

Transcript of individual interview with Vic

Question 1: What feelings do you have about yourself as a sexual person?

Vic: I think a lot better now than when I was just out of my accident, I think that's the main thing to reflect on, I mean I'm an old man now, so, the, old as in 48, yesterday. So the, the, I think it's nice to be able to be comfortable, and having become comfortable with that again, since being a teenager who became an active teenager-student life, living a student life and became paralyzed and my world turned upside down, I just turned nineteen and at the same time was discovering being out of school and being on my own and being, and being independent and being a sexual being I suppose, in the world, and developing that and after my accident I realized I had two disabilities: I had my paralysis and I had how people treated me, how people, what they thought of me, from what I was before and I think that was hard to come to terms with. The big thing that hit me after my accident I think was being, feeling like a burden to people, especially in the home situation I was, my mom had to look after me because my father died in the accident so, it was a tough thing to do and suddenly I was like ten years old again, but that links to sexuality because I didn't feel like I had anything to offer. I didn't want to be a burden in a relationship. So, it took me a long time to get over that, I cut myself off completely, from being any kind of sexual being and that lasted about four, five years and that was my, kind of, process at the time and it was linked to my feelings of not really wanting to be around for a long time. So, to get over that I got in a few relationships and that kind of has slowly been part of how I've matured and got to where I am today, so it was an important step for me, I think about '93 I got into a relationship and this woman jumped me and it was great and I was totally infatuated and it was a big, kind of, turning point that, that helped me realize that I could be attracted to someone else and could be in a relationship, so that was the start of it. So that was quite important. So, I think sexuality is far more important than we give credit for, and similarly I think you only miss something when you don't have it anymore. I've always been a sensual person, I've always been kind of a, I wouldn't say sexually aware but I always sensual and I... Little things, I loved nature, love running with my eyes closed, I love being in the sea and the water, I enjoy that kind of thing.

Question 2: What has your experience of dating and relationships been like?

Vic: Dating and relationships have been quite funny, dating and relationships... It's been interesting, I think before my accident I was kind of nervous around girls I was quite sensitive and I was also a hopeless romantic so I was always looking for the future Mrs McKinney, so I wasn't very good at one night stands, I had 1 or 2 of them but I just didn't like those and I couldn't relate, it wasn't me. Maybe I wasn't drunk enough I'm not sure! But at the time I just never felt comfortable with it, I was more, I had to connect with someone before I could be intimate with them and that's part of my nature. So, and so what about little things and when I became paralysed I remember being, the one relationship I had I thought, when it began I thought, well I don't care anymore, if this happens it happens, if it doesn't I'm not going to get hang up about silly things, about what I look like or you know? Am I long enough, short enough, tall enough? Um, is my breath that bad? I don't know. I just, you know, what else can go wrong so it was in a way kind of a release to say, "Well hey, what else can go wrong?", so in that kind of way I took, maybe a bit more perhaps blasé about it, being more confident perhaps or maybe because I didn't worry too much about things and then again you realize what's important and if someone wants to be with you, they want to be with you and if they not they're not. And that's pretty much what happened. So it was a good learning curve that, from a mature point of view or in developing maturity about, about intimacy I suppose and just being open with yourself and be honest with yourself, I think intimacy is not something we share with other people but we have to be in touch with our own feelings as well. I think that's a cool thing behind intimacy is that you start to realize until you're in that situation you don't know how really you're going to react, or how you're going to be. So it's, it's as much as what you're going through as what the other person is going through I think. I think that's what makes it intimate.

Question 3: You became a father after acquiring your disability. What was that process like?

Vic: The process was fantastic. We tried naturally because I can ejaculate which I discovered later in life as well, which is quite a bonus. But the count was low so we tried a couple of times naturally and my sperm count was low and we worked at it

and the numbers came. We approached the Cape Fertility Clinic, got in touch with them, tried artificial insemination, I think three or four times which is a cheaper option and then after that, when that didn't work, we went for IVF and that worked first time. But it's a numbers game, it increases your percentage from, naturally can be like, I think, 2 % or 0.5%, AI is about 5%, whereas IVF is like 35%, so it's, so with the second one we went straight for IVF and just didn't waste time. I think we might have tried naturally once I can't remember but that was, and it worked so that was good. But the most exciting process and a nice process, there's a couple things you can do, I had sperm frozen long time ago when Em and I were together, when we were married and so that's there, but when we tried again I'd produced a fair sample, so that's big and that was like the fun part. She tried to make fun of it and in case something happened so was going that in the morning, Em had to go carry it in a little jar back up to the clinic, five minutes down the road and kept in her bra to keep it warm that type of a thing, those little stories make it intimate and then again when we had had Benjamin I did the same thing, let me try for the first sample again and that was fine. So it's nice to know that you know when it happened I guess it's kind of day of conception, that's pretty cool.

Question 4: Has becoming a father changed how you see yourself as a sexual being?

