life?” “Great. Yeah, it's great.” But if I was there, he would go, “I'm going to have to tell you the truth because she's here, and she won't let me get away with not telling you how things actually are.” So, I gave my statement and I said, “You need to have this because when you see him, you will not get the same story that

you will get from me.”

He was referred straight away to the complex mental health team and, unfortunately, the West Midlands were the last ones to set up complex mental health and there was a service delay in Dave being seen, between TILS and complex mental health. He went into crisis; there were a lot of emails between me and this TILS person, where I was just begging for help, you know. I didn't know how to cope with him anymore. And he was scary, you know, and Dave had always said: “You and the girls are always the safest out of everyone. I'd never do anything,” and he meant it. No matter how angry he got, he'd go to bed, or he'd separate himself; he'd never do anything to harm us. But that was becoming more and more likely. The crisis team came out. They did an assessment on 111, they spoke to him, and he said, “I've got a noose and I've got a plan. When I'm ready, I will activate it.” They were concerned so they passed it on to another person, so he spoke to the other person, and he had to tell them the same thing, then a psychiatrist. By the time the psychiatrist was phoning, Dave would not engage with anyone – he was like, “Just leave me alone.” And he stayed in bed with a quilt over his head, for three days he'd been like that, and the psychiatrist said, “I'm sending out an ambulance, he's in crisis and he needs to be seen.”

So, six hours later, the ambulance still hadn't turned up; they wouldn't turn up because they wanted a police escort because he was known to be quite violent. In the end, I was lucky that the paramedics that did turn up said, “Do you know what, the police have stood down and said they're not going to escort us, but we're going to take a chance.” Because they were ex-veterans, and they said, “We're not just going to leave this man without seeing anyone.” So, they came out and I said, “I'll have Chloe go with you, because I seem to be, at the moment, the one that antagonises him.” Because I was focal for Dave, if he was angry or anything, I would be the one to blame; it was *my* fault that all these people were coming in – “Why can't you just leave me alone?” So, I thought it was better that I stayed out of it and didn't antagonise him anymore, so I sent Chloe up with them. He wouldn't engage; they said Street Triage needed to be called out. They did a risk assessment on him, and he came out as ‘high risk of suicide’. Street Triage came out, and, basically, he wouldn't engage again. The fact that he would engage was quite worrying but they referred him for home treatment, so nobody actually saw him while he was in crisis; they just kept assessing him, then someone else would come out. In the meantime, I was left with him.

The next day, he got up, because I basically gave him a bit of a kick and said, “Get out of bed. You're not going to stay in this bed anymore.” I took the dog out for a walk, came back, and he couldn't stand up, couldn't focus on anything, wasn't coherent. I said, “Dave, what have you taken? You've taken something, haven't you?” He couldn't put two words together. I phoned up 999 and said, “He's taken something, but I don't know what he's taken.” They came out, he was tachycardic and they said he lacked mental capacity, so they took him to hospital. The girls went with him to hospital, and he was left in a corridor. He was aggressive; he was, “Just leave me alone; nobody gives a shit anyway, so I don't want to talk to anyone.” They basically blamed him and said that he was... he wouldn't engage, therefore there wasn't much they could do for him. He was seen by RAID. RAID, again, referred him for home treatment. I think the next day I phoned the home treatment team repeatedly all day and said, “Is someone

going to come out and see him? Is he going to have anything?" "No, he's not on our board yet. Nobody has been assigned to him. I don't know when somebody will be coming out, but it won't be today."

They came out a day later and he was put on an "every other day" visit, but it turned out in the inquest that they only carried out two of those. So, he was put under a psychiatrist. The first psychiatrist he went to... Dave had been triggered in the job centre, because there was somebody talking in a foreign language on a walkie-talkie, dressed all in black, and he said, "The last time I saw that, I was blown up," and he literally could not, he was so agitated that he couldn't have this mental health assessment so they rearranged it for a couple of days later. He went to that one and then we had a further one booked for the week after. We went to that one, and Dave admitted that he was taking something called ephedrine, which he was buying crushed up. He said, "I don't want to be this person. I don't want to be taking things. I want you to give me some sort of medication to help me to control my mind, because I don't want to be this person." It's even in his note that apparently, he'd told them that he was taking this stuff, but he'd begged for it not to be spoken about in front of me. So, for him to sit in a psychiatrist appointment and to come out with it was a big move for him, because he was admitting that he was taking stuff again, and he knew my opinion on it.

The psychiatrist said, "We're not going to give you anything, you're going to have to keep taking ephedrine and you're going to have to wean yourself off." Dave said, "I can't. I can't be left with my brain the way it is. You need to give me something." They said, "No, nothing we can do." I became quite frustrated, and said, "How can I be the only breadwinner and now you're telling me that I have to subsidise someone's drug addiction *and* work, and you're not going to give him anything?" "No, we're not allowed to give him anything." Then we were talking about Dave's disassociation, and it was becoming more and more regular, so it was all day sometimes and it was quite often, and he would have no recollection that he'd done or said some of these things. And the psychiatrist said, "That does not exist. It does not happen. You are saying this to justify your actions and what you are saying."

From my perspective, if a professional is telling me that these symptoms do not exist, then my head is going, and I'm thinking, "Hang on, so you're telling me I've just got basically a drug addict who is using his mental health as an excuse to be really horrible," and it really did frustrate me. I ended up walking out of the appointment because I felt so like, 'well, there's no point. What have I been doing for all these years then?' I've been supporting a drug addict who is telling me, "I don't know that I'm saying these things; I don't know that I'm doing these things. It's my mental health." I've been advocating for him for everyone and now you're telling me that doesn't exist. So, basically, I'm an idiot. And my first husband was like that, so what, have I ...?' So, you know, there were a lot of thoughts that came into it, and I did, I walked out, and I said, "I can't do this anymore," and I got in my car, and I left him, which was quite hard. But I was so angry, so frustrated that nobody was helping me. They were all condemning and all basically saying, "It's his fault, and it's your fault for being so stupid to support him and to make excuses, because you're making it worse – you're making it worse because you're molycoddling him." And I left him there and when I came home, I had

messages from him, and they were so abusive.

