

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

Private lives - Part 8

Matthew Nicholls, a computer science student in Cardiff



This programme was first broadcast in 1997

Clip **Matthew Nicholls**

I would consider myself British first and then Welsh but not English, I'm sorry but definitely not English.

Sue: In Private lives today we meet Matthew Nicholls. Matthew has lived all his life in Cardiff, the capital city of Wales. Matthew describes himself as British first and then Welsh, but “definitely not English”! Except that is, when it comes to football. If England are playing a match, then Matthew supports them. And as we'll discover, football is a very important part of Matthew's life. Wales, however, is famous for the game of rugby. So, when it comes to watching Wales play rugby, Matthew considers himself to be Welsh! Matthew is 20 years old and he's studying computer science at Cardiff University. During the programme, we'll hear him talk about where he lives, and what he enjoys doing on a typical night in. He also talks about the kind of films and music he likes, and why he's chosen to study computer science. And, he talks about his new girlfriend. First though, football. Matthew started playing at primary school, and he's never stopped.

Clip **Matthew Nicholls**

It's hard to describe the feeling you get from playing football, from watching football, from living football. You've got to eat football, sleep football, drink football, play football, live football. Football, it's just so absorbing, it just takes up so much, it's great. I started playing when I was about 9 or 10 maybe. I actually find it difficult to go a week without playing football. I get withdrawal symptoms. I'm sure I do get withdrawal symptoms. I just start to get a bit ratty, a bit uptight and tense and it's just a great way of relieving stress. So many people just go out on the street and kick a ball around for hours and hours and it's just a simple thing that provides so much pleasure. It's such a great sport. It's just fantastic. Words just can't describe it. People can't understand how people get so absorbed in the game but it's such a big thing - it's just wonderful - I don't know how to describe it.

Sue: In between football, Matthew fits in his studies. And he's almost as enthusiastic about computer science as he is about football. He's excited by the speed at which computer programs can now work, and by what computers can be made to do. Looking ahead, there are good job opportunities for computer science graduates, and Matthew admits there's another good reason for studying computer science.

Clip **Matthew Nicholls**

I suppose at the end of the day, I've got to say, it's for the money because the money's great - you can get a guaranteed job, really good job prospects - it's the most developing field of all jobs in the market. If you want to be a lawyer, it's tough to get a job . If you want to be an accountant, you've got to pass loads of exams but if you want to be a computer scientist, it's just great, you get a job, you earn lots of money and I suppose it's fairly interesting as well. Some parts are good -- things like the Internet for example that's interesting. So I think it's the

right course to do. It's good.

Sue: The Internet is a vast network of connected computers. Information can be exchanged world-wide at the touch of a button. As part of his university degree course, Matthew is going to work with several other students on a project about an Internet security system. The system is called a firewall, and it's designed to restrict access to the computers on a network - such as the network of a small business or company - from the outside world.

Clip **Matthew Nicholls**

My project for my final year is related to the internet and the thing that I have chosen is an Internet project about firewalls. Now a firewall is basically a barrier between a network and the internet. Now if you have a small network in your company - such as a bank, you have to put a firewall up between that and the internet otherwise people from outside could break in and steal all your money.

Sue: Matthew has his own computer and spends many hours "tinkering" - or playing - with different programs, and surfing the Internet. He's very interested in computer generated graphics - drawings and pictures made with computers - and, if he doesn't make it to be a professional footballer, he'd like a job using computers to create special effects for films.

Clip **Matthew Nicholls**

If I could have any job in the world it would have to be a professional footballer because to do something that you love so much for a living, and a very good living, would just be a dream

come true. It would be amazing. But I suppose realistically I have to look at what I could be doing. So, I like computers and I like graphics. I am really interested in special effects. I'd like to work for a special effects company for movies because I find it so interesting the way they can create something that looks as if it's completely real as if it's really, really happening on screen, yet it's all been produced in a tiny, little box in the corner of someone's lab. And it hasn't been outside, it hasn't interacted with the real world in any way, yet it looks absolutely fantastic. And I love it when people go to the cinema and they look at a film and they say "wow that's amazing". That's what I'd like to do because it's interesting, it's fun and it makes you feel good too.

