At first I was at a loss as to exactly how to start this particular special feature but then I realised something as I sat down to write, I noticed the date, January 5th, 2011, exactly 3 years to the day that they were going to fit me for a colostomy bag and register me as disabled. So much has happened since then, life has continually improved since that day forward and I give thanks for that every day. It also gives me a title for this piece.

Three years later…..

So this special feature will be nothing like any that I've done before. It's actually just some thoughts and reflections of the last 3 years, but mainly of 2010, the lessons that I have learned from the year and my observations, as I am a great observer of many things these days. "Musings of a meathead" you might say if you wanted to be unkind. You might also ask why I do it and how I find the time to write this stuff. Well let me try to answer both of those questions in a couple of paragraphs that will hopefully paint a picture and set the scene.

One morning in the December of 2010 I woke up and noticed that I was actually feeling quite cold, this is rare for me, I never feel cold, which is why I go out in a tee shirt when most people are wearing a coat. And you thought that it was just to show off the guns? Well, maybe that too. So I looked out of the bedroom window; snow, miles of the bloody stuff, which meant that the country would now grind to a halt as usual. It's probably fair to say that I wasn't at my most tolerant, I had relationship problems, I'd had a hard year and did 5 shows, all of which meant that even though I was now eating properly again the constant dieting throughout the year had taken its toll. Also I was very tired after competing in the Mr. Universe, it was probably one show too many last year but I wasn't going to miss the chance in case I never got another one. So the answer to t all was a long holiday in the sun as soon as rebound training, Christmas and Lilybelle's first birthday were over. So I arrived in Lanzarote on January 1st for a long stay in a lovely apartment in a hotel complex, all inclusive and ready to make the most of it, sod dieting, I did enough of that last year, now it was time for some serious eating. Now I've always been a great believer in making the mind work harder while the body is resting as in day to day life I work the body to breaking point but the mind just ticks over. Therefore I wanted to do something useful whilst on holiday, something that would be far too big for the blog, and something that could show some obtuse reflections of last year and, in part, of the last 3 years. Those that have read "Remain" or any part of it have all commented on my use of song lyrics to illustrate a point and have said that whenever I write something else substantial I should use song lyrics again. Well that's an easy way to start this whole thing properly then. In the last chapter of "Remain" I used these lyrics.

With my pen and my electric typewriter
Even in a world, where everything is equal
I'd still own all the film rights and be working on the sequel

Elvis Costello – Everyday I Write The Book

So although this will in comparison be more like a pamphlet than a sequel, I will take it from there and start to recount my memories. Now everyone that knows me knows

that I'm the most positive man in the world, negativity forms no part of anything that I do simply because I believe in the law of attraction, which means that if you think positive then positive things will happen for you, I also believe that the opposite is true. So why then do I immediately think of the couple of negative things that happened last year? Well I would think it's because it means that I can quickly get the bad stuff out of the way first. I'm not going to give any details because that would give space to negative things, instead I will learn the lessons and from here on forgive and forget the incidents and the people who let me down so badly.

Was this solo?
Was this yesterday?
Was this true for you?
Because of all the choices you have made
This didn't do a lot for you

Tanita Tikaram – Good Tradition

Now let's get on to the positive stuff. There are those in life that have a "siege mentality" but thankfully it's only a few people and I don't know anyone like it at the places where I train but I have seen it in other gyms and also in other walks of life for that matter. People that will train without any care for, or attention to, anyone else and with no respect for the environment that they are in, the equipment that they are using or most importantly the other people training around them. I've seen it and I've heard the various weak justification arguments about total focus and tunnel vision; I simply reply "If you don't care about anyone else then how can you expect anyone else to care about you?" That's not just applicable to bodybuilding either, it's applicable to life in general. I'm so proud and happy to say that the people that I see in my everyday life, be it in the gym or anywhere else, all care, maybe that's why I always have a happy positive attitude, as I have said, like attracts like. So then let's highlight a contrast that I have observed. Something horrific that happened this year led to the illustration that people are not always what they seem. How many people do you know that this applies to?