Dave had this thing of he'd listen to music to calm his brain down when things were getting too much, he'd drown everything out, put earphones in, and that's when you knew his head was going. And he said, "You've got my music and I need my music now. You will come to this hospital, and you will drop that off. "No, I won't." That was my opinion – "No, I won't. I'm going back to work." I sent the message and I said, "I've put your MP3 in the porchway, I'm going to work." Because I had the pressure of knowing that work was suffering and work was telling me that, you know, me going to all these appointments was putting pressure on other staff, and it was just everywhere I looked there was just pressure everywhere. Anyway, I went back to work and one of my daughter's phoned me at work, which I found really unusual because she never, ever phoned me at work. She said, "Mum, I've had a really weird phone call with Dave." She was crying – she's the one who suffers from mental health – and she said "I'm really, really worried. He is walking down the street and he is shouting at people, he's threatening to kill people. Mum, I'm really worried. I can't cope with this anymore. It's just too much." She said, "Work are sending me home." I said, "Don't you go home. You come to me, you come to my workplace, and I will go home with you, I will walk through that door. You will not walk through that door on your own." So, she did, she came to my workplace, and we went home together. His MP3 had gone, and he was not at home, so I was relieved. He came home about 7 o'clock and the person that walked through that door wasn't the person that I knew – there was no soul in his eyes; his eyes were black. He was... [Sighs] ... He just wasn't the person that I knew.

He started picking up things and smashing them and saying he couldn't find his MP3 player and he needed it to calm his brain down. I went, "But you've got your MP3." "You will search for my MP3." That's all he kept saying – "Otherwise, another thing gets smashed. You *will* do it. You *will* find it." And I was searching, and I couldn't find it, and if it didn't look like I was searching for it, another thing would get smashed. Both daughters were at home, and he was stamping on our wedding photos, saying the fact that I'd walked out on him in the psychiatrist's meant that I'd given up and I was just like everyone else, and, "Now you deserve this because now you've left me, just like everyone else." I was begging him to stop. One of my daughters went outside looking for it with him to try and calm him down. I phoned up the police and I said, "Look, I can't control this man. I'm scared." They took three-quarters of an hour to come out and he'd carried on smashing up... basically, my whole house was smashed up. When he'd come home, he'd had a massive lot of ephedrine – he'd put it on the side and he was snorting it, and there was white powder underneath his nose while he was going around, and he kept snorting this stuff. He didn't care.

I tried to walk away from him while he was doing it, but he said, "No, you will sit there, you will watch who I am. This is who I am. This is what I have to do to keep my mind sane." And Kayleigh – my daughter with mental health difficulties – she said to him, "You're an embarrassment. I'm ashamed that you're my dad." And he went to punch her, and I stood in front of her, and I pushed him physically back and said, "You will never, ever touch one of my children. You will have to go through me." And he said, "Why are you always defending her? You are always on her side. You are always defending her." Kayleigh turned around and she said, "Because she's my mum and

not yours,” and that's when he really lost the plot. He punched the light fitting so much that we ended up with bare wires hanging out of the ceiling, and the whole of the bottom of the house was short-circuited so you couldn't see where you were going. The police still weren't here; I was putting in repeated phone calls to the police. He started going into the front room and chucking over tables and chairs – one of them had hit me and caused a bruise. I think he knew the police were on their way, so he barricaded himself into the attic, which was his safe haven when his mind was – he'd go with his music into the attic. Then the police came, and he was in the attic, and he said, “You haven't got a clue. You haven't got a clue what is going on in my brain. Leave me alone. Nobody understands.” I had this one police sergeant kept saying to me, “Why are you with someone like that? He's abusive. Can you not see that this is domestic abuse?” And I was like, “He's got mental health problems. That's what this is.” “No, no. No man smashes up the house, threatens his wife and kids without feeling anything for it to be mental health. No, it's domestic abuse. You need to press charges because he has caused a bruise on you.” I said, “I'm not pressing charges. I don't want charges. I want him to get help. I want him to be sectioned.” And they went on and on and on at me – “Press charges, press charges.” “No, I won't press charges.”

We ended up with negotiators in the house trying to get him down because he'd said to them, he had a noose, and he was going to take his life. This went on until three in the morning and then the police said, “Look, we've got two options here: we can't send anyone into the attic because we don't know what he's got up there, he's barricaded it, it's a danger to us. We can't leave you in the house because he is a danger to you, and we can't get him down, he won't come down. So, you need to leave the house. So, I want you to phone some of your friends.” I went, “It's 3 o'clock in the morning. My friends work, I'm not phoning my friends and saying, ‘Can I come round?’ at 3 o'clock in the morning.” “Well, you need to do something. Is there somewhere you can go?” “No, I've got no family, I've got no friends around here that aren't working.” I don't have a lot of friends anyway because Dave kind of drove a lot of people away. In the end, they said, “Right, come to the police station and you can sleep in a room.” So, one of my daughters went to her boyfriend's house, then we went to the police station. I put one of the dogs in the car with Kayleigh as I'd barricaded her up in the bedroom, and said, “You will not come out until it is safe.”

