

Benjamin Mee Biography



Born during a bush fire in Australia Benjamin Mee's birth signalled an interesting life to come. Growing up in Surrey he had a turbulent relationship with the education system and was expelled from school. Benjamin started his working life as a bricklayer and decorator.

Then, after an encounter with a dolphin, he became fascinated with the field of animal intelligence and never looked back. He decided to study Psychology at UCL before completing an MSc in Science Journalism at Imperial College, leading to a 15 year career in Journalism, both print and Broadcast. Benjamin was a contributing editor to *Men's Health Magazine* and was also a columnist for *The Guardian* for many years.

In addition he has written, and continues to write, many articles for newspapers, such as *The Independent*, and also for magazines. He also had a regular slot on LBC Radio, as well as having undertaken interviews for a variety of programmes, radio segments, and news broadcasts.

In 2004 he moved with his family to Southern France in order to begin writing a book on the Evolution of Humour in Man and Animals. It was whilst in France that his wife Katherine was first diagnosed with a brain tumour, which she subsequently had removed and received treatment for. Not long after this Benjamin's father died, and his mother decided to sell her house and buy another property in which she and other family members could live together.

It was during the process of looking for properties that Benjamin's sister sent him the brochure for Dartmoor Zoo, with a note on it saying "Your dream scenario!". And that's when everything changed.



Benjamin and his family visited the large house which happened to have numerous wild and dangerous animals living in the grounds, and fell in love with it and the animals. They were particularly struck by the fact that, if a purchaser couldn't be found, the vast majority of the animals would have had to have been destroyed. It was a massive undertaking - the Zoo had an extremely poor reputation, was in massive financial difficulty, and was incredibly dilapidated. The family forged forward, they wanted to save the animals, and they bought the Zoo in 2006.

It was not long after that Katherine began to experience symptoms again and it was discovered that her brain tumour had returned. The prognosis was poor, and Benjamin found himself juggling the complexities of managing a zoo and getting it ready for re-opening, while facing the consequences of his wife's terminal illness and caring for their two young children.

Benjamin's story is one that both moves and entertains - charting simultaneously the family's attempts to improve the animals' lives, the build-up to the Zoo's official reopening in 2007, as well as Katherine's decline, her final days, and how the family went on in the face of many obstacles.

Benjamin wrote a book about what happened - *We Bought A Zoo*. It is an international bestseller and has been printed in 23 countries. Dartmoor Zoo and Benjamin's story also became the subject of a BBC2 four-part documentary called *Ben's Zoo* in 2008. Then Hollywood came calling - 20th Century Fox film studios picked up the book and turned it into a moving film, Directed by Cameron Crowe (*Jerry Maguire*) and starring Matt Damon and Scarlett Johansson. The *We Bought A Zoo* film of 2012 was a blockbuster, and charts Benjamin's inspirational story of one man's leap of faith, triumphing over personal tragedy, and the battle to succeed, whatever obstacles stand in your way.

Dartmoor Zoological Park remains open today, still owned by the Mee's. Benjamin continues to run it and raises his two children on site. He has many projects on the go, including writing five books and expanding the Zoo. He has also become an official Ambassador for Brain Tumour Research in order to help the research into fighting this devastating condition.



Benjamin has television projects in development and travels the world conducting speaking and fund-raising tours, visiting zoos and investigating animal intelligence. In amongst all this he continues to educate, following his passion for transforming lives through knowledge, collaboration and partnership, and encouraging sustainability through shared practice in the context of conservation. He has recently been awarded an honorary doctorate of science from Plymouth University in recognition of his work and passion for research and the communication of science.

Additionally, thanks to his recent articles, Benjamin has been brought to international attention and is now at the forefront of a new movement to open up the zoo world to the outside, change regulations, and work more in tandem with other organisations, with the crucial aim of making the public aware of the importance of zoos in conservation and their necessity to protect and conserve the wild. You can read his articles and find out more information at www.benjaminmee.com