I'm not a man of too many faces
The mask I wear is one

Sting – Shape Of My Heart

Most of the people that I know and care about have the same principles as I do, principles that I willingly tell people most days, here's just two of the most important ones.

Don't talk it if you can't walk it
Take me or leave me but don't deceive me

Neither of those are harsh statements, they are facts of life, and they are my way f saying life can be tough my friend so lets be straight with each other from the start and then we really can be friends. Anyway back to the contrast. I will just mention a name now and that will immediately provoke some sort of reaction in you, Raoul Moat. Now I'm not going to get into the whole thing of what he did or how it all

ended simply because I don't know the whole truth about the whole episode, I don't think that anyone ever will because the police always only tell us what they think we need to know. I won't go on about every policeman that I've ever met having "little man syndrome" but they have. I have been arrested on more than one occasion and have always been treated in the same way by people who think that a blue costume makes them superman so I take that statement based on personal experience so whilst I'm not bitter, I am always very wary of the police.

What I would like to talk about is people's increasingly dismissive attitudes that have become apparent during the last 3 years, none more so than after the Raoul Moat episode in 2010. I said nothing at the time as it would have been inappropriate to do so but there seemed to be a thought process sweeping the country that went simply like this. Bodybuilder = steroids = madman. Where the heck did that come from? Well firstly I don't blame the press or the media, they report what they see and do it in a way that will sell papers and give all of the bar stool preachers in every pub up and down the land fuel for whatever particular fire they want to start. Wouldn't it have been nice though to do a little "don't have nightmares" disclaimer like they do on "Crimewatch?" All they had to do was print the truth, which in itself would have sold enough papers. That truth is, regardless of all of those that lie and say that they never have, the majority of people, men and women, who seriously try to improve their physiques by bodybuilding or for competition purposes do use or have used steroids at some time, and guess what, none of them have ever gone on a killing spree! Instead though we were all tarred with the same brush, apparently we are all steroid junkies, armed to the teeth, an accident waiting to happen. Well I have been around bodybuilders for the last 24 years and I can tell you now that you will never meet a better bunch of people. We all do what we do because we love doing it and none of us are ever going to go out and kill anyone.

Look at the other side of it as well; if the heart is a muscle, which it is, then surely those with the biggest muscles must have the biggest hearts? In my experience that has certainly been true in many cases and during the last 3 years more than ever, I personally have, metaphorically speaking, always made myself available to catch anyone that might be in danger of a fall.

A song for your heart
But when it is quiet
I know what it means
And I'll carry you home

James Blunt – Carry You Home

I've had what I call the "nasty negativity" too, in a lesser form. I remember when I lived in Spain that one night I walked into a bar and a group of men were sitting outside seeing who could quaff the most lager. As I walked past, one said to his mate "steroids?" and his mate nodded. I wanted to tell them; no actually I wanted to scream at them, that they didn't have a clue what they were talking about. I wanted to tell them that I was absolutely drug free, I wanted to tell them how I had been training for over 20 years to get that big, I wanted actually to beat the crap out of them all for being so judgemental, arrogant and rude.

In the event I bit my lip, walked on and had a drink with my friend Dave Ramsey. Dave knew my history and was actually quite annoyed himself but he managed to calm me down, and himself too, thankfully, as it was a nice bar, and between us I dread to think what we might have done. Fortunately the men left shortly after. I have to say, at the time, that was a rare incident and that for every one of those times, then and since, the contrary has happened hundreds of times. I've lost count of the amount of the times that people have made nice comments to me and I've also lost count of the amount of times that, usually when I'm abroad, people have asked to have their photo taken with me. When that happens it's a lovely feeling and it more than makes up for the idiots.