So, we went to the police station and the police station was shut, so we ended up sleeping in the car in McDonald's car park with the dog. In the morning, the police rang me and said, “We're sending tactical support in at 9 o'clock because of how volatile he is. We are going to arrest him, and we will need a statement from you. We can't really charge him with anything, you know, it doesn't really matter that he's smashed the house up as it's his own belongings. Come to the police station and sit here while we send the police in.” They arrested him, we came back to the house, and, very strangely, we came back to the house. He'd got up at four in the morning and picked up all the big things, trying to tidy up, and then had gone back to bed but hadn't contacted me. He'd sent me a text at six in the morning and said, “What happened last night?” And that's all I got. When I was at the police station, I phoned home treatment and I said, “He's in custody. I want you to section him. What's going to happen, I want someone to go in and realise that the person who did that last night is not in control, he's lost control. I want him sectioned.” “Oh, well, there's not a lot we can do about that. It

depends on if the police let us know.” It came out in the inquest that although he should have had a mental health assessment while in custody, that was never carried out. He wasn't on the records as being under mental health in Birmingham, and the home treatment team didn't go in and see him because they hadn't been contacted by the police and been notified that he was in custody, even though I'd notified them.

They kept asking me all day to write this statement and I wouldn't, I refused. I said, “He doesn't need criminalisation, he needs help. He's a danger. He's been sectioned before. I know that it works.” And I think that's why I held out on our marriage for so long, because I knew, I knew that if someone listened, sectioned him, gave him treatment, that the real him... it was still there. This wasn't him. No matter how much people try to convince you that it's domestic abuse, that they're just not a very nice person ... But, no, I've seen it. I've seen the difference it makes – this is mental health. But we had MARAC [Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference] involvement, we had social services involvement because Kayleigh is a vulnerable adult. We had so many people involved who were all telling, all these professionals were telling me, “It's domestic abuse, it's not mental health. Mental health is not an excuse to be the way he's being.” You know, your mind is so confused, and you think, ‘have I been so stupid that I've ended up in another relationship with domestic abuse in it? I'm making excuses for him?’ But then the other part of your mind is saying, “Hang on, but I've seen it, I know that when he has treatment and when he is stable, then he is a completely different person. This is not him.”

It's a very conflicting thought process that goes on, and you feel like you're being judged for not standing up to him and not dealing with him in a forceful way. You know, you're being a bit pathetic, you're making excuses for his mental health. So, he was discharged on the night time with ‘no further action’ because basically, I wouldn't press charges. They said they had no choice but to let him come back to the house. I'd told the girls that he wasn't coming back, and I sent them off to their friends under the, you know, “You need to see your mates, have a good night out and relax. Have a good weekend.” He came back and the only thing he could say was, “Do you know what my day's been like? Do you know how hard my life has been? Do you know how I've been treated?” He had no concern, it was very “me, me, me”. It was, “I've been treated really badly.” He grabbed some food and some water, and he went and locked himself in the attic. Of course, that night it was very hard to sleep because there was me and him in this house and I had seen what he was capable of the night before and I knew that if I phoned the police, I'd not get anyone to come out because even though they'd put a marker on your house to say “safeguarding” and a MARAC marker, they haven't got the resources anymore to come out and save you.

The next day, Dave got up and he said to me, “Do you want me to leave?” I went, “You're going to have to, because I'm no longer safe and the girls aren't safe, and I can't put myself in that position. If you get treatment and you return to who you were... I'm not saying I'm divorcing you, it's just I'm not safe anymore, and I've always felt safe no matter what. I was safe, but now I'm not.” “Oh, if you want me to leave, you're going to have to give me money because I need food and somewhere to live.” He basically demanded about £2,000 to leave the house, and if I didn't give him £2,000 then he would not be leaving, and he would be staying in the attic and he wasn't in control of

what he could do. I had no choice, I had to give him the money. He left, and that was the last week of his life, which is hard to deal with. [Sobs]. The guilt... I asked him to go because I couldn't keep the girls safe anymore. I just wanted people to help us, make us safe, and there wasn't anyone – no matter how many people I phoned, no matter how many people I reached out to. Everyone just ignored us. He left and I didn't hear from him that week, but I found out in the inquest that the complex mental health team kicked in that week, ironically. They made a phone call to him on 5th October to arrange an appointment, and the psychologist said that that was the most distressed man that she had ever spoken to in her life, and it will never leave her. She said he was going round and round in circles in what he was saying. He was angry, he was crying, he was... She said he had anger towards the mental health services because he kept saying, "They're telling my wife that I know what I'm doing, but I don't know what I'm doing. I'm trying to get help, and nobody is helping." And he said, "But I can't get her back. It's gone too far, and without her, I can't live." The psychologist said she kept trying to ground him, to bring him back down to his family and his marriage and say, "What could you do? How could you make this better?" He said, "I can't make this better, I can't, because I've gone too far." She said, "Well, no, your wife loves you but she just needs to know that she is safe." He ended up saying that he had two means of taking his life: he had some tablets, and he had a noose. He'd left the house with a noose as he fully intended to take his life.

The psychologist said she was so concerned; she said if that man was in front of me, then an immediate mental health assessment would have been sought, which is all I was asking everyone to take notice of and do. She tried to phone him again afterward, but he never picked up the phone again after that. She phoned the police, she phoned home treatment because of her concerns. But nobody phoned me, nobody let me know how bad he was and how close he was to taking his life. He came back to the house on Friday night, the early hours of the morning. I've got CCTV and I saw him trying to avoid the CCTV; he stayed in the alleyway between the two houses because it's a semi-detached. I could hear him coughing as he always had a distinctive cough, so I knew it was him. I looked on the CCTV and, of course, you know, my anxiety was through... I didn't know what he was capable of. I didn't know what he was going to do. I phoned the police and said, "I can't go to bed. I don't know what he's going to do." Because by now, I didn't feel safe, and I think over that weekend I phoned the police five times but not one person ever came out. They said that they didn't have the resources to send anyone out. I didn't want him arrested. I wanted them to take him somewhere safe. I wanted them to see that this bloke has just done this, and he's in an alleyway sleeping rough, and he needs to be sectioned; he needs help.

