

INTERVIEW

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## the Press conference with NELL McANDREW



by Rob McGibbon

Phoar! That has been the word to begin countless stories and picture captions about Nell McAndrew. One look at her and it makes sense. For years, Nell's appearance on the front of a tabloid has guaranteed an ample lift to the circulation figures. Consequently, she has graced the papers in various stages of undress more than any glamour girl, excluding Jordan.

Now 32, Nell continues to thrive where countless girls with similar statistics have gone bust. She started out as the body double for the Lara Croft computer game, Tomb Raider, and has since become the babe of the photocall, best-selling calendar girl and the Forces' Sweetheart, with two tours of Iraq under her super-slim belt.

Lately, she has been moving at high speed into the fitness world. Her work-out videos are hits and she is currently developing her own sportswear range. She is also a supreme charity runner who raises fortunes for various causes. She ran this year's London Marathon in the "elite" time of three hours, 10 minutes and 52 seconds.

Nell is living proof of the power of I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here, which has been dominating the newspapers and gossip magazines again. She appeared in the first show in 2002 and her fame rating went up a letter or two. But Nell is also a rare breed among the lower alphabet celebrities, she's got manners and is widely liked for her down-to-earth nature.

Her real name is Tracey and she grew up on a Leeds council estate. She was a Yorkshire Bank cashier before trying modelling. She married her long-time boyfriend, property developer Paul Hardcastle last year. Nell is the first to admit that she owes much to the red-tops. Hell, she even got her name from them.

**I'm A Celebrity is on again. How did the exposure from that and the press interest in you change after you appeared in that show?**  
It made a huge difference. We had no idea how successful the programme had been until you got voted out. The first time I realised it was so big was when Ant and Dec said my mum had been interviewed by a newspaper. I knew it must be serious because she would run a mile rather than do that. One of the papers even got to my sister, who lives in Newcastle. She tried to pretend it was not her, but they had a photo and her heavy Yorkshire accent was a big give-away.

I was a bit freaked out at the newspaper coverage — it went crazy at first — but the work started pouring in, so I went with it. I have always had the same attitude since I started modelling: I keep working my arse off and do each job as it comes along, and not think too much about the future. What will be, will be.



**"About a year ago, three papers did a story saying I threw a strop while visiting the troops in Iraq. They said I had behaved like a prima donna and demanded special treatment. I was appalled and really upset. It was complete lies"**

**When did you realise things had really changed?**

I went for dinner at The Ivy. That makes me sound all celebrity, but it's not the sort of place I go to a lot — my favourite restaurant is Pizza Express — but I went with some friends as a treat. George Michael was sitting on the next table and he reached across and introduced himself to me and I was thinking, "Don't worry, I know who you are, I had your poster on my bedroom wall for years! It was a surreal moment and I was totally amazed. One of my friends was so excited he could not eat his meal."

**You have a good relationship with the tabloids, but it can't have been trouble free. What has been your worst experience?**

About a year ago, three papers did a story saying I threw a strop while visiting the troops in Iraq. They said I had behaved like a prima donna and demanded special treatment. I was appalled and really upset. It was complete lies. I had been working 14 hours a day for five days, meeting about 4,000 troops, one by one. I wasn't paid for the visit, I did it because I wanted to, it is a privilege and an amazing experience, and I had arranged loads of free stuff for the soldiers before I had gone over. The story was so unfair and put me in a bad light. I was told about it while I was there by two squaddies who were looking after me. I admit I cried, but that was probably because I was so tired. They had seen how hard I had been working and they were lovely to me.

The story was ridiculous. How could I have the power to make demands in a war zone? I had flown out on the day Saddam Hussein was caught and I think there was a scramble to get stories. I was staying in a different place to the journalists, so maybe that's how it started. I have never even heard

of the man who was quoted. I am like anyone, I have my moments and I can have a sulk, especially when I am tired, but I have never had a strop at work.

