

Transcript of True Life at Mansfield University

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DENNIS MILLER: During his senior year, Mansfield University political science and history major Barry Hughes was part of an experience that only a handful of people in the United States have. He was chosen to be filmed for the Grammy-winning MTV program "True Life." The filming ran over the course of the fall semester. The episode aired in January 2010. Senior English major, Matt Coppadge, talked with Barry about how he was selected out of the thousands of applicants, what the filming experience was like and what the reaction was among friends and strangers when the show aired.

MATT COPPADGE: So, tell me a little bit about yourself, your name and year.

BARRY HUGHES: I'm Barry Hughes. I'm a senior here at Mansfield. I'm a political science and history major. I'm double-majoring. I'm just looking to start to go after grad schools and stuff like that.

MATT COPPADGE: Where are you looking to go to grad school?

BARRY HUGHES: Like the show said, my dream school is Penn State, but that's kind of a high and out there choice when you only have a 2.7 GPA. I just took my GREs on Monday and I did fairly well. Well enough, I think, to get into most schools around here. I'm also looking at the University of Scranton and Bloomsburg and IUP and stuff like that. I would love to go to Mansfield with all my friends, but they just don't have the guidance counseling masters I would want, here.

MATT COPPADGE: Well, for people listening to this, you're here because you were recently featured on MTV's True Life show. The first question I'm going to ask is, how did the whole TV show thing come about? Did you have to apply or did they come to you?

BARRY HUGHES: Actually, I don't know if it's appropriate. I was up kind of late one night playing video games and the only thing on MTV was a True Life marathon that they run all the time. I had been a long-time fan of the show. I was just messing around and trying to find one of the people on the show to see if I could find out anything about them afterwards. I saw they were doing casting. Just curiously I looked at the future shows coming out. It said, "True Life - I'm Addicted to Video Games." I just started laughing. I thought it was way too appropriate for me. I was reading it. They had some vague generalities of what they wanted out of people to come on the show. Just jokingly I sent in an email, thinking I'd never hear from them again. Some time passes and all of a sudden I get a phone call--no, I got an email from Josh Haygood, the guy that was following me around with the camera. I was just completely blown out of my mind. I had no idea what to think after that.

After that we did a short interview process. Then the first week before school he was like, "I'm going to come down and just get to know you." It transformed from that to, "Hey, I'm going to film you moving in the first day of school." It was really an accelerated process from there on out. It was just kind of so freaky. You almost couldn't believe what was going on.

MATT COPPADGE: So did this start last summer?

BARRY HUGHES: This started right before school came into session. It was probably about a month before the school session started, maybe two months. It was definitely a really quick process.

MATT COPPADGE: Was this a paid gig, or was it just for fun?

BARRY HUGHES: I wish it would have been a paid gig. I guess their philosophy is, because it's a documentary they don't want to pay you or give you anything to live outside your means. I don't know if anybody has watched True Life before, but they do shows everything from drug addicts to people just trying to make it. If you start giving money out or making promises, then people might go out and buy

extra stuff. I was thinking about it, if they had given me extra money I probably would have just gone out and bought more video games, better consoles, better screens and stuff. As nice as it would have been, I can understand why they didn't.

MATT COPPADGE: Right. Well, that makes sense. So how did your parents respond when they found out that you were going to be on a TV reality show?

BARRY HUGHES: My parents were a little tentative, but anybody that knows my parents knows that they're kind of crazy and outgoing. My dad acts almost exactly like I do. They were receptive to it. They didn't have any problems being in front of the camera. They weren't embarrassed or anything. We kind of had an awkward family meal there that showed on tape where we were all trying to eat with the camera guy standing over the top of us for the very first time. I think overall they were pretty receptive of me being on the show, as long as I behaved myself and stuff turned out well.

MATT COPPADGE: We'll come back to that question because I want to find out their reaction after seeing the show. Obviously your friends were pretty excited, because they got to be on TV, too.

BARRY HUGHES: The first person I told was my roommate, to make sure he was cool with it. He didn't believe me at first. It was nice. Everybody I told, nobody really believed that they would come to such a small place like Mansfield and highlight some dude that they've known. Everybody knows me for playing video games around here and everybody that knew me in high school, so it wasn't so much that they didn't expect me to have an issue like this as much as, "Why is MTV coming to Mansfield?" I think a lot of people were really shocked over that. A lot of my friends didn't believe me. A lot of my friends didn't believe me until the show came on the air. If they didn't go here, they didn't see the camera guy following me around. They were shocked. A lot of people thought I was just kidding with them.

