

# MND Matters: Episode 33: Q&A with Peter Ash and Daniel Brocklebank

## **Suzanne**

Welcome to MND matters, brought to you by the MND Association and sponsored by Toyota GB and Toyota Financial Services. Today we're joining you from a very special location, the Coronation Street tour visitor center. I'm Suzanne, and I'm delighted to be joined by actors Peter Ash and Daniel Brocklebank. Peter, who plays character Paul, and Dan, who plays Billy, have been involved in a storyline about MND since April last year, so together, alongside some of Peter and Dan's castmates and journalists, we've just watched a preview screening of Paul's final scenes on the show. And I think it's fair to say that it was an incredibly moving and emotional watch, for all of us concerned. And it was actually the first time Dan and Peter that you've had chance to see those scenes too. So how was it for you watching them?

## **Peter Ash**

It was emotional, wasn't it? Yeah, and because we filmed it over two months ago, forgot a lot of it as well.

## **Daniel Brocklebank**

I think it's, it's, I was really nervous before we started, just because it's, it's such a big episode, and like Pete says, you know, it was a couple of months ago now, since we shot it, so I couldn't quite remember the order in which things happen or but I'm really pleased with it. Yeah, it's beautifully done.

## **Suzanne**

I think there was a real balance, wasn't there between some of the drama of Billy racing around and not knowing what was going on with Paul and the hospital scenes. So it was a very Coronation Street end. Is how I think we felt watching it. Is that how you felt filming it?

## **Daniel**

Well, I think filming it, I mean, it's not until you see it put together, really, that you get the whole shape of it, but yes, in true Cory style, you've got lighter moments and darker moments all sort of seamlessly symbiotically working around one another, filming it. We were just in tears for weeks. Oh,

## **Peter**

Oh yeah. Well, yes, been all. It's been like for months. Every new script we got. Have you read this? Yeah, it's heartbreaking, isn't it?

## **Daniel**

We've run out of tears.

**Peter**

Absolutely. But no, that's something I think the Corrie do great. They get the comedy as well as the real pathos and stuff as well. So yeah.

**Suzanne**

So we haven't just relied on ourselves to come up with questions. We've actually gone out to the MND community and asked them what they wanted us to ask you. So I'm just going to read some of those questions out and just tell us your thoughts. So Kelly asked, Did you enjoy the storyline, even though it was hard to do, and I think enjoy is perhaps an interesting word to use there. I'm sure you'll have some better ones.

**Peter**

Although I struggle. I've said this in a lot of interviews. I always say enjoy, but then I say enjoy is probably not the right word. And I don't know what the right word would be, but it's been. I mean, we have enjoyed it. We have we

**Daniel**

It has been challenging. But we've always been aware that we've been representing real people and their situation. We adore working together. That was enjoyable, you know, we, I mean, we've had a I've had a ball working with him, considering that sort of, you know, how heavy the content is we've been shooting, we've still been able to finish work despite maybe crying solidly for 12 hours going home feeling like you've done a good job. You've represented the community well. So yeah, there have been elements of enjoyment. Obviously, you know, it's been heavy as well, but I've enjoyed it.

**Peter**

I have, yeah, I understand, though, what you saying absolutely that, you know, it's, it's tough. And I know there are a lot of people who've, you know, quite rightly said, deeply, can't watch it. It's too close to home for them. Totally understandable, obviously. I mean, they've seen that where Paul's, you know, it's pretty harrowing when you're watching and that's watching myself as well, which is weird, but yeah, it's you know, to imagine that you know happening for real. Yeah? Be absolutely horrific.

**Suzanne**

Okay, so Gaynor has asked what kind of research you did in terms of speaking to people who had had a loved one who died of MND, and that you've been working with our team quite, quite a lot as well, which has been so interesting from our point of view, to see, sort of how much research has gone into it. So kind of, in terms of those conversations, how have they come about? Have they been useful to you?

**Peter**

Absolutely. I personally knew very little about MND. Obviously, Dan has personal connection, so he was a great source of insight for me. And, yeah, getting to know the MND community was, you know, a great help with with this storyline, obviously, because these are the people your representing and and, yeah, it is. It's an amazing bunch of people you know that MND community. They just just make you

want to get involved and help out in any way you can. So obviously, I lot of research for me. Obviously, Dan, you had a personal connection.