But everyone I phoned just ignored everything I said, and I think that's what formed most of the trauma to do with his death, it's that... that man could have been alive if people had just listened. But there was nothing I could do, I couldn't phone anybody else, I couldn't... I went out and approached him one night and said, "Dave, what are you doing?" He said, "Don't worry, darling – I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not going to come in the house, I'm not going to hurt you." He said, "Just leave me the fuck alone." I put some blankets over him, gave him some tea and something to eat and I left him there. [Sobs]. Because the police had said if I let him in, it would be harder to get him out. I literally didn't go out of my house for four days. I just kept thinking 'he's going to

come out of that alleyway and he's going to attack me, what is he going to do?' On the Monday, I phoned up a drug rehabilitation place, and I said, "Look, he's sleeping in an alleyway, he's admitted he's taking something. Can you help him?" They said, "No, *you* can't phone, *you* can't refer him, you're his wife." I said, "But he can't do it himself, he's mentally ill." "Well, there's not a lot we can do then. *He's* got to make the phone call." "I'll tell you what," I said, "I'll go to the alleyway and talk to him now and I'll get him to talk to you. While I'm there, he will talk to you." "No, you can't do that because then you're pressuring him." So, I phoned up home treatment and said, "I need to speak to someone about Dave Jukes. I really need someone to come and see him." "Oh, everyone's out on visits at the moment, I'll get someone to phone you back." They never phoned me back. I'd been told the only way I could safeguard the girls and myself, because I couldn't remove him from the alleyway, was to get a non-molestation order. So, on the Tuesday, I went to court. I snuck out the house and took a taxi as I didn't want him to know I had gone anywhere. My thinking behind that was it was to protect the girls and me, and also I thought if he then breaks that, someone will take him somewhere and someone will say, "Right, we've got a room here and we're going to get you some help." I represented myself in court, because, obviously, I couldn't afford a solicitor, and it took all day.

I came back to the house. I'd arranged for a bailiff to serve him, because apparently, you can't do it yourself. But something told me, "Don't go to the house, Jo". I don't know what it was. It was like a voice in my head saying, "Jo, don't approach that house at the moment," and I waited by the flats near where I live. For some reason, I took my keys, my house keys, off my keyring. It wasn't a conscious thing. I don't even know why. But the bailiffs turned up and said, "Sit in our car and we'll go and serve him. If he sees you, it might antagonise him a bit more." I sat in the car, and obviously, it's got child locks in the back of it, and I saw them go into the alleyway and I saw them running out. I thought, 'Oh my god, he's probably attacked them, or he's run off or something'. Then they started knocking on neighbours' doors and I'm thinking 'oh god, what has he done? Has he really hurt them? What's he actually done?' I was trying to get out of the car, but I couldn't open the door. Then I thought 'well, it's not them, they're not hurt so it's got to be him. What if they've hurt him? Has he hurt himself while he's been...? Has he punched them, has he done something?' And I waited for a couple of seconds, and I was just trying to open this door to get out, and one of the bailiffs came over to the car and he went, "You don't want to get out." I said, "Why don't I want to get out? I do. If he's hurt someone, I'll help you. He will listen to me. I know he will listen to me." They said, "No, you just need to stay out the way." "I don't, I need to know what's going on."

Then a police car turned up. I thought, "What the hell's going on?" Then I saw them get a defib out of the ambulance and I thought 'okay, what's going on? Nobody's telling me anything and I can't get out of the car. I was banging on the windows of the car, saying, "Just let me out." Then he came over to me and said, "He's gone." [Sobs] I said, "Where's he gone? Where's he ran to? Where?" He said, "He's dead." I literally just howled, thinking it's all my fault. I'd killed him. I shouldn't have been at court. [Sobs]. He'd hung himself in the back gate, facing the house. There was just police, ambulances there, and I couldn't go in the house as it was a crime scene, and I had nowhere to go. The only place I could phone was work. How sad is that? I went to

someone from work's house until they'd finished with the house. What they do is they just come and give you the keys, say, "There's your keys. Go back to your house now." Then you walk into the house, and it's exactly the same as you'd left it in the morning, but it's not because someone's just died in your house. You go into the garden and the fence panels are not there where they've accessed his body, and his things are on the chair, like his came back. And they don't clear any of that up; they just leave you to do it yourself, and nobody contacts you afterwards. It's done. As far as the police are concerned, as far as everyone's concerned, that's it – the person's dead. End of story. But it's not the end of the story for the families, is it? Because there's no support, no understanding of how hard it is to deal with the amount of failures that Dave had encountered, the amount of failures the whole family has encountered, and how you come to terms with that is ... it's difficult. I'm under trauma therapy now to try and come to terms with it all.

I: Has there been any recognition or support from any of the armed forces charities, that this was essentially a veteran suffering from PTSD, who had taken his life?