**How did you rectify the story?**

The *News of the World* did an interview saying that it was all lies. That was great because stories go into cuttings and can get brought out later. I am very proud of everything I do with the troops, so it was important to put the story right. The papers are really good to me generally, so you can't expect it to be rosy all the time.

**You sadly had to terminate a pregnancy two months ago because doctors said the foetus would not survive. It was a big story in *The Sun*, how did that come about?**

I was so excited about being pregnant that I told Sue Barker during an interview at the Great North Run. I was 11 weeks gone so I thought it was OK to let people know. A few days later, I found out about the complications. It was an awful, awful time. I thought about releasing a statement, but that is not really me and I felt it was important to tell the story in the right way, so people understood what had happened and why. Requests had come in for baby-related interviews and it was going to get very awkward.

I rang *The Sun* and they sent two of their top people [Sharon Hendry and Arthur Edwards] and they handled it brilliantly. The paper made a donation to the baby unit that looked after me, so it is not like I was trying to cash in on something so sad. In the end, something positive came from me going public and I have had some amazing letters from women who went through the same experience. I am very positive that Paul and I can have a happy family soon.



Portrait Phil Adams

cream...". My Granddad always gets *The People* and I thought, Oh no, he'll have a heart attack when he reads this! It's so embarrassing to think of my family and friends getting these images of me.

All I will say is that I like underwear from Agent Provocateur best. Black is my favourite colour and a complete outfit — stockings, basque, etc. — is fine by me. I won't go any further than that!

**You have a good publicity strike rate with photo calls. What is the key and which one is the most ridiculous you have had to do?**

The most important thing is to give as much time as possible. There's no point thinking you can swan in and out in a few minutes. The more effort you put in, the more chance a photographer has of getting what he needs. I look at the press as if we are working as a team, doing a job together. I will be there until everyone is happy. If a company is paying me to get publicity, it's my duty to work hard.

One of the most ridiculous things was when I was a promo girl for the Jordan Formula One team. I let them paint my entire body canopy yellow and then paint the Jordan logo over my boobs. I then did a photocall naked with just the tiniest bit of fabric covering me down below. I felt a bit stupid, but the worst thing was that I let them dye my hair as well, so I had to walk around with yellow hair for ages.

I also did a publicity campaign for a juicer machine a few years ago and a designer made this bodice of fruit. I looked pretty odd in that. I juggled some grapefruits for the camera that day, which — for some reason — the papers liked. I do all sorts, me!

**Your real name is Tracey, how did "Nell" come about?**

I did my first glamour shoot with Jeany Savage for the *Daily Star*. She had been working with Kelly Brook and Melinda Messenger and she was saying, "You can't possibly appear as Tracey from Leeds." She thought it was too common, so she tried to think of a name to rhyme with Kell and Mel and came up with Nell. It was in the newspaper the next day before I had time to think about it, but I've always hated Tracey, so it was fine. Nell is like a nickname, but my family and friends call me Tracey, and Paul calls me T.

**What is the reality of doing the raunchier lad-mag shoots, such as *Loaded*?**

People imagine that it is some wild party atmosphere, but that's not the case. Studio time is expensive, so everyone has to be professional and get on with the job. I normally use photographers and make-up people I know well, so I feel relaxed, which is important if you are virtually naked. We generally have fun, but it can be exhausting. One of the oddest set-ups was posing with two snakes slithering all over me. That was for *Zoo* and, thankfully, I was dressed for that.

**How do you liaise with the press, is it through publicists and agents?**

No, I have never had a PR or a publicist — I've always done it myself. I had an agent booking modelling jobs for a while, but that didn't work out because he had a very different way of dealing with people. Agents can be a bit hard-nosed and that's not my way. Now I have a new agent, Emma. She's lovely, gets on well with everyone and is a great



**No interview would be complete without some discreet product placement. We aim to be a bit more up front, so feel free to pull The Blatant Plug...**

I am currently fronting the Horlicks' pajama campaign, raising money for Great Ormond Street Hospital. Please visit [www.nellmcandrew.tv](http://www.nellmcandrew.tv) for details of my charity runs and other work.

friend, too. We are a team and keep things simple and personal, which is perfect for me.

