

Good evening everyone and thank-you so much for joining me this evening to celebrate the opening of my new home, The Arches and Ripple Artworks Studio. Over the last 4 years I have been particularly unwell. Due to persistent and severe headaches, I was forced to come home and live with my parents in their house, which as you can probably appreciate, this wasn't very easy! Before this, I was living and working an independent life in Edinburgh.

As much as I love both my Mum, Dad, and their house, living in such a big space with lots going on around me, was particularly challenging, and my headaches, made this even worse. My brother, Charlie, and his wife, Lee, then came home for six months during the coronavirus pandemic, with their 2 children, and then a 3<sup>rd</sup> one arrived during this period. Having to constantly look at my feet to check that I wasn't going to stand on a toy or even a child, made my headaches even worse!

And then... I had a lightbulb moment. I told my Mum and Dad that I wanted my own space at Dalswinton. This is where the idea of the Arches came into plan. My Mum had always wanted to open up the archways in the stable block and this helped the plan to go into action.

Unfortunately, I then ended up in hospital again, and as a result, I was devastated not to have been able to have an input into the conversion. However, in my absence, my Mum and Dad employed a team of professional traders who helped to create the amazing space that you see before you tonight.

I would like to express how grateful I am for all those who helped including –

- ❖ All the staff at Armstrong Joinery – have been amazing.
- ❖ Jim the Painter and Decorator.
- ❖ Along with this, they have joined forces with Gareth Lewis and the team which helped with plumbing, and Morton the electrician.
- ❖ Sandy and Justyn for all the wonderful flowers and gardening.
- ❖ Hamish for keeping the yard tidy – whilst also having to put up with my mother – which I can tell you is no mean feat!
- ❖ My neighbours, Emma and Steve – and Emma and Andy for putting up with the chaos that comes with a building site.

In hospital, I had the most amazing number of people who helped to care and look after me, both day and night. All the nurses, doctors and other health professionals were amazing. Angele, who helps me in the flat in Edinburgh, and lives opposite me, came to my rescue and managed to enlist the help of 2 other friends from her university who came and kept me company over night, so that if I suddenly became unwell out of the blue, they would be able to help me and inform the doctors. Yvonne, who is here tonight, along with Shannon, Angele and Tim were all amazing.

As I became better after my operations, I was moved to Dumfries and Galloway Hospital for Neuro Rehabilitation. When Mum told me that I was being moved to Dumfries for Rehabilitation – I was certain that she was going to put me in a white room with no-one to talk to or see for days on end! I told Mum this and she just burst out laughing and then explained more about what it involved – to say that I was relieved would be the biggest understatement ever!

After being discharged from Dumfries hospital, I then moved into my new amazing place that you see before you today, The Arches. On the first night, Mum dropped me off in the Arches, with a Neuro-nurse, called Robert, who I had never met before, in a building, that I had only seen for about half an hour! However, Robert was amazing and really helped me to get stronger.

Mum and Dad then employed 2 amazing carers, Bea and Megan who help me in the Arches and are here for 2 weeks at a time. They are fantastic and help me with everything. Along with this, The Dalswinton House Team of Fi, who has now retired, Ioana and Malena, all help with keeping the place neat and tidy.

I also have the most amazing PA, Diane, who helps me with all my admin each week day. We get on so well and are the best of friends. When Dad advertised to find someone, I said that I didn't want some too sensible – and Diane fitted the bill!

I would also like to say Thank-you to Ann who comes to help me when Diane decides that she wants holiday, which I try to cancel as she tries to stop me from going to Edinburgh.

In addition to this, I would like to thank both Miranda Cloy for helping me with the design work for the RiPpLe Artworks sign and other leaflets – along with Katy Coultart who has been brilliant in getting a blogsite up and running for RiPpLe Artworks.

I would also like to thank The Secretary of State for Scotland, The Right Honourable Alister Jack MP for agreeing to open my studio and I welcome you all to have a look around.

As you will probably know, just like Finding Nemo, I have very bad short term memory loss, so if I haven't mentioned you, please raise your hand and let me know what you did for me.

Lastly, I would like to thank the 2 most amazing people in my life, who have helped me through every up and every down that I have gone through. Both Mum and Dad have been amazing and I definitely wouldn't be where I am today, if it wasn't for their ongoing support and kindness.

So, here's to everyone who has helped me over the years, I really can't say thank-you enough.