R: Yeah. I'd say one of the difficulties we had, because of the area we're in, there's very little veteran things in Birmingham, although it's the second-largest city and it's got a really big veteran community, apparently. I got told yesterday that 2-% are veterans in this area, but there's nothing, and there's no one based here and nothing available if you are a veteran in this area. If I was in Portsmouth or Plymouth, I'd be falling over myself, but not in Birmingham. I've sung from the rooftops about that since Dave died. We didn't know of anyone, all we knew of was the NHS, doctors, the home treatment team and that was it, and if you've exhausted those people, and Combat Stress, then you've got no one. Obviously, following his death, I reached out to All Call Signs, as they'd just set up, and SJ was probably one of the only people who – had never met me before – but phoned me and made sure I was okay on the day of Dave's funeral. She phoned me on the morning – "Jo, how are you doing? How are you going to cope today?" And it was probably from there that I realised there was an online community.

I: So, who was this, Jo?

R: SJ from All Call Signs. I didn't realise there was an online community. Probably we aren't the only family who don't realise that there is a community out there on the computer. Now I know, but it's sad because I think that if I'd known some of these charities, and Dave was alive, then the outcome would have been so much different. But I didn't know then, and I didn't know that there was support available with them. But I think, you know, although there has been no support from the army at all, they've never even acknowledged anything except for awarding me a war widow's pension. Which is good in a way because I felt like I'd done his memory justice, because there is a stigma attached to mental health, there is a stigma attached to PTSD. And I think from the first interview I ever did, I said that Dave may not have died in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghan, but he died through his service, and he deserves to be remembered for the sacrifice he made for his country. He sacrificed many, many years after he came out of the army, through his mental health and through his subsequent death, but he'll never be remembered for that. He'll never have his name on a wall, or his name

remembered by anyone, but he will because I've shouted his name from the rooftops, you know. I think more people know about him now than they did when he was alive.

But that was important to me; it was important that I didn't feel that his death was in vain. One of the things that occurred to me even in the first days of his death was that he'll be forgotten; he'll just be another number. And some charities will talk about 'numbers' all the time; my argument to that as a family member is that he's not a number; he was a human being with memories and people who still love him, and for him to just be used as a number to contribute to someone's campaigns, I find that absolutely disrespectful to the memories that those people leave behind. He *will* be remembered now and that is purely just because, I think, of the amount of things that went wrong with Dave and the amount of people who just didn't do their jobs properly. I hope it has helped shape the future treatment of veterans and it's been recognised officially. But it's bittersweet – it's bittersweet when you know that things are changing, and I do recognise that from this time last year, veterans' mental health is a lot better where the NHS are concerned. They recognise it more; they are putting things in place. But that's been built on the shoulders of a lot of people and a lot of suffering that people are still going through. And although it's good to be part of the solution and not part of the problem, it is difficult to listen to and to say, "I know if this had been in place when Dave was alive, I know that he would have continued to be alive."

The coroner did say that he would not have died on – his first anniversary is next week – he would not have died on that day if people had done their jobs. He underwent six mental health assessments in three months of crisis and not one person finished their actual assessment, so no support was put in place because everyone was... they assessed the fact that he was being assessed. You know, I've done all of that because I have to have justice for him, and I have to make sure that he isn't remembered negatively. He was a difficult person, I would never kind of say that he was an angel. I think I've always tried to be very honest and say there were good parts of Dave and there were bad parts of Dave, but the man I loved was there still, and I knew that he could recover. Even though you get questioned about "why" – "Why would you be with someone that long?" It's because I know that it was mental health and I know that with the right treatment, he would have been back to who he was. Probably, if I hadn't had that insight into the Dave before treatment and then after, then again going downhill, it might have been different. But I firmly believe if he had been sectioned, he'd be alive and he'd be living a full life.

I: You've done quite a lot of interviews, I think, because you want to raise awareness about the lack of provision for those with PTSD.

R: Yes.

I: How has the last year been for you, Jo, as a war widow? You said you were awarded your war widow's pension.

R: Yes.

I: How have people responded to you? How have you been? How have the girls

been?

R: It's been really difficult. I think at one stage, I went into denial, in the period between the initial grief and... You know, your brain kind of goes into... well, you haven't had a death certificate, and you know you've got an inquest coming up, but until you have that inquest, it's a bit like putting your fingers in your ears when you're a child and going, "La-la-la," and, "Everything's alright, I can deal with this." But I think the inquest itself is very traumatic because as the instructing party on your husband's behalf – it was an Article 2 inquest, which means that his human rights were breached by the NHS – so barristers were involved, there were barrister solicitors, and it went on for a whole week. I was a fundamental part of his inquest, so I had to read every statement, I had to read every report, from pathology to, you know, all the doctors who dealt with him beforehand because I am the person driving that inquest on his behalf, I'm his representative. So, you know, to listen to some of the evidence, you know... the girls came with me to the inquest because they said that throughout Dave's mental illness, they knew how bad it was but they didn't know the full extent because I shielded them from a lot. I took a lot of the flak, I tried to make things okay for them while dealing with, you know, calming Dave down. They said the inquest helped them to put things into chronological order, but it's been very hard for the girls.

My daughter today has just been signed off work and referred back to her psychiatrist because she is really struggling. You know, it's little things like his text messages start to disappear because it's been a year, and you've got a whole year of no talking to that person or no memories. It still seems quite surreal that he's not here, which sounds ... Like, yesterday, I thought I saw him walking down the street, which is ridiculous because it wasn't him, it was just someone else with grey hair the same as him. Yeah, it's like you're constantly reliving everything because of the trauma. I've been diagnosed PTSD myself now because of how traumatic the last, you know, since 2012 has been, and I've had to kind of keep on bottling things up and moving on and keeping everything together for the sake of everyone, and I think my brain at the moment has just gone, "This is too much. You can't keep doing this. "And I think suicide carries with it a forever, "What if?" One of my big things was how did Dave know I was at court on the day he died? Because the police came and saw him on the day he died. Kayleigh was the last one to ever see him alive, and the police came and saw him and spoke to him. I'd wanted to know what those police officers had said because that played on my mind. It turned out that the police officers did tell him that I was at court, so I feel no matter how much people say to you, "It's not your fault. You did everything you could. You couldn't have supported him more, you couldn't have asked for any more help." You always feel "if I hadn't have done that. If I'd just sacrificed myself that little bit more ..." I could have put up with it, I could have, you know ... I could have got him ... But I know, realistically, there's nothing more I could have done; I'd exhausted every single avenue. I think that plays on the girls' minds as well.