The thing that I have noticed more and more this year though, especially since the Raoul Moat thing, is that people won't say anything, they will just look away and retreat into their own little world. It doesn't annoy me, it makes me sad really, but I think that it's just an extension of modern day life for these people. I call them the "David Brent's". I laughed a lot at the comedy programme "The Office" but I also wondered just how many David Brent's there are out there. I've met a few and even worked with a few in my time and I do hope that when they saw that programme they realised that the character was targeted at people like them. The problem is they are so insular, no anal, so wrapped up in their own little world that they probably didn't.

The future teaches you to be alone
The present to be afraid and cold

Manic Street Preachers – If You Tolerate This

I think that the David Brent syndrome has expanded to a lot of people that weren't like that until this year. Maybe it's because of the recession or maybe I've never observed it before but it is definitely worse now than ever. I've seen it, I've experienced it, and it's shocking and sad. There have been several occasions during 2010 when someone has looked at me and looked away yet had a look on their face that says "ah yes he looks great but….." But what? And here's the sad part, it's usually "but he can't drink 10 pints of lager a night like I do" or, "but I play squash once a week so I'm much fitter than him" or my favourite "but I wouldn't want to look like that; most people don't like it really". I think that it all comes back to the two important principles that I mentioned a little while ago, read them again and tell me if I'm right.

To look at this from a different angle my friend Gary Walsh spoke to me before I came away about some superbly educated man who has written a whole book on how academics can't be bodybuilders. How apparently if you are an intelligent businessman then you can never be a bodybuilder. Well I made enough money in business to retire at 50 years old and I've not done too badly at the bodybuilding since then have I? David Brent syndrome or just someone else stereotyping bodybuilders? You decide. Incidentally, Gary's wife Julie is a female bodybuilder, she is just a few years younger than me and she looks amazing, she
is also a really nice person! Guess what? She gets the same sort of stuff that I have been talking about more than I do. It's so sad; men are intimidated by her because they don't know her so again they retreat behind their goatee beard and ludicrous logic.

You can't write if you can't relate
Trade the cash for the beef, for the body, for the hate
……. ……..soy un perdedor,
I'm a loser baby, so why don't you kill me

Beck – Loser

It was Ali G who coined the phrase "keep it real" albeit as a joke. But how many people these days keep it real? They live in insular worlds where they are the Kings, where nothing can upset the equilibrium, even though that equilibrium is built on fake relationships, borrowed money that they will never have and reputations and identities that they have designed for themselves and are not recognised by anyone else. I know that it's only a tiny minority that I'm having a rant about but why can't these people get on the same page as us decent people in society. I'm not saying that everyone should make a nice comment every time they see a bodybuilder, it wouldn't matter to me if that never happened again, but at least give us the same amount of respect as you would anyone else, don't just turn away with a filthy look on your face, why do we deserve that? Is it just jealousy? If it's not then I would like to know why it is that you can act this way towards people like me who go out of their way to be friendly and respectful to everyone. Is it because you tried it and failed? Don't be bitter because of that, you have our respect for trying and failing, give us yours for trying and succeeding please.

So take what you need
Be on your way
And stop crying your heart out

Oasis – Stop Crying Your Heart Out.

Ok, rant over, change of pace again. On the subject of principles, I have on the wall in the hallway of my house an A4 framed copy of my "wisdom and teachings". I'm going to do a new list some day, I've even got the first one ready, it goes "The quality of love is not diminished by the quantity given and there are no limits on how many people you can love". But for now, let's stick to the existing list. Everyone that has read it comments that although the "teachings" are meant as a joke and are funny they are actually very insightful and make good sense. Here are a few of the "teachings" along with explanations.

Never crap where you eat Don't take this literally! It means that you should never date someone from a place that you regularly frequent, like barmaids in pubs for example, that always ends in tears, or someone that you see at your place of business almost every day, I've done that and it always causes trouble and in one case it cost me 15 years of my life! So good friends yes, but no more, trust me.

