

# And another thing!

*Plane crash, electoral wipeout, Robert Kilroy-Silk – UKIP leader Nigel Farage has survived them all. But whatever you make of his views, you have to marvel at the man's bulldog determination. (Just don't get him started on cod quotas.)*  
By Violet Henderson

**S**o this is England. Or a version of it. The leader of the UK Independence Party Nigel Farage is sitting outside a particularly grotty greasy spoon in Hastings. He's taking a noisy suck on neither his first, nor his last, Rothmans of the day. It's 8am and we've met for breakfast – or two milky coffees in his case – on a grim, blustery morning. But Farage, 48, wrapped up in a Barbour and a felt fedora, isn't at all pessimistic about the weather. 'It's not bad at all,' he says, 20 minutes before a downpour of biblical proportions hits us. But then this man – neat, compact and suntanned after a summer spent angling – is a survivor.

Aged 21, he was knocked almost dead by a car. Six months later he was diagnosed with testicular cancer. And then there was the infamous plane crash on the day of the 2010 General Election (added to which, his party only landed a depressing 3.1 per cent of the vote). Farage – as in 'menage' – is now expert at retelling his dramatic aerial story. 'It all went wrong very, very early on,' he says,

leaning back slowly into his white plastic chair. 'My first thought was, "This can't actually be happening. This must be a dream." And then I thought, "Oh Christ, it *is* happening." And that's pretty terrifying. I started thinking, "What do I do? Do I ring somebody? Do I send a text?" Because I was sure that in a few moments it was all going to be over. But I reasoned that the pilot sitting next to me didn't want to die any more than I did, so I just let him concentrate on what he was doing. For the first – probably the only – time in my life, I sat in silence, waiting for it to happen. Then it happened.'

He sums up jovially: 'It's astonishing how lucky I've been. I've got a scarred body though.' But the scars on his body are not as severe as those he aims to inflict on the body politic, because what has emerged from the wreck of his plane, and the last election, is a man hellbent on a mission. 'Generally we go through our lives and we do our best and choose a job, get married – or not – and we muddle through. Not many people are absolutely driven by something, ▷

Photographed by ABBIE TRAYLER-SMITH

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# ABOUT TOWN

‘but that’s what happened to me.’ And now UKIP seems to be having a moment. The BBC recently calculated that for every 10 per cent that UKIP polls, the Tories lose five per cent of their support. It would be an understatement to say that Farage is motivated: he sleeps no more than four hours a night and devotes every iota of his being to getting the British people a referendum on whether or not to remain in the EU. After that – he refuses to even entertain the notion that Britain might want to stay in – he’d like to ‘change the way the country is governed’.

So far, he’s come out in favour of helping small businesses, improving grammar schools and, yes, giving pubs the chance to choose whether or not to allow smoking. Not a million miles away from Tory policies (barring the smoking ban). But if UKIP keeps up this pace, it’s not unfeasible that, after the next election, the party could be powerbroker of a future coalition.

But charge him with being a modern-day Tory in Eurosceptic costume and Farage puffs up like a peacock. ‘This gets to the heart of why I am here. We haven’t got a Tory party.’ He’s wailing now, in full performance mode. ‘We haven’t got a Labour party. We’ve got one big brand of social democracy. They mush in the middle. They look the same. They sound the same. Frankly, you couldn’t put a

cigarette paper between them. It’s pathetic.’ So no chance of a UKIP and Conservative collaboration in the next election then? ‘At the moment, I’ve had no conversations,’ Farage says carefully. (Shortly thereafter, however, UKIP’s Paul Nuttall declared that if his party and the Tories agreed on European policies, they would not field candidates.)

And yet Farage’s politics have been attracting significant interest from the old Conservative vanguard. The multimillionaire creator of IG Index and former Tory bankroller, Stuart Wheeler, defected to UKIP in 2009 to become the party treasurer. And then, in 2011, Lord Hesketh, former Chief Whip in the House of Lords, jumped ship. ‘I didn’t leave the Tory party,’ says Hesketh. ‘The Tory party left me. They told me a pack of lies about the referendum and that makes them fundamentally untrustworthy. Now UKIP has Farage, who’s organised the party and got proper people on board. So I’m confident the truth will out.’ According to Farage, ‘this

shows how far we’ve come. In the past people thought of UKIP as pretty maverick and eccentric, but it’s much more difficult to lay that charge at UKIP’s door when you’ve got people like that putting their shoulders to the wheel.’ Of course, the Wheeler types also bring financial clout to the cause. ‘Well, that helps as well,’ admits Farage in a less forceful tone.

He grew up in a non-political family in rural Kent and attended Dulwich College as an ‘argumentative but not disruptive’ student. He followed the alcoholic father that he hero-worshipped into the City. ‘I wanted to make money and wanted the whole yuppie lifestyle.’ And, as a commodity broker, he achieved just that. ‘Most people would think it appalling, the way we behaved,’ he says, grinning. ‘It was a very, very excessive lifestyle. We’d go out for a drink at midday and still be going at midnight.’ He married, moved to Kent and played golf on the weekends: ‘I was normal.’

But slowly he began to burn with a sense of injustice as he watched ‘what these cretins who were ruling the country were doing to



*‘Not many people are absolutely driven by something, but that’s what happened to me’*



*Clockwise from top, Nigel Farage on the seafront at Hastings; discussing European fish quotas with a fish seller; getting back to business*

◁ It. Everyone knew it was wrong, but no one said anything.’