One of my daughters is very, very angry towards any NHS staff. I mean, she will not ... Just short of a couple of months after he died, she ended up having to be in hospital because she had a complete breakdown. Because her emotions come out when she's been drinking – she's 24 – and she so angry. She just sits on the floor, and she howls with pain. But to see her walking down the street everything is a mask, and she's, "I'm

okay, everything is great. I'm over this." But if she has a little bit of drink, everything comes out and she ended up where she smashed a shower screen through her anger and she ended up with glass inside of her, so I had to take her to A&E. They said, "Do you want to talk to RAID?" Oh, my goodness – "You never did anything for him so why would you even offer me anything? How dare you ever offer me anything." She will not talk to anyone, she will not engage with anyone, mental health-wise or otherwise. She will not even go to the doctors. She has such anger towards them now because she and Dave were really, really close. There will be those times in her life when she needs help when she gets married, when she has children. It won't go away. People say, "You'll move on, you'll get over it." But you won't because of all those times, you know, the children who are left behind have it for the rest of their lives, especially if they had a really close relationship. And it fundamentally changes people, it doesn't matter what your relationship with them is, if they are your friend, your comrade, your colleague who you are quite close to – everybody, no matter who they are is filled with the same questions – "Why didn't I pick up the phone that time? Why wasn't I there for him? Why...?" I know all of his friends have really struggled with their guilt because life takes people on a journey, and they get swept up in their own life and they forget. And if you haven't heard from someone in a while, you don't automatically think there might be something wrong, you think 'well, they must be okay; they're getting on with their lives, they don't need me.'

Even at the funeral ... A lot of his friends will probably never get over Dave's suicide. To think that it doesn't have a wide impact on everyone, there's no hierarchy, there's no competition in grief, there's no ... you know? I have this thing about mothers, they seem to think that their grief trumps everybody's, that they are at the top of that pyramid, then the fathers come underneath, then if you are a spouse, you're underneath them, then if you're a sibling, you're even further down. I don't agree with that because it depends on what your relationship is like with that person. You could be a mother and your child could take their life, but you might not be close. I doubt that my mother would be very upset if I took my life, so just the very fact that you're a mother doesn't actually mean that it affects you. I think it's the relationship you have with that person and if you've been a part of their struggles and part of looking after them for years and years, then that is how it impacts you more.

I always recognise that some of his friends ... I mean, at his funeral, they couldn't even speak, they were so upset. Even some of the staff who dealt with Dave, I know they still think of him. One of them said to me yesterday that when they phone someone now, If they don't pick up the phone straight away, they think of Dave and think 'I'll give it one more try,' because you just never know. So, I don't think anybody is immune from the effect, it has a ripple effect on everyone. It starts with the nucleus, the closest members of the family, then the more you get outside of the family, you still feel it though maybe not as deeply. If you're a widow, your life has just been chucked up in the air. Everything in your life has just completely ... your future has just been changed overnight; your finances have just been changed. You've gone from ... even though he was unemployed, he was still getting a fulltime wage, so you go down to one wage overnight. Nobody comes along and says, "Oh, let's help you out with that." If they've got no life insurance, which Dave had no life insurance, he had no savings – he had 79p in his pocket. You know, it's a massive ... and you're trying to deal with that at the

same time as grieving. It's immense. And if it's suicide, some people don't want that acknowledged and that's up to them. Some insurance policies don't pay out if it's suicide. So, you know, when they say we need to have PTSD suicide recognised, well, I don't agree you should put that kind of ... Because you're not in that position of that family and you can't call that shot for that family, and it might be against their morals, it might be against... Maybe they just don't want to acknowledge that there have been mental health problems, you know. Maybe financially, if they do say yes, it was suicide, maybe they're going to lose their house because of it, because their mortgage won't get paid out. It's very simplistic from the outside to look in and say, "I know that we should do this and do that ..." Well, you don't know it because you don't live it and you haven't been in that situation.

You know, suicide is a cruel thing. It sounds ironic to say that I know that Dave did it out of love, which is ridiculous. But all he ever said to everyone was that he just wanted me to be happy. He knew that his mental health problems were causing such distress and such pressure on everyone, that in his head, if he took himself out of the equation, it was, "Her life would be great because I'm the biggest problem in her life." He didn't know the effect that would have, because you know, your mind kind of lies to you and says, "Life will be great without me," you know. I know on the morning he died, he spoke to one of his friends and he said he was arranging to have a tattoo. Obviously, he was never going to go through with this tattoo, but he but on the tattoo, he said that he wanted "Only God can judge me but only I know the love I have for my wife," which is really sad. He never had that tattoo done, obviously. But some of his friends said the fact that he returned to just sleep in the alleyway ... And he never once knocked on the door, even though I didn't know he wasn't going to, he never once threatened, he never once tried to do anything, he just lay in that corridor. His friends said it was because he wanted to be close to me, but he knew in his head that he was a danger. He knew that while the wall was keeping hi separate, he could still hear that I was there. He even took his wedding ring off before he took his life, and he put his wedding ring in his wallet in such a secret place that I was obsessed with getting his wedding ring back. I was like, "Was he wearing his wedding ring?" "No, he wasn't." "But he never took his wedding ring off." And when I got his wallet back, it was tucked away nice and safely. Apparently, that goes back to what they know of in theatre, that if someone dies, sometimes your body gets rifled through and maybe some things get taken from you that you hold precious, so he had taken it so that nobody could find it.