If you lay down with dogs you will catch fleas Choose your friends carefully, if you choose well then you can give them all the love in your heart and it will come back tenfold, choose badly and they will ruin your life.

If you lend someone £20 and never see them again it was probably worth it If you think that you know someone well enough, if you think that you care about hem enough to lend them money and they take it and they disappear you have ot away lightly and before you caught the “fleas” mentioned above.

If you tell the truth then you don’t have to remember anything It’s only when you try to deceive people that you have to remember the stories that you have told them, the truth is already indelibly printed in your mind.

Generally speaking, you aren’t learning much when your lips are moving None of us know it all; listen to people without talking over them, we are all learning, every day of our lives.

If something seems too good to be true then it probably is Never be deceived by something that seems to have all the answers to your problems, most of the time it won’t.

And finally……

Never date a woman whose bum is bigger than your own This last one leads me on to something else that I have noticed this year, something that has become more commonplace then ever (oh dear, I feel another rant coming on). Firstly, don’t take the phrase literally, there are lots of very nice girls out there with big bottoms, it doesn’t actually mean that. To explain exactly what it does mean I will tell you about a couple that are staying in the same hotel as me as I write this. Now she is nothing special, although she thinks she is. Not exactly a looker but she’s not a minger either, I’m sure that she doesn’t go short of male attention but I bet if you asked her she would tell you that every man in the world fancies her. They do not I can assure you. I have kicked better looking women out of bed on a Saturday night so that I could watch “Match of the day” in peace. Ok then, I know, you have a picture now, but I’m just saying.

He is very ordinary, not good looking, with a dodgy haircut, and his only redeeming feature is that from his manner he seems like a very nice guy, although I have never spoken to him or her because I don’t think that she approves of….. well, anyone really. She walks around with her nose in the air as if she is better than the rest of the world. Ok this is a very good quality hotel but it doesn’t cost an absolute fortune to stay here and the people here are middle class but down to earth so why should she have that attitude? The thing that annoys me the most though, and this is the point of my “teaching”, is that he follows her around like a lapdog. I’m not kidding, on a couple of occasions he’s been so close to her I’ve actually looked to see if she has him on a lead. She treats him like a servant, sends him to get her whatever she wants and he does as he’s old……. and he really shouldn’t! Treat her like a Princess yes, every woman deserves that, but be her equal partner, not her lapdog! Look guys, I know that the odd one or two of you will put up with anything as long as you get thrown regular sex from someone that’s allegedly “out of your league” but you are wrong to do so. Remember this; nobody is out of your league! Be positive and look for someone who is beautiful on the inside, such women do exist believe me! So don’t be satisfied with a life where you are basically a slave who gets thrown a bit of tail every now and then! You are better than that, know your potential and find your true happiness! Oh

and by the way her bum is bigger than his too, much bigger. Hopefully this will illustrate what I have been saying in a much more compact way.

He calls her the chocolate girl
Because he thinks she melts when he touches her
And she knows she's the chocolate girl
Because she's broke up and swallowed
And wrapped in bits of silver

Deacon Blue – Chocolate Girl

Now, calming down again to recall the saddest thing from last year is easy; it was when my daughter separated from her husband. I say easy to recall because it was the only time that I cried last year. Everyone knows that my daughter has been the most important woman in my life since the that day she was born and she fully explained to me her reasons for the break up which I eventually agreed with, so I'm not going to comment on the whys and wherefores of it all but it was not a nice thing.

