



A BYTE IN TIME SAVES LINES

For BBC journalist Mario Cacciottolo, we are all shaped by the things that someone once told us. **Sharon Spiteri** points her mouse at a project aimed at preserving memory

A journalist's first love is other people, their stories, their timorous, clamorous voices, their great loves and pet hates and their unique logic. It is this drive for stories which is at the root of the inquisitive tenacity most people love to hate, just as it is this same thirst which persuades us to buy into our favourite news media.

BBC journalist Mario Cacciottolo, 35, has captured the very essence of people stories with his website www.someoneoncetoldme.com, a man's journey to capture memory and identity in a pithy soundbite. In a short essay he wrote to introduce his site, Mario put it like this: "We are all shaped by the things that someone once told us. The words we hear impact on us, whether we want them to or not, and it's undeniable that they have a power."

The idea came to Mario when he was looking for an excuse to take pictures. "I had just started this photography course and needed practice, as well as a showcase. You meet someone and they tell you something about their life and, in turn, that tells you something about them. The things we remember in life are interesting and this was an attractive way of chronicling some of that."

someoneoncetoldme.com is updated daily with a new picture of an individual holding up a board on which they have written a quote that has stayed with them. The individual, location and language change. There are quite a few pictures of India, which Mario visited soon after he started his project. In India, "I met loads of people and absolutely everyone was up for it. On my way back, I remember sitting at an airport during this 23-hour journey back to England and counting my model release forms. I had 83. That's when I knew that enough people liked the idea for it to work, for me to be able to take enough pictures to launch the site and keep it going."

Mario has taken about 250 pictures to date, and has published 140 of them. Interestingly, "I've only ever had the same thing twice, just one quote repeated. A lot of people tell me stuff their parents have told them. Parents do seem to have a real influence. I was sitting in a pub one time with three friends who had agreed to take part and they each pulled out their mobile phones and called their parents. That really brought it home to me."

Fridays is for languages other than English "because I don't want this to be something for English-speaking people but I want it to reach people in all languages. My first foreign-language Friday was taken in Malta. Since then I have amassed quite an interesting collection of languages: Arabic, Icelandic, Tibetan."

With a name like Cacciottolo, there is more than love for the island at the bottom of Mario's consistent reference to Malta. Although he was born in the UK to a Maltese dad and an English mum, he came to Malta as a baby and lived in Gzira until he was 13 years old. He still has family in Malta and is at pains to let it be known that he is very proud of his Maltese heritage and intends to retire here.

Mario wants to boost his collection of images from Malta - "the natural landscape is absolutely beautiful" - and is also keen to find volunteers willing to take their own pictures (within someoneoncetoldme.com rules) and send them to him. "I want people to participate, to hold up their own quotes, take their own pictures and send them for publication or to volunteer to have their picture taken by me. I plan to be in Malta this summer and am hoping people will come forward with their quotes."

Mario can be contacted at Mario@someoneoncetoldme.com ■