So, I wouldn't say that it's got any easier in the last year; I'd say I'm probably still in the same mental state as I was when he first died, but you put one foot in front of the other, don't you, as much as possible? I think raising the awareness of PTSD has been part of my journey. I mean, my therapist said to me it's almost like therapy for me to know that something which has totally devastated my life I can try and make something positive come out of that. You can go one of two ways, can't you? You can either become very bitter and hateful, and I don't think there's any right or wrong, you do what is necessary for you, but for me, I didn't want to turn into one of those bitter people. I wanted to always be quite open and admit how much I struggle. I struggle with my mental health loads now, which I had never done before this, but, you know, you were never going to come out of this unscathed, and if you think you are then... My doctor says, if anything, that's more worrying. But I wanted to be not ashamed to actually

admit that I am struggling, I have struggled, and that Dave, you know, he struggled a lot but that didn't mean that people didn't love him.

I: So, are you still in work, Jo? You said it's affected your own mental health?

R: At the moment, I'm signed off work. I've been diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety. I'm undergoing trauma therapy and I have been referred to occupational health. I am in work, but I've been signed off at the moment. The job I do is very stressful in itself, and as much as you try and control your brain and your thoughts and how you react to people... it's not a conscious thought but obviously, when your brain is so... My brain doesn't shut up; my brain goes on and on and on. I've started having derealisation. I have hallucinations and things, and sometimes I think I'm going up absolutely loopy, but the doctors all say that it's just because your brain can't cope at the moment; your brain is, it's like putting your engine management light on. You know, when the engine management light comes on, your car goes limp; it can't drive as fast and can't do as many functions because you haven't been taking care of it; you haven't been servicing it; you haven't been, you know, filling the water up or changing the oil. And it's the same with your brain; your brain goes into engine management mode, which means "take care of me" and I can't function with all of this going on.

So, yes, it has an impact on everything, doesn't it, you know? At one point, I would have been in work regardless of anything. I mean, it showed with Dave's illness, you know – anything and everything. I'd put off anything to be in work because I don't like letting people down. That's then another degree of this negative voice that's always in your head saying, "You're just crap, aren't you? You're just a bit weak, you know. Pull yourself together. He's been dead nearly a year. Carry on with it. What are you doing? You're wallowing." You know, there are so many conflicting thoughts, but I think I've gradually started to realise that I have tried in between to kind of forget or put aside how actually my brain feels, but it always comes back. So maybe my brain is going, "No, you can't ignore me this time."

I feel that if I wasn't honest about that, that I'm kind of disrespecting what I fought for, for Dave, because how can I bang the drum of PTSD and how it affects the families and how it affects the veterans, if then I'm not admitting that it actually affects me personally and I'm too ashamed to say it? I can't be two-faced like that. I've got to go out there and say, "Yeah, it affects me," and there is no shame in that and there's nothing to be embarrassed about. It's not permanent. I haven't got a permanent mental health problem; I'm in trauma, and my brain needs to deal with the trauma that I've been through and then it will recover. It was said to me as in, if you had a broken leg, you'd rest up on the settee and you'd make sure you were well-taken care of, and little by little you'd put weight on it. You wouldn't put weight on it straight away and then run up a hill. And, unfortunately, with mental health, that's what we think we have to do, so you need to rest it and you need to take care of yourself and your family and that will always be your priority and should always be your priority. Then little by little, you put more and more weight on it, and that's what I'm trying to do.

I: Dave's anniversary is coming up, and last year, when it happened, it was awfully close to Remembrance, as indeed it always will be. What is Remembrance like

for you? Last year was your first year without Dave?

R: October is a pretty brutal month. Well, September and October are really brutal because there are a lot of memories in September about the things that led up to his death, you know, the smashing up of the house, I remember that the ambulance with him this night. You know, it's a long lead up to it, and then he died on the 9th and then our wedding anniversary is on the 22nd so, you know, that's really difficult because ... Maybe you've noticed that when I talk about the man ... See? I was doing it again. [Laughs] When I talk about the man that I married, that's when it hurts because he was the man that I loved. In therapy, they say that's a bit I find the hardest. I probably find it easier to remember the PTSD, which is a bit mad. I find it easy to remember all the hard times and the crises and talk about the crises than I do about who I actually married. Maybe that's a testament to how much I loved him, I don't know.

Then we've got Remembrance; Remembrances is really hard. Suicide Awareness Day is really hard because you have it in your face everywhere – “Oh, it's good to talk, it's good to prevent suicide,” and it just reminds you. I think one of the hardest things about suicide is that it's the biggest form of rejection you will ever have in your life because the person you loved and who loved you, has decided to leave you in the most permanent way. They prefer to be dead than to be with you, and that's a hard thing to live with. Yes, and Remembrance, it's everywhere, it's the build-up. Remembrance isn't just November, is it? You got the Ride to the Wall this weekend. It's the whole of October and November, really, Remembrance – it's everywhere. Everyone says, “We need to remember our veterans. We need to remember their service. We need to remember the sacrifices they've made and the sacrifices their families made.” But is it *really* remembered? Is it really? Or is it just, “Let's tick that box there. We've done a Remembrance service and we were silent for a little bit.” I think one of my biggest bugbears with Remembrance is that it's not just World War I and II, you know, there are people now who are still dying from their service to this country – are you remembering them as well? I know, even working in schools, what we focus on is, “Let's look at some World War I history. Let's look at some World War II archives,” and that's what they mean by Remembrance, and I think, you know, we need to make sure that Remembrance is not just World War I and II.

