

In Pursuit of a Dream – Christopher Brennan’s Path to Journalism



“I wanted to perform; I wanted to be seen.” Christopher Brennan’s recollections of himself as a young boy at school highlight an intrinsic desire that led him from the classroom and into the world of journalism.

In his own words, Brennan wasn’t one of the “cool kids” at school. From an early age, he had developed a rather unlikely fascination with computers and ABBA. It was this deep intrigue that pushed him further and further out of his comfort zone.

“I just needed to know as much as I possibly could about those two subjects,” Brennan explains. “I knew what all the Abba songs were about, and when they'd been written.

“It was that sort of inquisitiveness around that, combined with my desire to be seen. That's journalism.”

If there was a turning point, it came from his schoolteacher asking him a simple question. As Brennan joked around with his friends near the media room, the teacher suggested that he took his performative skills to the school radio. Brennan laughed it off, believing it to be beyond his talents. “Why not?” That simple two word response has stuck with Brennan now throughout his career. Any challenge he faces, any obstacle that he is unsure he can overcome, he returns to those same words.

Brennan’s capability to dive into a subject would eventually propel him into a successful career in technology journalism. He describes his captivation of the tech company Apple, as comparative to his boyhood love of ABBA. And so, when he eventually left education, entering the world of employment, this thirst for information was what he thinks got him his big break.

“It wasn't whether I was a good writer, it wasn't whether I was a great journalist. It wasn't whether I understand the nuances of magazine publishing. It was that at my interview, I knew about the SE-30 and its processing and who made it, and what it was called, and why it was different to the SE, and what the Mac Plus was.

“I'd had that sort of obsession to find out as much as possible about the thing that I was interested in. It was more the passion for the subject that drove my career.”

His career, writing for various technology magazines, led to many highlights as Brennan reminisces about lavish trips abroad, and press passes to big events. In his mind, he is clear on what ingredients are needed to make it in the fast-paced, competitive environment of journalism.

“In a lot of cases, it's because you stopped asking questions,” Brennan says. “I worked on interviews for nine months. And the thing is, the one I care about is the one who never returned my call.”

“I think just a tenacity and a passion for the subject, you have to care about it. If you don't care, your readers will know.”

He is steadfast on tenacity and determination underpinning what makes a great journalist. But while discussing his own experiences around former colleagues and staff, he is quick to point out that politeness is a trait that has served him well over the years.

It's only in retrospect, that Brennan can appreciate the magnitude of some of his career achievements. Once a performative child with no platform to express himself, he managed to carve out a path to the top of the UK's technology journalism arena. Being part of the exclusive group of writers with access to the biggest industry brands, Brennan enjoyed several years of luxury living as he hopscotched from one five-star hotel to the next, following all the big tech events of the time.

He is under no illusion that the heights he achieved were not due to a carefully considered plan. “That doesn't work for me,” he sniggers. In his view, fate and chance have more to answer for as to where he ended up.

A casual coffee with an old acquaintance led to his next career deviation. He was asked to perform a one-hour lecture at Leeds Beckett University, which must have gone very well because it manifested a 15-year career in academia as a journalism lecturer at the university.

“I was the most terrified one in that room.” His first lecture was daunting, but his old mantra came ringing back in his ears - “Why not?”

His earliest motivations for entering this profession had been about finding his place, but lecturing gave him something far more profound. The desire to be seen had now been replaced with an enjoyment of guiding others.

“I get a great deal more joy out of seeing other people achieve stuff, it's the best job in the world.” It might sound a bit cliché, but watching Brennan say it, you know he believes it.

That's the most striking thing about Brennan. His ability to exude confidence, while rattled with self-doubt, his lack of planning but his clear conviction, his quirky fascinations but his ability to search for deeper meaning. Brennan is a walking embodiment of what journalism should be. Not defined by an arrogance, but by a desire to move forwards, to always ask yourself, “why not?”