MATT COPPADGE: I remember hearing rumors that MTV was on campus. I couldn't figure out what for and then I saw a camera guy, but he wasn't following you, yet. I guess eventually I heard they were here documenting you. Is it because you're addicted to video games or is it because you're really good at them? What was the main focus of the show?

BARRY HUGHES: I thought coming into it it was about being addicted to video games, but along with that being really competitively good at them and trying to maintain a high skill level while going to all my classes and stuff like that. But if anybody saw the show, it kind of ended up just turning it into being like I don't go to class and I play video games. They didn't really say how good I was. They didn't really put my gamer-tag out there. So it was kind of a shock when I saw how it came out. But all in all, it wasn't too horrible, I don't think. Some stuff wasn't portrayed very accurately and other stuff was exactly how it happened.

MATT COPPADGE: How good are you, exactly?

BARRY HUGHES: Right now in Call of Duty I have about a two kill/death, which is really good considering I've never met anybody that can show me they can play better than that. I've seen people with higher ones online, but generally they've kind of glitched it out. For anybody that's not a gamer, glitching out is kind of like cheating.

MATT COPPADGE: Is a two-kill death like--

BARRY HUGHES: It's just the ratio of kills to deaths. So for every time I die, I take two people with me, basically. Most people here know somebody that plays Call of Duty and generally it's going to be a little higher than that. I've played game battles, which is sponsored by major league gaming and that's really competitive. On there I had over a two kill/death. Anybody that knows me knows that I'm really into individual stats and stuff like that.

There was a point where I was at home during this whole show that never aired, either. I was keeping track of all my stats with paper and pencil, so I could have a better idea of how I was doing. I'm really picky

about stuff. I don't know, I do pretty well.

MATT COPPADGE: How long did it take you to get used to the new Modern Warfare? I know the new Modern Warfare just came out, at least a couple of months ago. Did it take you long to get really good at that, as compared to the first one that you were playing?

BARRY HUGHES: It was not too bad of a transition period. Anybody that's played Call of Duty 4 versus Modern Warfare 2 knows that the one thing different about Modern Warfare 2 is that there's a lot more in the Z axis. Like, you can get shot from windows two or three stories up, whereas in the older game that wasn't really an issue. I think they did a good job of making it a lot more like a realistic battlefield than Call of Duty 4-wise. I think most people will generally say it's harder. There was a transition period, but I seem to have a natural knack for transitioning into different games and game-types, so it wasn't too bad.

It showed on my show, my first game I went 26 and 11, so.

MATT COPPADGE: Wow.

BARRY HUGHES: Which I thought was pretty good. I guess the thing that makes me a different gamer than most everybody else is some people have those big knockout punch games whereas I'm a more consistent player. I tend to do well, frequently.

MATT COPPADGE: Right. You said that mostly it's just trying to stay competitive online, as well as being able to attend classes. I'm guessing that your gaming habit doesn't get in the way of school as much as the show obviously portrayed. Is that true?

BARRY HUGHES: Actually, that's the thing they didn't really show. One of the things that I kind of had to fess up with Alison about is I was missing almost the attendance grade in every single one of my classes. In a lot of classes that's five to ten percent of your grade. It's really hard to get high grades when you start out docked that many points. Missing class for the sake of missing information has never really been a problem for me. That was one of the things. I was obviously smart enough to do well in these classes. It was just I was handicapping myself so much by not going and missing the attendance grade.

One of the things they didn't really talk about in the show is the horrible cycle that got started. I have a little bit of an anxiety disorder. Modern Warfare and Call of Duty, those two games in general, are my coping mechanism. So if I get stressed out about class, I just want to go play more video games. That's kind of the thing that's always hurt me the most, the need to go play video games when I'm stressed out about stuff. We all get stressed out in college. Avoiding your homework and your studies is not good.

MATT COPPADGE: You were saying earlier, a lot of college students cope with college, or at least try to, with partying and alcohol and all that stuff. You said that it's different for you and that the gaming is sort of your mechanism in that sense, correct?

BARRY HUGHES: Yeah. I've never had--most of my friends know, and a lot of people can't believe, I'm over 21 and I've never had a sip of alcohol. I've never smoked. I don't really party. I don't have a lot of other stuff that I do to hang out and socialize, other than video games. Anybody knows the seventh floor in Laurel knows that it's always kicking late at night. It's always screaming. There's always events going on. That's the gang I hang out with. We all play video games late into the night. For me it just happens to be something I need to do in order to get through the day.

MATT COPPADGE: How much did the show and the camera guy get in the way of your personal and academic life?

