

# PRINCE CHARLES IS HER LATEST TV CONQUEST

The Countryfile presenter Julia Bradbury, 42, and her sister and manager, Gina Fox, 52, talk about their tight family bond, the fear of never having children, and getting celebrities to open up

**JULIA:** Gina and I have different fathers, but I've never thought of her as a half-sister, she's just my sister. Our mum is a typical Greek mother: very loving, very anxious, permanently fearful that the worst is going to happen. She had her own issues when we were growing up, because her mother rejected her, and I think she made a conscious decision that she was going to do the exact opposite with us.

So for Mum, motherhood was full-on nurturing. I remember lying in bed with her when I was little — with a crowbar under the bed in case of a break-in — and I said: "I'm jealous of Gina because she's had 10 more years of you than I have." I didn't realise, then, the poignancy of that statement. In the past two years, both our parents have had cancer. Dad's had prostate cancer, Mum's had bowel cancer. So, suddenly, there was this possibility that we could lose one or both of them.

At the time, I was pregnant, and it was a blessing because Mum had been convinced that everything was against me. The fact that I hadn't settled down, I enjoyed the "party" lifestyle, had focused on my career... She'd thought I'd never have kids. I

said: "You've got to be here for this, I need you!" I didn't want to know the sex of the baby, but she did. She wanted to visualise who she was surviving for. So in the lead-up to Zeph's birth, she knew and I didn't. [Zephyr's father is the property developer Gerry Cunningham.]

As a family, we talk every day, so every decision, whether it's to do with Zeph or business, involves a meeting or a conference call. We're completely involved in each other's

business as well as the business of being a family. We've never had a conversation about this, but Gina has a lot of power when it comes to me. I may be the one who's on TV, but in the background she's in charge.

She's much more organised than I am.

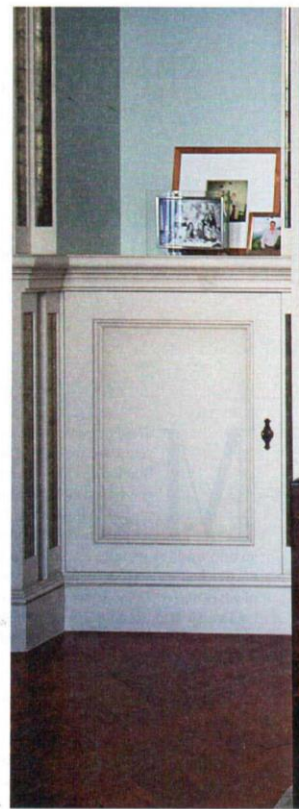
I'll get a third of the way through my paperwork, then get hopelessly distracted. I need her and respect fully what she does for me. She knows far more about what I earn than I do, and she thrives on that. I talk to her about everything, from I-don't-want-to-tell-Mum-because-she'll-worry, to a dilemma over whether I should take a job or not. We're career-driven, but we're also driven to look after each other.

Gina is very emotional, very intense, very true. She's frank beyond politeness. That's OK for me, but not in every situation, so there's a lot of kicking under the table. I'll ask her not to mention something and she'll go: "What's wrong with talking about it?" But that's also what I love about her: what you see is what you get.

When we're together, people can find Gina and me quite frightening. We're loud, strong and full-on. People often say they find Gina scary, which is hilarious, because she isn't at all. But she can be dominating — we both can. I think it's our closeness people find threatening. A lot of families say they're close, but they're not really. There's secrecy and jealousy, and there are favoured siblings. In our family we're all constantly propping each other up.

There are some things I'd not discuss with Gina. Sex, for instance. She's my big sister and I wouldn't want to go there. But any other issue is open for discussion. She's highly critical of me and I am of her. I'll go: "You can't wear that — you look like a sofa!" I'm constantly having a go at her about diet and exercise, which annoys her.

We have explosive arguments over stupid things, like a diary engagement. She'll say: "You're so selfish. You never do what I need you to do." I'll say: "You always want me to do what I can't do." And she'll slam the phone down. Neither of us has a problem holding our own. Sometimes, Mum sends Dad



down to intervene, which is hilarious. He'll sit between us and say: "Your mother's very upset. Now what are you girls up to?" It's his forte, one of the few times he's allowed to speak.

Gina's a great mum to her son Jack, who's 14 now, but she's not had a happy personal life, despite an almost infinite capacity to love and to trust. We joke that in 30 years' time we'll be like a Greek Hinge and Bracket, living together, slightly glam, still getting our hair and nails done. Actually, I really love that idea.

**GINA:** My father died when I was five and Mum remarried when I was seven. Julia was born when I was 10, so we practically had separate childhoods. I just recall



**'When I was 17, our father came upstairs and caught me in the shower with a boyfriend and said, very gravely: "That is not a social habit I approve of"'**

her being in the way, and forever creeping around to spy on me. She'd then go back to Mum and report on whatever it was I was doing. When I was 17, our father came upstairs and caught me in the shower with a boyfriend and said, very gravely: "That is not a social habit I approve of." A line Julia and I still use when we've done something really bad.

We got to know one another properly when Julia moved to London. She was 17, I was 27. I'd spent the last 10 years expanding

Mum's couture business — Mum did the designing, I did the books and, in 1984, we opened a shop in Knightsbridge. You don't need to look far to see where we get our drive from. Mum is like a human dynamo. She's also the rock we both cling to.

Julia and I lived in Maida Vale together, and there were lots of tears and laughter. She's messy, I'm neat, so we'd have screaming matches over the washing. But on a deeper level, family is everything to us and we make decisions together. Others

can find it threatening and, at times, have tried to break us up. It's one of the reasons my marriage failed.

As a Hollywood reporter for GMTV, one of Julia's first jobs was interviewing John Travolta. Having found out he loved chocolate, we scoured Beverly Hills for hand-made truffles for him. She then gave me a clipboard and introduced me as her assistant. She has a knack for getting stuff out of people. I remember her asking Michael Douglas about sex addiction, even

**LADIES WHO LOUNGE**  
Left: Julia (lying down) and Gina today. 'People find our closeness threatening,' says Julia. Inset: a newborn Julia with her father, Michael, her mother, Chrissi (right), a family friend (centre), and Gina, July 1970

though she'd been warned by his agent not to. She's fearless.

When she first met Prince Charles [after the floods in the Lake District], he asked her if she worked for Keswick Tourist Board. Later, they switched on the Christmas lights together and he said: "Mmm. I hear Countryfile is doing well." Clearly, someone must have briefed him. She may have reminded him of that when she was hedge-laying with him at Highgrove recently.

For a long time, Julia put kids on hold, so it was a shock when she was told she had endometriosis and may not be able to have any. I offered her my eggs, but since I'm 10 years older than her, she thought mine would be past their sell-by date.

So when she met Gerry, she worked very hard to get pregnant — and let me tell you, we all went on that journey with her. The family turned up en masse for her scans: Mum, Dad, my son Jack, Gerry, Gerry's niece Bernie... Her consultant had to find a room to fit us all in. We were so thrilled, there was no chance of anything so important staying private. Julia Bradbury's book, *Wainwright Walks Coast to Coast* (£14.99), is out on April 4. Julia is giving a talk at the *Oxford Literary Festival* on March 17; [oxfordliteraryfestival.com](http://oxfordliteraryfestival.com). Tonight at 7pm, Prince Charles guest-edits a special edition of *Countryfile* to mark the BBC1 show's 25th anniversary

**INTERVIEWS BY CAROLINE SCOTT. PHOTOGRAPH BY MUIR VIDLER**