In 1993, Farage was one of UKIP’s founder members. Six years later, he was elected to the European Parliament and, in 2006, led the party, before stepping down to stand against the Speaker John Bercow for the Buckingham seat in 2010. Farage lost and returned to take charge and ‘rescue’ UKIP from what he calls ‘the odd people’ dominating it. And get rid of them he did – although that all depends on who you think is odd. ‘One of them was a high-profile celebrity on BBC television,’ Farage says before pausing theatrically to revel in his cheeky allusion to permatanned former chatshow host Robert Kilroy-Silk.

His new life around Westminster was, in contrast to his City years, abstemious. ‘I found it really boring. There was no one to have lunch with as they were all on blooming mineral water,’ he says, shaking his head. Fortunately, he’s since found a lunch culture in Brussels, where he has been sitting since 1999. And yet, despite Farage’s fondness for a tippie, he draws the line at the European Parliament’s nightly champagne receptions, ‘which are paid for with taxpayers’ money’, he harrumphs. ‘I’d rather go to the pub.’

I ask him if, given his uncomfortable position as a Eurosceptic in the European Parliament, he has anyone to go to the pub with, and Farage mentions ‘a bloke from Finland’. In fact, he says there are plenty of politicians he admires, even if he doesn’t like their politics, such as Berlusconi: ‘He could not care less if people hated him, he just did his thing.’ But Farage, a father of four who is now on his second marriage – to a German, Kirsten Mehr – and denies having had an alleged seven-times-in-one-night romp with a 25-year-old Latvian (while married to Kirsten), says: ‘I was very disappointed that, having made a couple of positive contributions early on in his premiership, I didn’t get invited to a single one of his parties. What a rotter.’

Farage delights in saying what no one else would say. Like when he leans forward on his elbow, beaming, to tell me: ‘Angela Merkel is even more miserable in private than she is in public.’ As anyone who has watched his diatribes on YouTube knows, he’s a natural performer who enjoys seeing his opponents squirm or, like poor old Gordon Brown, try to laugh off their deep discomfort.

Later, Farage lowers the tone of his voice and slows the speed of his syllables to tell me ‘a lovely little story. When I first arrived at the European Parliament, I got into one of the big cars they provide for you, beside a German MEP, Elmar Brok. He’s a great bristly chap who’s been chairman of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs for years. Well, he couldn’t even bring himself to say hello.’ Farage repeatedly raises and slackens his eyebrows for added emphasis (Chaucer would have had a field day with this character). ‘And then Elmar just shouts at me, “We’ve spent 30 years trying to build this project and you come along and try to destroy it. Britain, France, Italy, Germany – separately we’re nothing. Together we can be the world’s

extremism.’ Farage is a libertarian, even if some of the people UKIP attracts are not. ‘I feel that the state just gets bigger and bigger and bigger, but our freedoms, liberties and choices become impinged on, inhibited. I would like a much freer country.’ And all of a sudden, Farage starts to sound more like a politician.

Which, of course, he is – as I see when he leads me across the road and into Hastings fishery. It’s a bizarre place where everything is made out of heavily creosoted wood, and huge grounded fishing boats monopolise the skyline. We step over anchors, fish remains and the tail of a sleeping collie to a hut where a woman is selling fish to a deserted seafront. Farage immediately, and easily, chats to her about cod quotas. (Along with wind turbines, cod quotas are his *bête noire*. Up to 70 per cent of catches off our shores are often abandoned because UK boats have already hit their allocations. One UKIP policy is to reclaim British shores and also a £2.5 billion revenue.)

Farage says: ‘I noticed that there was an EU flag flying further up the beach. I hope that was only a sick joke.’ They chuckle together. Farage turns to me: ‘I’d like this woman to meet Mr Cameron, although I am not sure she’d say very nice things to him.’ More chuckling.

And then, out of nowhere, the wasteland is suddenly heaving with people, all over the age of 65 and all surrounding Farage. I practically go down in the crush. Farage seems unsurprised, even

unaffected. He’s found a local dignitary and he’s discussing the ‘ludicrous’ price (£5.50) of the parking on the seafront. These UKIP fans not only laugh and clap on cue but, whenever there is a whiff of a camera, they whip out UKIP flags from plastic bags and furiously wave them near their leader’s head. Earlier, Farage had told me how he sensed ‘a big change among the young generation, who want success and identity’. He said, with unbeatable conviction, that ‘far from being old-fashioned and backward-looking, UKIP is today the party with the positive vibe’. Maybe, or, with all these elderly supporters, maybe not.

Away from the furor of the waving flags, nodding heads and promises of change, Farage admits: ‘Sometimes I find the enormity of the task ahead of me tiring. Since the accident, I am not as tough as I was.’ But his is long-game politics, and he has the optimism to fuel the journey. And I watch him walk off, lighting another fag. □

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From left, UKIP member Lord Hesketh; Nigel Farage in Hastings; UKIP treasurer Stuart Wheeler and his wife Tessa

superpower and take on America.” So I said, “I don’t want World War Three, thank you very much.”

A Little Englander, then? Actually, Farage is closer to a Big Englander. One of the many rhetorical questions he asks me is: ‘Who do we think this country’s friends in the world are – Australia or Romania? It’s a no-brainer, isn’t it?’ His point is that there is a big English-speaking world full of ‘very obvious alternatives to where we are today’ – which, of course, is Europe.

However, confuse Farage’s eagerness to exploit these ‘remarkable links’ with a BNP-like zealotry and the suntan darkens to fuchsia. ‘Cobblers!’ he shouts. ‘What I’ve done – it’s taken time and lawyers, and we’re the only party in Britain to have done it – is to make a condition that you can’t even become a member of our party if you’ve ever been a member of another proscribed organisation that’s got links to violence or