Man About the House
Joel Williams was a contestant on the reality TV show Big Brother, in which housemates are filmed 24 hours a day. Joel, who describes himself as a Christian, Conservative, community counsellor, remained in the house the entire ten weeks, finishing in second place. A governor of two Cardiff schools, Joel, who’s just 20, is now back in Wales, finishing his A levels. I caught up with him in London, at the National Reality TV Awards.

**Did you grow up in a Christian family?**
Yes, I grew up in a Christian home, and I’m a Christian myself. I think growing up with a Christian background is helpful for anyone. It makes you aware of right and wrong and the moral code we should all abide by, as good citizens of the United Kingdom.

**So regardless of religious beliefs, everyone can benefit from the moral code that underpins Christianity?**
Absolutely. One of the joys of the Bible is that even if you aren’t a Christian, you can still take something from it. You can read certain verses, and they’ll give you the inspiration, guidance and awareness to behave in an ethical and moral way. I like the book of Proverbs. I often see quotes on Facebook and Twitter, and when I put them into Google, they’re actually from the Bible. At first, they might not appear to be, but if you look into them, you’ll find they are.

A quote I put on Twitter was, “Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have enough worries for itself.” It means, why am I worrying about what’s going to happen? Let me focus on the here and now. That’s a biblical verse.

**All sorts of things happen on Big Brother. Was there anything you found challenging to reconcile with your faith, with Christianity?**
I’m a firm believer that you should have no skeletons in your closet. Ultimately, we all do, but I would try to live a life that’s quite transparent. On Big Brother, your life is completely transparent, it’s ten weeks, 24 hours a day, seven days a week surveillance. They will pick out your bad bits, and if you’ve got any bad bits, trust me, they will come out on Big Brother.

In terms of finding it challenging in light of my faith, there were things in the Big Brother house that would challenge people who aren’t Christians. I’m sure many viewers, regardless of their religion, and atheists included, are distressed by foul language and housemates walking around naked.

I felt: “I’m not doing it, but I’m living in this environment with you so I’d much rather you didn’t do it in front of me.” But what right do I have to judge others? A biblical verse is, you should remove the log from your eye before you remove the splinter from someone else’s. I always tell myself that when I think about judging people.

**Did you discuss religion or Christianity with other members of the Big Brother house?**
Yes, and the one thing we agreed on, as a house, was that we are a Christian country, and we would rather be in a Christian country than a country of any other religion. You don’t need to be a Christian to benefit from living in a Christian country.

We also discussed church schools, and even housemates who weren’t religious said, “I’d send my child to a church school because I can see the benefits that child would have.”
How did your parents feel about you going into the house? Did they have any concerns about what you might be exposed to?

My parents had initial concerns. I think any parents would. But they knew it was something I wanted to do and trusted me to judge what’s best for me. I go to college, and I’m in the world where I see a lot. I think Big Brother is like that, but in a more concentrated and saturated way.

Do you feel you gained from the experience?

Yes, I found it an interesting experience, and I very much enjoyed it. I've had the opportunity to sit here today, [and] talk about my faith and other matters, which I don’t think would be happening if I didn’t do Big Brother. You need to look at the positives and act in a positive manner. There's a saying, “If you hang around with negative people, you become negative yourself.” For me, that can be difficult at times because I can be pessimistic, but I tend to say I’m a realist.

What did the people from your church say about you going on Big Brother?

They had concerns; they were worried more than anything. They want the best for me, just as I want the best for them.

Did anything happen on the show that you were worried your church friends would see?

No. I went into Big Brother aware that it was filmed all the time and what’s done is done. I can’t go back and correct the past, but I’m sure if anyone had any concerns or issues, they would have talked to me about them.

The media appears to be pushing boundaries and becoming more sensationalist to grab viewing figures. Do you feel sensationalist behaviour was encouraged in Big Brother, for example, when housemates were given alcohol?

I think we’ll all agree that if a person is heavily intoxicated, they’re likely to behave in a more outgoing way than they would if they weren’t under the influence. It’s all about choice. If a person chooses to drink alcohol and get wasted, they know they are going to let themselves down and behave in a way they might regret.

Do you drink alcohol?

I don’t drink. I mean, I’m not teetotal, but I don’t see the benefit from drinking. I don’t have an issue with anybody who wants to drink; I just don’t choose to do it myself.

Do you think viewers are influenced by the behaviour they see on reality TV, such as scenes of a sexual nature and the language used?

Absolutely, which is why we have a watershed, so young children don’t view scenes that should be for adults. It is all about choice. If an adult chooses to watch that, fine, that’s their choice, but they can choose not to watch it. For a child, it’s very different, because a child might just put something on and sit and watch it.

There are many shows that are controversial; that may have bad language and certain viewpoints that aren’t supported by all. That’s why they are broadcast later when it’s less likely children will be watching.

Do you think reality TV normalises extreme behaviours?

I can’t talk about that because I went on a reality TV show that is highly controversial. It would be the pot calling the kettle black. I think everyone has to remember that actions have consequences. If you’re an actor, or if you’re on television, you have great power because you’re potentially influencing millions of people, so you need to be mindful of behaving in a sensible way.

There are some people in the public eye who reject the idea that they’re role models and say that’s not their job. What would you say to that?

If you’re in the public eye, you’re a role model. You will have, and you deserve, greater scrutiny because you've put yourself out there. You haven’t been forced into that. If I’m photographed coming out of a betting shop, that’s a consequence of the choice I made to put myself in the public eye.

I was aware when I went on Big Brother of what could happen when I left the house. You have to be mindful and behave in an appropriate way. I’ve been asked to take on ambassador roles with charities, but if I went out and behaved like an imbecile, I’d be dropped from those charities, because I’d bring them into disrepute. Anyone who is in the public eye has a duty to behave responsibly.

Do you ever debate Christianity? If someone said to you, “God doesn’t exist”, would you debate this?

No. Why should I? I believe I’m right, they believe they’re right, let’s just agree to disagree. There’s no debate to be had there.