BARRY HUGHES: Honestly, there were a couple of times when you could tell that he was kind of pushing me to skip class when he was there and stuff. That's never what it was about for me. I never skipped class just because I wanted to skip class. I skipped class because I was beat from staying up till five or six in the morning playing video games or because I was having migraines from not getting enough sleep or just

being too stressed out. So I wasn't about to go about and change my class attending policies just because somebody was pressuring me to skip classes.

I would get frustrated. We all like to text in class and stuff like that. Any time I would do that you'd see him jump up with the camera. That's kind of like a good red flag to the teacher that maybe something is going on.

They didn't really show me gaming as much as I did. Our dorm rooms are small but he's really good at keeping out of the way and stuff like that. There was just a lot of craziness going on in the room all the time. It was really frustrating because I had to play without sound most of the time he was filming, which people don't really think about. I never really thought about. They don't want the sound effects from the games coming over. If you saw the show, they blur out the screen for legal reasons. I had to keep my volume off and stuff. That was rough. Trying to stay competitive without being able to hear anything was difficult.

MATT COPPADGE: Did you have any trouble with professors with the cameras being in the rooms? I saw Professor Haas on the air and she seemed pretty cool with it. Did professors give you a hard time about that or were they pretty lenient with it?

BARRY HUGHES: Professor Haas, I think, is kind of out of that whole being ashamed thing when you teach a class human sexuality. There was some interesting stuff we did in that class that I'm surprised they didn't air. Most of the teachers were pretty good about it. The only time anything really happened is Professor Gunther kicked him out of our final because he was trying to get in there and tape the final and she didn't want him to distract any of the students, which I can totally understand. He understood. Other than that, most of the teachers were pretty receptive of it. I don't know how much was involved with the university going out and telling the professors, "Hey, let this guy in your guy," or what. I didn't get any problems for it. My advisor, Dr. Bosworth, wasn't a big fan. You can't appease everybody.

MATT COPPADGE: What was it like seeing yourself on TV?

BARRY HUGHES: Always kind of a hit to the ego. They did make me come out to look a little worse than I wanted, just the way stuff played out with Alison, which is a whole entirely different story in and of itself. I thought it was OK. How many people have the opportunity to have something like that happen for them? My roommate was real pumped. I guess he was taking some flack for having his flannel pajamas there on TV. We got a lot of good feedback from friends and people close to us.

It was very interesting the fact that we all have that moment like, "Oh, do I really sound like that? Is that how I always look?" You kind of get a little flustered. But you have to put that behind you and realize there's bigger issues in life.

MATT COPPADGE: You said you got negative feedback from people outside of Mansfield and your close family and friends, too, right?

BARRY HUGHES: Yeah. As far as people at Mansfield, I've seen some Facebook posts since. Everybody can see that nowadays. Some people said they were embarrassed for me. Some people said for some reason they were embarrassed of Mansfield, which I didn't really understand because they didn't show too much of the goings on of the college on there. I didn't really understand that. One of the things that happened is there was this website--I don't know if it was a woman's blog or a women's blog, but they didn't think very favorably of me. They thought I was just a stereotypical white male. They definitely weren't afraid to talk about it. They said everything from Alison should break up with me to I'm a bad person type of thing. I think it's interesting when you start calling somebody a stereotype when you've only seen 20 minutes of their life.

MATT COPPADGE: Right.

BARRY HUGHES: There were a lot of comments below the article and stuff where people had said

various things. You kind of have to let that roll off your back. There's nothing you can do about it. Everybody's going to try and get their little two-cents in.

One of the things that happened that made me happy is a lot of my friends got on that website and tried to comment. We still can't figure out, for some reason, why none of them showed up.

MATT COPPADGE: Probably moderated or something.

BARRY HUGHES: Yeah, none of our comments seemed to show up to disagree with the article. It favored the other woman that was on, Charice. I think it was just kind of they were coming from certain angles. I don't think it would have mattered if I had saved a child from a burning boat. They still would have not been very happy with me.

MATT COPPADGE: Right. Did you get to meet Charice, the other woman from the show?

BARRY HUGHES: No, I never got to meet her. During the show I wasn't even allowed to know how many other people they were doing it on or necessarily who played what. Of course we were all interested to find out who else was on it. She contacted me after the show and I think we played one round together with me and her and her boyfriend. They just play different game types. Like I said, I play really competitively. I think she had a .88 kill/death, which is probably lower than average. That's the thing, I may put a lot of play time in, but it shows that I've put that much play time in, through my skill. And I like to win. Anybody that knows me knows I'm that horrible person that starts screaming and yelling and all the bad stuff. I have a good group of friends up here I play with and we don't normally get too many new people. I played with her. I talked with her after about the show. I guess her boyfriend said that what the show didn't show was he played as many video games as she did. I guess their fight was real, but stuff is framed in certain ways. You're never really going to know the whole issue unless you were actually there.