**Daniel**

My family and I have lived through a similar storyline, so I've already cared for somebody living with MND as of the rest of my family. So for me, it was, it was bizarre to be faced with such a large storyline and no research required. There were many, many instances in our scripts where they were very reminiscent of what we went through as a family all the way through. That gave me a huge amount of comfort. And I've said this to Pete before, but to know that we were getting it right, I can't think of a single time where I had to call an editor or a storyline and say, I'm not sure that it would happen like this, or it didn't happen like this with us, or I've spoken to somebody else, and this wasn't, you know, it was bang on every time. So that, as somebody that has already lived through something very similar to what Billy and Paul have been through, it was very comforting to know that we were representing the MND community truthfully. So I didn't really have to do much research at all.

**Suzanne**

That authenticity is just so important. And like you say, I mean, you've just nailed it as a team, which is just great for the community to see.

**Daniel**

Really good to know.

**Suzanne**

Gail, so you sort of touched on this. So Gail asked, How did you pull this role off so realistically, and I think that's perhaps some aimed more at you, Peter, from sort of actually acting with disability and the physical issues and speech, etc.

**Peter**

I guess just I don't know, with the pressure of knowing it is something that real people are dealing and living with, and it kind of gives you that extra push to get it as right as you can. And we've always said as well with MND. It's so different for every person. Everyone has a completely different journey to it. So, you know, in a way, we couldn't get it too wrong in terms of the timeline of it all, but, and I guess we've been very lucky that we've been playing this out in pretty much real time as well, which I think has helped a great deal as well. It's give us a time to focus on every little moment and let them breathe.

**Suzanne**

Brilliant. Thank you. And carrying on from that. Audrey has asked about the voice loss, which was shown really beautifully. And I think you had the I will always be me book involved in a couple of scenes. They were beautiful scenes. So how did you manage to show that voice loss so well? Because it is quite a quite a tricky one, isn't it?

**Peter**

Yeah again it's just something technical. You could be aware of what parts of the mouth aren't working or aren't working as well anymore. And for Paul, it started off with just the way I started with his tongue

wasn't quite keeping up with the rest of his mouth, so it was it wasn't all the time. You could hear it, but every now and again, you could tell that there was something going there, because obviously the way we played it was Paul wasn't really aware himself how much it had deteriorated until he heard himself back in a recording. But yeah, just the physicality of the voice as well. It's just being aware of what parts you can and can't move.

**Suzanne**

I guess kind of lots of stuff in front of the mirror. Does that kind of help?

**Peter**

Not really, because it's difficult to imagine just a fact of, like, right your tongues not moving, like, like, like it can as in, I wasn't hitting the roof of my mouth from a tongue things like that. Whereas I don't know, it's quite hard to explain, isn't it really, your process of it really,

**Suzanne**

it's an acting art, obviously.

**Peter**

I guess sometimes it's stuff. I guess we just don't really think about, because we've been acting for decades and decades, a lot of stuff. I guess we just get used to it. But then trying to explain that can be quite difficult, can't it?

**Daniel**

Yeah but I think because, like you said, you know, nobody's decline through MND, either physically or vocally, is the same. So it did give us some artistic license to be able to sort of the way they written it as well. Like, you know, Paul's leg would go, and then there would be episodes and episodes and episodes where Paul and Billy were dealing with getting used to that thing before the next thing went so it's just a combination of all of it, really, isn't it? Yeah, absolutely.

**Suzanne**

Well, very good acting. This one. This question's from Marta. To you. Daniel, so how did you find playing a carer?

**Daniel**

Well, again, I've lived it. It's interesting with these sorts of storylines, I think, and not just these storylines. I think even in real life, the role of the carer is often overlooked. All of the attention is on the person who has the illness. And I think Corrie were careful, not necessarily to overlook Billy's role within Paul's journey. And I think they tried to show how difficult it is for somebody to be caring for somebody 24/7, even though you know they love them dearly. And then, obviously, then after Paul, you know, eventually goes, there's, as happens with carers, is there's this void. All of a sudden, you've given up your life to care for somebody else's, and all of a sudden, you now have 24 hours in a day that need filling. And it's almost unimaginable as to what you're going to fill them with, because that person that filled that 24 hours is no longer with you. So I think it was important again, our research team, our writing team, you know, didn't, I didn't. They didn't want to let people living with MND down, but they

also didn't want to let the people who were caring for somebody living with MND down either. And I think we've been able to show that.

**Peter**

Oh, absolutely, yeah, yeah. Now we've been lots of Yeah, showing how it's taking its toll on Billy as well. Absolutely.