**You had a boob job eight years ago and went from a 34B to a 32D. Was that just about the best business decision you have made?**  
Well, it certainly wasn't a bad one! I was doing plenty of underwear modelling before, so it's not like bigger boobs have, like, totally made my career. I was not really happy with the way I looked, which is why I had them done. The press interest certainly went up and it definitely helped me get the Lara Croft work. Without some lift, I would never have stood a chance. I feel a lot happier with my body and confident these days, so I am not sure, given the situation again, that I would have a boob job now. But I certainly don't regret having them done.

**I would imagine most people have you down as a pretty blonde bimbo who could do with some enhancement in the brain region?**

They might do, I don't know. I'm not blonde for a start. I am brown and going really grey, so I will have to keep having highlights for a long while yet. Some columnist wrote recently that I am thick, but I don't take offence because I am not. I got eight GCSEs, but what does that mean anyway? People get obsessed with qualifications. If you have loads, then you must be an amazing genius, but you might not have an ounce of common sense.

I have my dizzy days and I would never put myself up as a member of Mensa or try to be Carol Vorderman's protégé. But I am not doing too badly for someone from a working-class background. My life is great and I have done some amazing things through my work. I have travelled the world and I've even met the Queen — twice. Me, meeting the Queen, who would ever have thought it?

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**Nell McAndrew's FANTASY FILTERS**

**What would be the Fantasy Headline of the story you would most like to read?**  
"Zero Tolerance To Crime Begins In Britain Today". I am appalled at crime in this country and want it tackled properly.

**What would be the Fantasy Headline involving yourself?**  
"Nell McAndrew Breaks World Record To Win London Marathon". Or "Nell And Family Move To Home In The Sun". It is my dream to live somewhere hot that is not too far from England. I hear Menorca is lovely.

**What would be the headline you most dread?**  
I don't want to even think about it, but it would be anything to do with my family that has come about because of who I am.

**Who would you most like to interview and what question would you ask?**  
I would like to interview Tony Blair and ask him when he will begin Zero Tolerance and when he will give the NHS more money.

**What question would you never answer?**  
Anything specific to do with sex has me running to the hills.

**What headline would you like on your obituary?**  
I have had to deal with sadness lately with the baby, so I can't get my head around that. I am focusing on starting a family and I feel that my life is only really just beginning.

### NELL'S NEWS SCHEDULE

**Newspapers:**  
I like *The Sun*. There is a lot of snobbery about papers, but my dad is a painter and decorator and I was brought up with *The Sun*. I like their women's pages. I don't think I've ever read a broadsheet properly. Sorry! I like the *Daily Mail* health pages, too. At weekends I get the *News of the World* or *The People*. Now I am living in Leeds again, I get the *Yorkshire Evening Post* a lot. It's a great paper because it focuses on important local issues.

**Magazines:**  
I am massively into health magazines. *Runner's World* is my favourite. I love reading about the latest trainers. I also get *Zest*, *Health and Fitness*, and *Rosemary Conley* magazine is good. Out of the celebrity magazines I like *Q\*Ziaa* most.

**Television:**  
The only TV news I regularly watch is Sky. You get a good overview of the important stories and I like their style, it's not too formal.

**Radio:**  
I tune in for music, not news — and my local station, Galaxy, is the one I listen to most. Sometimes I listen to Steve Wright on Radio 2 in the car, but I don't go any higher than that!

**Website:**  
I am getting more and more into the web. If I am online I will go to the BBC site for some news. I also update my site myself, but apart from that I am not into technology. I had a BlackBerry for a bit, but it drove me crazy. I've gone back to a pen and diary. Much better!