You know, the only thing we hear Northern Ireland is that some of the soldiers are being prosecuted. Where do we hear about the sacrifices that those families made and they made? Some of those veterans are taking their lives. And when do we hear about Bosnia? We don't. When do we hear about Iraq anymore? Now, it's all Afghan. But you can't just remember certain aspects because they've all sacrificed and all their families have sacrificed. I think a lot of the honouring should be of the families left behind as well, because the sacrifice they have made and the things they have lived through as a consequence of their husbands or their sons or their fathers in protecting this country is huge. I don't think it is honoured enough and I don't think the people are remembered enough. That's kind of why I like this project because it's giving a human face to it's not just the veterans, actually, but they stand on the shoulders of so many people, and without those people, that veteran would not have been able to do their job – they would not successfully have been in Iraq or Afghan or wherever they were. Because you've got to have someone keeping those home fires burning, you've got

have someone who is making it that they've got some reason to fight, because, otherwise, if they don't, they're not going to be there to fight just for their country; they are there to fight for the freedom of the people they know and love. So, you have to honour the people that they know and love as well as them.

I: That's very well put, Jo.

R: Thank you.

I: Jo, what do you wish people knew about war widows, about those left behind and the life that comes after?

R: I wish they knew how difficult it was financially. I wish they knew the inequalities that exist within war widows' pensions. I wish they knew that those people have sacrificed a lot of their own mentality, their life, everything they've got to make sure that this country is protected. That they fought alongside their loved ones, maybe not on the battlefield but they did emotionally – they were there, they worried about them constantly, the anxiety they had, you know. Normal people just read about battles or see it on the news and think, 'oh God, that's awful'. But imagine being the one that is at home watching that on the news, listening to that, that there's been another explosion and is my partner or husband involved? And you won't get to find out at first, because all the phone lines have been cut down, so you won't know maybe for a couple of days, but you're still expected to go to work and carry on and do all your everyday things, and don't let your kids see that you're worried.

And the children of these men and women are affected deeply, you know – they've moved around constantly, because there are different barracks they're being sent to, different countries they're being sent to. So they're always the "new child" and always battling to be accepted, which will leave them with long-term personality traits that make them lack self-esteem, that make them want to be one of the crowd, and want to be accepted. They've got gaps in their education because they move from one school to another, and it's not always the same, it's not always at the same pace, so there will be gaps that are going to have and they're going to grow up – some of them will grow up without a father or a mother figure and they'll miss that terribly in their lives. And if it goes altogether, you know, it's a void that nobody can replace, and I think that their sacrifice needs to be honoured and remembered. I think, importantly, people need to keep saying the person's name and letting the widows and families know that, "Do you know what, I remember this about him," and "I remember he had a funny sense of humour," and, "I remember this time we went to..." Because when Dave's mates send me little stories like that, it means I laugh because I know that's his personality, but it means that he did exist and he wasn't just someone who put on a uniform and went somewhere, but he was an actual human being that people have living memories of.

I think living history and oral history could never be replaced by a book; I think it's really important. I think it's important to let people know that you remember things and not be afraid of that. You're not going to remind someone that someone's dead by remembering, saying, "Oh, I remember this about him." They haven't forgotten. They

know he's not here, but you're helping them to remember the funny, and maybe some of the aspects of their personality that they can't remember themselves or they choose not to, but when you tell them a story that brings the person back to life for them. You're not going to make them mourn more and you're not going to make them more upset because they're already feeling like that. You're just going to make them thank you for remembering them.

I: What does the future hold, Jo?

R: [Sighs]. Oh... I think the future holds – well, I hope the future holds – moving into veteran support. I think I've got a lot to offer. Personal experience and lived experience, you can never train for that; you can't buy it; a university doesn't teach it. I would really like to be involved more in the veterans' community. But it's like there's this little stigma attached to actually saying, "I'd like to be involved but I'd like to be paid a wage." It's like... I don't know anyone that can't not be paid a wage, because I have kids, I have a house, I have a car. But it's almost like if you say, "Yes, I want to be involved in veterans support and I want to be involved in changing everything, and I want to use my experiences." "Do you want to volunteer?" "No, I *don't* want to volunteer because I need to earn a wage." And as a widow, particularly, I can't afford to not work. I kind of want to put that out there, that there is nothing wrong in earning a wage. Because you get people who not only care about it but are also then committed to it because their wages rely on that. They can't just go, "Do you know what, today I don't fancy coming in, and you can't do anything about it because I'm a volunteer. If I want to walk away, I can walk away," and, "Oh no, I can't walk away because I'm actually employed by you and I'm accountable to you and I have to prove that I'm doing what I say I'm doing." So yeah, that's what I'd hope.

I: So, it would be important that they were paid skills?

R: Yes. But the pay is so poor. I've been looking for jobs. I look on Cobseo, I look at charity jobs, and I think some of them are £17,000 a year. My daughter of 24 earns more than £17,000 a year, so how can I possibly, at my age, have a wage drop that high? I've got degrees, I've got postgrad degrees, I've got a master's, I can't and I won't, so, therefore, they are losing the opportunity to have these people who could make a difference. Because the only people who can afford to be in veteran support are those who are either retired or who are on benefits and on disability benefits and whatnot. And I'm not judging anyone like that, I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but there's a whole other level of people who can make a difference, who actually at the moment are not being utilised because they can't afford to not be paid. I think it's wrong.

I: Jo, is there anything we haven't talked about? Anything else you want to say?

R: No, no. I think we've covered the lot.

[End of Recording]