**Suzanne**

I think it's an element as well of how it almost takes over your home and your life every time.

**Daniel**

Yeah, the equipment, chairs,

**Peter**

absolutely

**Suzanne**

James Smith has asked a question. He says, Do you think it's helpful for people with MND to share their journeys and experiences? And I guess we've had, we've seen a lot of reaction on line, particularly to the storyline, and I know you've been interacting with some of the people that have been sharing their own stories.

**Daniel**

Yeah, I think it is. I think the lack of awareness around MND has been huge. I would say in the last two years I've seen more awareness around MND than I've seen in the last two decades, which is thrilling, but the only way that's going to happen is by people doing as Rob did, as Rob Burrow, did you know? I mean, Rob chose to share his journey very publicly, which was a very brave thing to do. That teamed with Doddie Weir, our storyline. I think over the last two years, there's been more awareness than ever, and it's thrilling to see.

**Suzanne**

Lovely Thank you. So there's three questions here from somebody called Love Foreman's. So has your off screen friendship made it easier to film the storyline together? And we can see the kind of the easy relationship you have off screen. Has that made it easier?

**Peter**

I'm sure it has. It would be very difficult,

**Daniel**

Imagine if we hated each other.

**Peter**

Yeah, it makes all the difference, in any job working with people you go on with it makes it infinitely easier. Yeah,

**Suzanne**

And which scene was the hardest to film was another question?

**Peter**

I don't know.

**Daniel**

That's impossible. I have no idea. They've all been challenging in their own way.

**Peter**

Challenging yeah.

**Daniel**

single I've got 1000s of them running through my head right now. I can't think of a single one.

**Peter**

The was was very special, loads of special, beautiful scenes.

**Daniel**

I suppose in terms of difficulty, the one hour, which was pretty much the two hander, I suppose in terms of intensity, normally in a heavy episode, you may have 10 scenes, maybe less, actually, over an hour long period, we had 28 scenes.

**Peter**

We were in every single one.

**Daniel**

So in terms of quantity to shoot over a two week period, that was, I mean, the amount of dialog was, yeah, phenomenal. I think for me, probably is that one, but not too necessary to shoot. Just to remember the bloody words, yeah,

**Peter**

it was a different way of doing it. It didn't really feel like we were filming Corrie when we did that episode. It was real different vibe to it, yeah, but yeah, no, like we've had some beautiful, amazing scenes.

**Daniel**

It's been a gift, really hard, yeah,

**Suzanne**

And sort of following on from that, really about sort of how tough it has been. Did you find it easy to switch off after filming such hard hitting scenes?

**Daniel**

No, no. I think once. It's that intense. You're filming it all day, then you get home and you've got to sit for another two hours learning it for the next day, and then you go to bed. So it's incredibly difficult. You're either crying, reading it, crying performing it, crying watching it, crying learning it. I mean, we luckily, because we get on so we've had a giggle where we've been able to grab one, yeah,

**Peter**

No, absolutely, but yeah, it's been a it's been a tiring, 18, very intense, exhausting, emotional, yeah.

**Daniel**

And then we've done a huge amount of fundraisers and stuff as well. So weekends have been taken up with MND associated activities or events. So it's been quite an intense couple of years, really, yeah,

**Suzanne**

You've really thrown yourself into it, and that's the community has seen that. And there's so much gratitude for what you've done, you know, not just on screen, but also the awareness that you're raising outside of the job. You know what you've chosen to give your time, which you know to do fundraising in awareness, which is amazing. So yeah, thank you. Sue has asked, Has the storyline changed how you will view MND going forward? And that's probably for you, Daniel, it was more about kind of, actually showing what you already knew about about MND, or using what you already knew about MND?

**Daniel**

Yeah I don't think it will change how I view MND. I will always view MND as a cruel, probably one of the cruelest illnesses I've ever witnessed any human to have to deal with. I'm just proud that we've been able to tell this story so publicly commemorate my grandfather to some degree, and then the hundreds of people that I've now known over the last two decades and their families to be able to tell their story publicly, to be able to show people what this cruel illness does and how it affects those around the People who are affected by it. So no, it's not changed my opinion at all. I will leave this storyline knowing it's as cruel as it was when I went into it.

**Suzanne**

Amy Louise has asked, and you've kind of touched on this already, but your proudest moment while doing this storyline, and she also says, Can you also pass on my congratulations to Peter for being nominated for an NTA

**Daniel**

Again. It's hard, it's hard. We've had so many wonderful moments over this storyline.

