

Breaking barriers and finding balance

by Jo Hodges

Life as a camera professional has always been more than just a job: it's a lifestyle, admittedly one which can outwardly appear full of high glamour and globetrotting luxury. Whilst there can occasionally be some sliver of truth to this, it's easy to underestimate the flip side, where stress and insecurity can get the better of us, and sometimes, all too sadly, we are the last to spot it ourselves. When highly regarded camera supervisors **Liz Bell** and **Jo Hodges** reached their own personal epiphanies that led them on a journey to find balance and self-fulfilment, it fuelled an urge. It became clear that, in keeping with their longstanding belief in mutual respect and support amongst peers, reaching out to help others discover their own inner harmony should be their next project. And thus a new Fusion, as it were, was created, this time between the professional and personal. ➡

Jo Hodges and Liz Bell - camera supervisors and media performance and life coaches





Jo running the line in the England vs New Zealand semi-final of the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan

The whistle sounded on the 2019 Rugby World Cup Final in Japan. Fifteen matches, four different venues, one typhoon experience, an earthquake scare and it came down to this final moment. As part of a 50-strong production crew, my role was as one of the RF camera operators running the line and I think possibly the first woman to do this on a Rugby World Cup Final. A big step in an industry once dominated by men. Goodness knows how many 'steps' that worked out to be!

Liz Bell and I set up our own crewing company around 20 years ago. Fusion Film and TV provides experienced and friendly crews who regularly work together and are respectful of each other's qualities and differences without egos and pretensions – something we feel hugely benefits our clients as well as our own quality of life. There's a familiarity and professionalism when we work with people we already know, and this bit of stability and understanding between us all makes for a less stressful environment – great for both crew morale and clients alike!

Working in Japan in 2019 afforded me the opportunity to see an amazing country and spend time with its beautiful people. That really is a plus point of the job we do as camera operators, isn't it? It's a profession where we get

to be on the front line of so many amazing events, offering a constant window to new experiences, cultures, people and perspectives.

The good news and the bad

But, as I left the stadium after this amazing tournament, it really struck me how far both Liz and I have come as two women in a previously male-dominated part of our industry. When we both started out some 25 years ago, it was hard: there were barely any female camera ops; it was rare for there even to be a ladies loo if you were covering a football match; and there were many occasions in my early years as an operator when it was assumed I was there to iron the presenter's shirt or do a quick tea run – cue awkward explanations and equally awkward responses. Nowadays, thankfully, things have changed, as my current situation shows and our constant support from the fantastic directors who request us proves. I am starting to really believe that gender in camerawork is becoming irrelevant, and I hope that Liz and I have helped in some small amount so that other women will be encouraged to join our now more welcoming and diverse industry.

Sadly though, recently we have noticed an almost imperceptible shift in attitude within the broadcast industry. There's an accepted feeling of pressure nowadays, with crews being asked to work longer hours for cut rates and of course the younger and less knowledgeable being asked to work for the dreaded 'experience'.

Learning to take care of ourselves...

Liz and I reached a point a few years back where we wanted to look after ourselves better, both mentally and physically. Running a crewing company as well as working full-time was starting to take its toll. None of us is getting any younger and the camera equipment certainly isn't getting any lighter. Like most freelancers always chasing the next job and rarely feeling we could turn work down, we wanted a better work/life balance but had no idea where to start or how to help our regular crew achieve the same. So we both made the decision to retrain in a role where we could use our new skills to help those we already worked with. After an intense 18 months studying life coaching with world-renowned coach Ali Campbell, whose work and courses were genuinely life-altering, we added neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), body language, transformative life coaching, the study of mental issues and media performance skills to our belts. Initially, from my point of view at least, I was more interested in us all just taking better care of ourselves, both physically and mentally – by becoming more aware in the areas that cause stress and making sure we pay more attention to our general well-being. However, after studying and talking to many people in our industry, we realised it wasn't just us starting to feel burnt-out; it was the same for production managers, makeup artists, floor managers, directors and, well, everyone really! It seemed there were so many of us struggling to deal with the issues not just caused by working in TV but by life in general.

... and others

After completing our training, Liz and I once again went into partnership and set up a company. This time, alongside our camera commitments and running Fusion, we created EqUa Coaching – a life coaching company that offers workshops and one-to-one sessions, plus a regular podcast 'Find Your Balance', for people from all walks of life, helping them to



Liz (left) and Jo getting ready to shoot for Channel 4 News from the temporary 'studio' facility opposite the Houses of Parliament

deal with a myriad of issues and problems, and providing them with tools and techniques to help make sure they can cope with everyday situations better. Stress is one of the biggest killers in society, especially among men, and if we can all learn techniques to help us deal with this, we can all learn to respond better, rather than react badly.

Taking stock: balancing your head doesn't just apply to your camera...

Somehow, in amongst all the camera work and company running – and I do take my hat off to her – Liz managed to write her first book, which she hopes will help people to take a moment to reflect and possibly change their perspectives on life. It's called *Who Am I?* and it's truly lovely. It's not a coaching book in the traditional sense of the word; you don't really have to do anything other than read it – no exercises, meditating or journalling. It's just a small book of stories and fables, beautifully illustrated by the exceptionally talented Katie Watts of Crowblack Studio, which have a resonating message – and the feedback has been brilliant. Liz and Katie have had some fantastic endorsements from the likes of Claire Balding, Cathy Newman (author of *Bloody Brilliant Women*) and Jeremy Vine, among other celebs, some of whom we are proud to have worked with in our Fusion guise too. Another perk to working in the television industry, I guess!

One of the most important things we have learnt is to be grateful for where we are and for what we have. We hope to encourage everyone to understand how important it is to appreciate our industry and to support each other in all our difficulties, but also to take a moment to celebrate our achievements and realise that, in the general scheme of things, we're very lucky to get to do what we do.

The gift of being present

So that takes me back to Japan. At the end of the World Cup Final, I found myself filming in the dressing room with both the South African winning team and HRH Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex. I did have a little smile to myself as to how surreal a situation this was – and I also took the time to enjoy it and to be present in what was truly a memorable moment of my career. Liz and I continue to enjoy being part of this wonderful industry in all its madness and glory but hopefully nowadays in a more healthy and productive way.

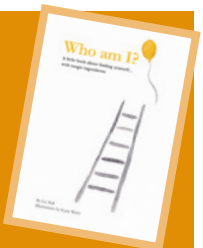
Fact File

If you are experiencing stress or anxiety and would like some help and advice, please visit our website, www.equacoaching.com, where you can book a FREE 30-minute telephone consultation.

To purchase a copy of *Who Am I?* by Liz Bell, visit Amazon or selected independent bookstores. Liz and Jo's excellent podcast series 'Find Your Balance' by EqUa Coaching is available on all podcast formats including: <https://anchor.fm/equacoaching> and <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/find-your-balance-podcasts/id1451234766> Contact: info@equacoaching.com

In their other roles as camera operators and supervisors, **Jo Hodges** and Liz each have 25 years experience, working with clients including ITV, BBC, Sky, IMG and Sunset+Vine, covering major events such as the Olympics, Paralympics, World Cups, Royal weddings and HMQ's Jubilee.

In 2001, they launched Fusion Film and TV, www.fusionfilmandtv.co.uk, to provide professional and friendly crews to the likes of BBC, ITV Prods, Arqiva, IMG Prods, Al Jazeera and C4. Contact: info@fusionfilmandtv.co.uk



Some of the Fusion crew with director Gemma Knight, working for Timeline TV on a women's event