

One to One Interview

John Lund, global sales and marketing director at Finnish OCR specialist Visy, tells Emmanuel Mair about being a national champion in wife carrying

Q: From meeting you in the past, I know you're very keen on your athletic pursuits. How did that come about?

A: I've always had a flair for theatrics. Back in school, I would get in trouble for putting on random shows for classmates, getting on the table and doing crazy over the top stuff.

The thing about sports is it's a great way to be theatrical and express yourself. In many ways, if you're competing in an athletic event, you are the centre of attention. I began rowing while at university in Boston and when competing at national level, there are thousands of people watching.

Aside from that, I've trained in professional wrestling and been a US and UK champion in wife carrying.

Q: You're going to have to tell me a bit more about the wife carrying.

A: I like to joke that it's chivalry at its finest. It's a man carrying a woman over an obstacle course and the prize is the woman's weight in beer. The world championships are held every year in Finland. My best performance is fourth place where I was only one second off the podium.

Q: How did your life take you from the US to Finland with Visy?

A: Various parallel tracks of my life crisscrossed to create the opportunity. As part of my undergraduate degree, I studied abroad in Prague and there were a bunch of Finnish students on the same programme. Every day after class, I would train in the gym before heading to the pubs and clubs, which amused them a lot. One night someone had a lightbulb moment and thought the perfect sport for me would be something called wife carrying.

When I returned to the US, I found that the American championships were only four hours away in Maine so I decided to enter. I was pretty good at it and became American champion a few years later.

Having worked on fundraising for John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004, I went on to do a professional development course. For the final project, I put together a fundraiser for Team USA to head to Finland for the wife carrying race.

That got me back in touch with the Finnish students from my university course. I went to Finland, finishing in sixth place in the world championships and then ended up meeting the people from Visy. We just hit it off and I ended up staying here for four years. I've since been in the UK, Austria and the US but I'm back in Finland now.

Q: How do you manage to balance this all together with your working life?

A: The overall theme of how I've tried to live my life thus far is to follow interests, passions and curiosities. That ties into all of these things including the work with Visy where I love what we do with AI and vision technology. I've always tried to manage these two life tracks in parallel.

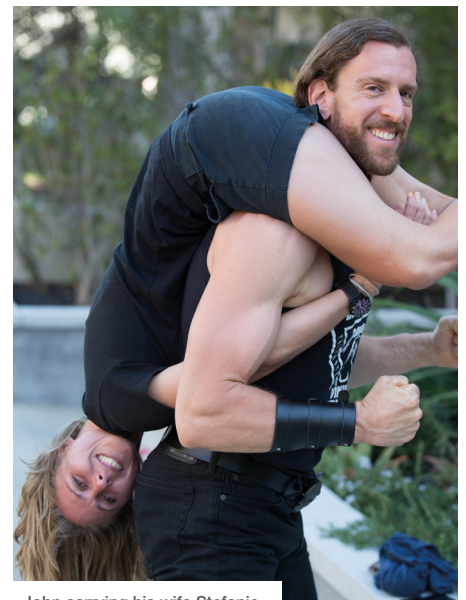
Education-wise I have a Bachelors in sociology and business, plus an MBA and a law degree. With the Visy work, I've been pretty ambitious, trying to write a lot and focus on outreach and speaking at different conferences and events, working hard to grow the company as well. What's been great is that Visy has always embraced my interests, my ideas about videos and presenting, and all in all, it's been a great place for me to be me.

The flipside is I have this more eccentric side where I'm in a stunt role or making videos. I've also done classes in acting and film production, as well as some film work when living in Los Angeles. I did a stunt in a Dolph Lundgren movie where I was blasted with a shot gun and went flying back and landed on the pads. That's probably pretty unique for the industry.

Q: In light of all your high-octane pursuits, how will you approach getting older and maybe having to rein it in a bit?

A: That's something I've been thinking about, certainly as I sit here with a ruptured Achilles tendon. I'm working with a junior athlete trying to help her get into shape to get a scholarship to row in the US. That has been a really rewarding process.

I also have my other hobbies. I still do some screenwriting and some writing generally as well as video production – these are all things that my body can do as I get older. They're still sat-



John carrying his wife Stefanie

isfying for me and I'm not going to break a bone while doing this. Last year I bought a bass guitar – it's something I can play into my golden years.

Q: Before you go, I'm going to have to mention the elephant in the room. With your beard and long hair, you do have a resemblance to the typical depiction of Jesus.

A: I had really long hair when I was in high school. Then when I went to university, I went through all kinds of phases - part of my head was shaved at one point, bleach blond, body piercing. In the 90s that stuff all made sense. Eventually I went fairly conservative – short hair, clean shaven.

Around 2014 I started growing my hair out and growing my beard and here we are. I try to keep it as professional as I can but sometimes I obviously look like Jesus or a hippy.