**Peter**

I think it probably would have to be our special

**Daniel**

Yeah, I would say so.

**Peter**

Because you know, that's very rare in Corrie, yeah, in general, isn't it? So to have that and to have Yeah, no, we, I think we were both very happy and very proud of that episode.

**Daniel**

I agree with Pete.

**Suzanne**

It was a beautiful, beautiful episode. From start to finish, it was full on emotion. JanetJanet has asked, How did the storyline affect the way you thought about your own lives? And I guess there's something there isn't there about sort of being able to not have MND in your own life and have MND on screen, as it were.

**Peter**

Oh, yeah. I mean, yeah, we still look at it, and end of the day we got to walk away from it, quite literally. But to imagine that happening your own life. Yeah, it just makes you want to grab every moment on it.

**Daniel**

But I do think we forget generally and every day, you know we all, all of us, forget that you know any second could be your last, whether it's through a Vendee or not. So it's important to try and maintain a happy demeanor regardless. Life moves too quickly, exactly, especially when you're having fun. Last 18 months have flown by.

**Suzanne**

Oh, and this is a special question from our MND Association fundraising team and to Peter, so how was the atmosphere when you ran the Manchester 10k and what's your advice to people thinking about signing up to the event? Think it was your first 10k wasn't it?

**Peter**

Second. I did it last year. Yeah. Oh, the atmosphere is amazing. It's incredible. I would advise anyone who wants to do it to train for it. I mean, I would have, and I really wanted to, I was just so busy. Not a lie,

**Daniel**

We would sit there in the pub thinking 'really should be training right now',

**Peter**

If I can do it without training and surviving then, you know, if you do training, you'll smash it. But honestly, it's, it's an amazing atmosphere. It's quite emotional at bits as well. You know, you see people running for lost loved ones and people cheering them on. It's, it's an amazing atmosphere. Do it next year. Dan, you need to do it.

**Daniel**



No I listen. I met you at the finish line for beers. , I was there supporting you. My body is is not built for running. I've not got the ankles for it.

**Peter**

I'll get him doing it.

**Suzanne**

So just that, that was the end of the questions from our community. But just sort of from just out of interest, really, what's, what's next? I mean, you're sticking around Daniel I assume?

**Daniel**

Yeah, I've just signed another year on the show, which takes me up to November 2025 what they will have in store for me between now and then, who knows

**Peter**

I can't wait to see.

**Daniel**

I will ring you to make sure that you still watching it. I'm going to send you questionnaires, but I don't know. I don't know what they have in store. Alien abduction. I don't know we had a sink hole that's already happened. Tornado, maybe I don't know. I don't know.

**Suzanne**

You heard it here first!

**Daniel**

Yeah, well, no, I'm just plucking those from the obscurity. I can't say that about any reason. No, honestly, I don't know. I think, you know, inevitably there's going to be, you know, I think it would be, I would find it very odd if they moved Billy on into another relationship,

**Peter**

He will probably wallow for a bit.

**Daniel**

I would say, so, and rightly so. So I have no idea. I don't know. I don't know. All I know is that I'll still be here for at least another year.

**Suzanne**

And Peter, obviously you won't.

**Peter**

No, I filmed my last bits.

**Suzanne**

Is this your first on screen death that you've filmed?

**Peter**

Yeah the first played characters have died before, but never on telly, yeah. So there we go, first time. Yeah, I've died on stage in more ways than one. So, yeah, weird, and I probably start sinking in now that I've actually left, because, I mean, I've left about two months now, but it's not really sunk in yet, because I've still been in the building doing press and catching up with these guys and everything. Yeah, yeah, but obviously I'm just gonna see you, we're good mates now, and you know, Jane and Harriet , will see all of them again in future.

**Daniel**

Well, maybe not Harriett. We're joking!

**Peter**

We love her really.

**Suzanne**

Are you having some time off?

**Peter**

I'm loving my time off. Yeah, lie ins are great. Do you remember them?

**Daniel Brocklebank**

Nope.

**Peter**

Yeah, weather's crap so, but apart from, yeah, no enjoying time off, yeah, and excited to see what's next. Really get auditioning again and see what's out there.

**Suzanne**

Perfect. Thank you. So yeah, it just really remains for me to say thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you very much dedication to portraying Billy and Paul's story so accurately and sensitively as well, and for doing all this kind of stuff with us as well. We're super grateful and thank you from the Association and also from the community.

**Daniel**

Thank you,

**Peter**

No worries, thank you.