Sue: Matthew is a fan of two recent blockbuster films which have been on release in many different countries all over the world: Jurassic Park - about a Costa Rican island inhabited by genetically-engineered dinosaurs - and Toy Story - about the adventures of a roomful of toys which come to life. Toy Story is the first full-length animated film to be created entirely by artists using computer technology, and both films have captured Matthew's imagination.

Clip Matthew Nicholls

Very, very few of the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park were actually models, there was only about two or three, all the rest were done on a computer and people couldn't tell the difference - they were just so amazed by it - it was just, it was just breathtaking. But I think for pure skill and expertise and technical achievement, there's a film called Toy Story which was done completely 100% on a computer. It looks a bit like a cartoon but it kind of looks real as well - and the way they've done a whole film just on one computer - can you imagine something the size of a television - producing a film, a whole film, can you believe that that could be possible?

Sue: Matthew lives in a flat not far from Cardiff city centre and the university. He lives there with two friends: James, who owns the flat and is studying to be a dentist, and John, who plays a lot of rugby and is studying art. They've painted the living room ceiling blue and the walls orange. In one corner, there's a bookcase and several shelves are packed with videos. Matthew says this is a flat of "movie buffs" - of film lovers - and for a lazy night in they would hire a video from the local "movie shop", and "veg out" - they'd take it very easy!

Clip Matthew Nicholls

A perfect night in. Well, I suppose sometimes we run out of money and sometimes we just can't be bothered to go out, so what we'd usually do is go to the movie shop and rent a few films, then maybe get a pizza as well and maybe go to the off licence and get a few cans of beer. And then stay in all night - veg, veg out on the settee and watch a bit of TV and drink a few beers and have a bit of pizza and then slowly, we all sort of mope off to bed.

Sue: In his bedroom, Matthew has a ghetto-blaster - a portable tape player with built-in speakers. He likes a wide range of music and says he can listen and work at the same time! One of his favourite songs is You Might Need Somebody by Shola Ama, because it reminds him of his girlfriend, whom he met at a local football match!

Clip Matthew Nicholls

Lots of people listen to certain types of music because it's really cool and it's the in thing to do. A lot of people at the moment are into Brit Pop as they call it or Grunge which is bands like Oasis and Blur. And they think it's really cool to be like them so they listen to it and they

copy them. Personally I don't particularly like their music so I don't listen to it. I prefer other music such as, maybe I should call it ambient music. It can be quite relaxing and it's nice to listen to after a hard day. You can just sit down and relax just be absorbed in the music you know. And I suppose the other main kind of music I like is eighties music. I'm a bit of an eighties boy shall we say. Music from the 1980s. And I do like the 70s as well, they're quite good. But different kinds of music for different times I think. And I suppose you've got to have the romantic music when your loved one's around too - nothing like a bit of mush you know. The first time I met her was at a local pitch. It was just kind of a local league match and she was standing on the side lines watching the game talking to her friends. I can even remember the clothes she was wearing - a pair of jeans a white top, pair of sunglasses. And the next time I saw her was at a training session - just by chance - and then I suppose I kind of asked her if she'd like to see me again and one thing led to another and the rest is history! And I think she's great, she's wonderful. She likes football - she must be great!

Sue: Matthew's flatmate James joins us at this point, and gives his version of the lead-up to Matthew's romance. It seems that both James and John gave Matthew friendly advice about what to say on the phone, and how to beat off a rival!

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Matthew our flat mate has been trying to go out with a girl for quite a few weeks now and initially there was bit of a competition between him and this other bloke, but he's managed to pull through - with a little bit of help from his friends. And now he's happily going out with her - after hours on the phone - but eventually he's going out with her so we're all happy!

Sue: Matthew, James and John enjoy student life. They say they talk of nothing but sport, beer and girls, but they all have ambitious career plans. And they consider themselves lucky - unlike many students, they don't experience financial hardship because their parents can afford to subsidise them. To end the programme, Matthew talks about a quotation from the Bible that inspires him, and it sums up his attitude to his studies and his future.

Clip Matthew Nicholls

There's a great verse in the Bible from Luke Chapter 11 Verse 9 that says "Seek and ye shall find. Ask and ye shall receive. Knock and the door shall be opened". And it's all about having faith in your own ability, about going out there and getting it, about the world meets nobody half way - if you want something you've got to go out there and get it and if you sit there in the corner and don't say anything you won't achieve anything.