Vic: I think fatherhood has totally blown my mind, it's been amazing, it's kind of a full circle I think partly because my father and I were incredibly close and I was so lucky to have the dad I had, and I am very aware of that fact. So being a father's the most natural thing in the world to me. For me fatherhood's been the ultimate thing in my life I think it's one of my proudest and greatest achievements if you can call it an achievement. It's more a privilege and a responsibility. But it's a privilege and something I'm just thankful for every day. I love it. I love my kids, I love having kids, I love the fact that I am a dad. And when I had my son, James, you know, the first six months you know, sure, what's he going to be like, but he'd get on my chest and sleep there and he starts forming a personality and we started connecting straight away so everything I wanted in a child I had and it was like having my dad back, so it's just, it's so fulfilling it's hard to know where to start. In terms of sexuality it's nice to have kids, I guess and to have kids, I don't, I think my sexuality I got comfortable

with a long time ago. Fatherhood I guess is just an extension of that. It's more a, when I lecture or when I talk about it, I show pictures of me and myself on the beach with James chasing me and me playing with him, and I say my identity in society is a father and a husband and I think that's crucial because my key things is, when I speak in my presentations I stop for a point, I say, "What is *inclusional* about?", and turn to the audience, normally its students, and I say well we are social beings, when you go out and meet people what are the first questions you ask? It's a bit of to and fro, and people say, "What is your name, what are you studying?", I said "What do you?". People say. "What do you do?" And the next thing... "Are you in a relationship?". And it always comes out, in a few minutes people come up with these questions: Are you in a relationship? There's a bit of a giggle around there and I said, "Exactly, so those things define you in society". What can you do, what to do you, are you in a relationship? Are you married? Are you single? And I said to the audience, I say, "And what do you think people ask me when they see me? What happened?" Everybody gets it, "What happened?" I said, "That's it and that's what sucks because it goes no further than that". People that expect not to do anything or be in a relationship because I'm in a wheelchair. And that's the difficult part, that's what we should change around. So it's trying to just, I mean, I've tried to lead an ordinary life and an extraordinary thing happened to me, coming home from UCT one day and my dad and I were driving home late one night he picked me up from Michaelis, I was working in the dark room and then on the way home a tree fell on the car, so you don't expect that type of thing, it's an unusual accident, and you know, that was a double whammy to happen to me at that time so, so but since then I tried to leave an ordinary life, be a husband do work and that's, I think, what we try to do. But it's been a strange journey to get there and I've been very lucky to have what I have. I think I have more you know, I'm not, my privilege and my education, the funds that I have, aren't lost to me. Especially when I deal with a lot of wheelchair users in the townships and Cape Flats of South Africa. So I'm aware wherever I go there's a thousand guys, two thousand guys who can't get out there and when I tell my students that there are fifty thousand wheelchair users in Cape Town they're shocked and they say, "Where are they?" That's the question I ask. So it's about, this is part of the reason why we don't know and we don't interact enough with people with disabilities because they can't get around. So it's about trying to lead that and be, I'm not trying to be an example to anybody, I'm just trying to lead my life, but if I

can inspire the people through that then that's the bonus. I think it's a big thing about this research, why its so necessary because whenever I speak and I give presentations I say, "If you became disabled today, and it could happen to anybody, would you want to be treated differently or the same?" And everybody just says "The same", and I think it's a key thing. But we forget that because we haven't grown up, we haven't been socialised since a young age and people haven't interacted with people with disabilities so it's strange and unusual and we don't know how to act around it, I think that's a key thing.

Question 5: How have others reacted to you having children?

Vic: Very interestingly, as I said, people don't expect me to have kids or be married and they get a shock sometimes when they see a wedding ring, "So are you married?" and so, and it's surprising quarters, sometimes I'm in company who are, think would be okay with it and some people are like "Really?" I think after being in a chair for 29 years I kind of cut off to stuff now, in the early days I told a lot of people where to go, in funny situations I would make jokes, but, so, for me I just got used to it all, when we got in public and Emma was pregnant she got a lot of funny looks from people, she's with a guy in a wheel chair. And we were in Pick'n Pay once, and I think that's the thing about inappropriate reactions, and Emma and I were in Pick'n Pay and this couple of ladies, "Oh, wow, look at you! How do you guys have sex?" she asked Emma, I was in the bread counter, that's totally inappropriate, unless it's the correct setting you know and that's... but we are faced with a choice, because you want to change attitudes but not in the middle of a shopping mall. So you have a choice, you can say well what do you, you know, we have a great time, I swing from the chandeliers, thank you! Or, piss off and die, that's totally inappropriate to ask questions like that. So you can get caught but in the long run those are the kind of reactions you have to put up with. I think people are often surprised and then go, "Oh, that's nice!" I think there's a different between the reactions I get, which are often patronizing or can be in public where people ask Emma, "Does he take sugar?" that type of thing, and he can answer for himself, which I will, to looking at Em saying, "Well you must be such a special person to be with a disabled guy" so there are a couple reactions around it. And again I think people just don't know how to react or have inherited traditional types of feelings around it. And I, I must admit I still

get surprised, I forget how simple the reactions are sometimes, I go, "Really? Are we still there? Have we still got so far to go?" But that's what inspires me to educate, I think, it's the key thing to do, to make people aware of disability.