MATT COPPADGE: Speaking of fighting, was it awkward to have fights on air and put out there for pretty much everyone to see?

BARRY HUGHES: We were actually really worried about it because she never really got in a fight with me about video games while he was there. It's kind of always been a stressor in our relationship. The fight that was first shown in the actual show was more about the camera guy being in her face in three in the morning with his bright light on. Anybody that saw him walking around knows there's that huge light on top of that camera. She was kind of drug into this whole thing. She was kind of caring enough to do it. She wouldn't know they wouldn't do the show unless she was going to be a part of it so she was kind of held hostage by the whole situation. Him being in her face at three in the morning, she kind of got upset at me and felt like her personal life was being invaded. That's kind of what the fight was about. She kind of overreacted a little bit to the whole whose fault it was. We kind of got in a little tussle about whether or not she was going to stick around that weekend or what. That kind of got misrepresented. If anybody looks at it, like they show a scene of her walking through the bottom of Laurel and it's daytime. There was actually another thing where while she was asleep he had taken me outside to get interviewed and she was upset that he never told her where we were going. I didn't know where we were going. So we were kind of worried that she was going to come out looking bad just because we knew they liked to frame stuff in certain ways. So we were a little scared for her. But she actually came out looking good enough, I thought.

MATT COPPADGE: How did the show, after watching it, compare to how you expected it to be? Obviously there were different things. We've been talking about that. Was it drastically different or were you expecting it to be dramatic as it was?

BARRY HUGHES: Honestly, I expected it to have some drama in it. I knew they were kind of full of it when they said they weren't going to include any of the fights that weren't about video games. I knew we hadn't really fought that much and I know it's MTV. They need drama. That's what people watch it for. Like I said, I was surprised that the show had taken a different turn than I thought it was going to. All in all, I expected some twists. I expected the unexpected, I guess you could say. Other than the obvious stuff, which most of my friends know isn't me, it just kind of sucked that the people who don't know me have all

this new stuff to assume about me, which I got a lot of feedback for. Other than that, I kind of expected it. I hoped for a little better but when you only have 20 minutes to show somebody's life, you kind of end up cutting and pasting a little bit..

MATT COPPADGE: Right. So the big question at the end of show was, are you still going to be able to keep up competitively with your video games and maintain your grades? So far this semester have you been able to do that?

BARRY HUGHES: Yeah, I've actually done pretty well this semester, as far as staying up in all my classes and stuff. One of the things that I laughed about and I yelled at the end of the show was they said I was planning on cutting my gaming back to three and a half hours, which I just jumped up and screamed, "Not true, not true!" I never said that. That was just something I think they were looking to put in the end credits to show some kind of change or something. That's what last semester was really about. They didn't really show it. I was trying to find the line of balance between being able to spend all this time playing video games and study and go to class. I got a 3.0 last semester. There's the famous, "How many classes do you think you missed?" line. I did miss a bunch of classes last semester and still I pulled off a 3.0, which isn't great but considering how many times I went to class, I don't think that's that horrible. So going to class this semester I think I'm going to do a lot better. Like I said earlier, I took my GREs and that turned out well so I think I have a lot of things looking up for me.

MATT COPPADGE: Have you been able to find that balance between video gaming and academic life and personal life or are you still trying to find it?

BARRY HUGHES: The thing is, you can achieve that balance but the thing that gets me is if I don't play when I need to play, I start to have anxiety issues and it makes me a little grumpier and I have to start to deal with that. You don't want to study if you're anxious and stuff, anyway. So sometimes I have to be like, OK, I'm going to take a break from studying and play for an hour. Or I'll play for four hours and then go, OK, I think I need to take a little break and look over my syllabus and see what I got going on. So I think I have done a lot better at achieving somewhat of a balance between it. It's not about cutting it back to a certain time, it's about doing what you need to do to get by. I think that's what I realized. I've never been a person who said I need to study at least four hours a day or two hours a day or whatever. It's, I need to do what I need to do to get this done. That's kind of how I go about it.

DENNIS MILLER: That's it for True Life at Mansfield University. For dozens of podcasts on a wide variety of topics, go to podcast.Mansfield.edu. You can also download transcripts of any show.