Slowly walking down the hall
Faster than a cannonball

Oasis – Champagne Supernova

Those lyrics take on a whole new meaning when one of your kids' marriages goes the way that yours did 20 years earlier, the feeling of helplessness and disappointment hurts and although it happens slowly it's as if everything that everyone had worked to make so perfect is being thrown away far too quickly

Seeing it all so beautiful
The way it ought to be
Seeing it all so beautiful
And turning away

David Gray – Hospital Food

Those that have read the controversial chapter of "Remain" that is about relationships will know that my theory of us all living in a throwaway society has now been proven to me in the most hurtful way. For those that have not read it, the basis is that we live in a throwaway society, if your toaster packs up just chuck it away and get a cheap new one from Asda for £10. If your relationship is flagging just chuck it away and change your status on facebook, that will get you a new relationship, in fact you can have your choice of them. Harsh? Maybe, but now think about it and tell me it's not what people do these days. Tell me why divorce rates and relationship break ups are at an all time high. Again, it has been an observation of mine over these last 3 years, time that I call "bonus years" when I consider what things could be like now. In those 3 years I have become far more observant, I notice things more and take a greater interest n everything, but the result of this is not good, for it shows me that society is slowly but surely degenerating.

How can I be sure of this? Well because I am not insular, I step outside of my world and into the real one whenever I can and I don't like what I see or hear. I take it all in and rightly or wrongly I let it all out to anyone who pretends to be interested. However, before you are tempted to slash your wrists remember that you don't have to be a part of the degeneration. Stay away from it wherever you can and when you can't just be polite and respectful and get away from it as soon as you can. I refer back to my earlier statements about positivity, if we are all positive enough, if we can all get enough positive energy moving in the right direction then maybe we can reverse what is happening and people's lives will be better and people will be happier. It would be irresponsible of me to not put in some kind of disclaimer now and say that things are really not that bad so I will say it now, things aren't really as bad as I make them out, you have to remember that I am now officially a "grumpy old man" and as I'm not on facebook I can't use that to moan about things like other people do so I have to do it here instead. Anyway, a bit of a moan does you good now and then I think, because clearing out the bad things in our mind enables you to get back to being positive.

Don't you cry tonight
Don't you cry tonight
'Cos were having a ball little baby
So don't you cry tonight

Guns 'n' Roses - Don't Cry

Well as expected this whole thing has gone off in several directions but I hope that it has given you something to think about. To finish, let's look ahead to the rest of 2011. As far as bodybuilding goes this could potentially be my best year ever. Having broken away from the rigid constraints of the UKBFF I am now allowed to compete for whoever I want, wherever I want. Here are the first four shows this year that I am looking at doing.

Saturday April 30th
NABBA London & South East Britain
NABBA British finals – Saturday May 28th
NAC UK Open – Sunday May 29th
NAC World Championships – Saturday June 4th

The UKBFF have moved their London & South East show to June 12th but I don't think that I will be doing that one as I am expecting to be banned from all of their shows as a "punishment" for competing for other federations, I know, it's ridiculous, but I would like to win the London & South East title for the third year running, I'll have to see how things go. After this I plan to have a bit of a rest and spend as much time with my Grandchildren as I can, and then I will start preparing for this show.

MUSCLE BEACH SHOW – Monday September 5th I've always wanted to compete on Muscle Beach; it's the Mecca of bodybuilding and having visited Venice, California, a few years ago I can't wait to go back there. So if all goes according to plan then I will achieve that ambition this year. After hat who knows, we'll have to wait and see what life brings forth for me during the year.

Life is something that happens to you
While you're making plans

John Lennon – Beautiful Boy

Or if you prefer

"You create your own universe as you go along"

Winston Churchill

On a personal level, from me to you, I'm going to end this piece by showing you something that is stencilled above the front door in my house, it's there so that every time I leave the house, whatever else is on my mind, it's the last thing that I see, that way I can never forget to do it.

My simple theory is that you can't take care of everyone in the world so make sure that you take care of those that you can and those that you want to; then you will know who the people that you love the most are. Remember, like attracts like, if you take care of those that you love the most, then they will take care of you. So enjoy life, make the most of every day, do all of the things that you ever wanted to do and remember this last piece of wisdom, coined and regularly used, not by anyone famous, just by me.

You don't want to be the richest man in the cemetery
But you do want to have the most stories to tell

Have a great 2011
Kev