



“When I was 12, I had cassette tapes about the power of positive thinking; I’d listen to them religiously”

TV presenter, nature lover and walking devotee Julia Bradbury chats to Rachel Dobson about the secret to her zest for life, how her upbringing influences her parenting style and why she embraces being 50

We’re used to seeing Julia Bradbury atop cliffs, striding across hills, through fields and up mountains, enthusing about big skies, fresh air and their benefits for mental and physical health. But, beyond the trademark puffer jacket and hiking boots, she is on a mission to spread a message of conservation, powered by proactivity and education.

The mother of three began her career as an entertainment reporter before hosting consumer affairs programme ‘Watchdog’ and Sunday-night favourite ‘Countryfile’, before returning to her love of hiking, nurtured by her father, Michael, in the Peak District during her childhood in nearby Sheffield. Most recently, Bradbury reminded us of the natural beauty of Britain in ‘Cornwall And Devon Walks’, which kept our outdoor dreams alive through lockdown.

Q You’ve described your childhood as idyllic. Can you expand on that?

A I don’t suppose I knew at the time that it was idyllic, but with the wonderful tool of hindsight, I do celebrate the fact that I had a lovely, loving childhood and it’s the foundation of my life. Having loving parents gives you great freedom as it affords you the confidence to try new things and take risks, because you know that if it doesn’t work out, you have something to fall back on. That’s not to say that if you don’t have a perfect childhood you can’t be a happy human being – there are millions of examples of people who have strived and overcome difficult childhoods. But I think it does frame your life differently. I’m grateful to my parents for giving me that.

Q What are your parents like? Do they have similarities, or are they opposites?

A My parents are so different. My father is bright intellectually and he’s from a frosty English family. He was sent to boarding school when his parents emigrated to Australia and then New Zealand. He’s loving, but sometimes finds it >>>

difficult to demonstrate his love. My mother, Chrissi, is a self-starter who came from a close Greek family that emigrated to Cardiff and suffered racism. She had to push and hustle – leaving school at 16 and getting a job. Dad was trying to find love, acceptance and a family unit and Mum was trying to find acceptance in a different way. They came together and they are still together.

Q Where do you think your bubbling positivity comes from?

A I don't know why but, when I was about 12, I had these cassette tapes that were all about the power of positive thinking, and I would listen to them religiously. My mother had a friend who was an advocate of positive thinking and I remember being in her house while Mum and her were talking, while I had the tapes. There was also a little blue book called *The Power Of Positive Thought*, which I have to this day. It really speaks to me.

Q You and your husband, Gerard Cunningham, have three children – Zephyrus, nine, and twins Xanthe and Zena, six. How do you emulate your happy childhood with your offspring?

A I haven't given them the cassettes! But I do impress upon them how you can take control of your emotions and that it's fine to be sad, but let's talk about it. Mostly, I shower them with love, like my parents did me.

Q You have endometriosis and had to have five rounds of IVF before you had your twins. How did you get through that?

A I walked! I usually work out quite hard; I do weights and interval training, yoga and walking but, when you're going through IVF, you really don't want to do tough physical exercise, because you're tired and don't feel great. Walking is the perfect exercise because you can either push yourself or take it easy, while making sure you are getting outside, getting the blood pumping and the brain active, but you're not killing yourself. I believe walking is one of the best forms of therapy, both physical and mental. I walk every single day.

Q Was it tough to leave *Countryfile* because you felt that you would have more chance of having a baby?

A The travel and long hours with *Countryfile* made it hard – but it's difficult for everyone. Some women

don't feel able to share with their boss that they're having IVF because they're worried about being discriminated against in the workplace. It's outrageous that we're giving birth, are the world's workforce, the carers of the world, contributing trillions to the economy in free care, and yet we have to fight for promotion and maternity pay if we dare to go off and have babies.

Q What do you hope will change with regards gender equality in your children's lifetime?

A I hope that things are going to change towards men and it will be accepted that men can and do have as much responsibility for the children as women.

Q How does equality play out in your household and relationship?

A We pretty much have an equal partnership. I'm lucky in the fact that Gerard has his own

business, so can manage his own time. He recently did a business course and one of the questions on his personality profile was about the most important part of his day. He said it was walking his son to school and he was marked highly positive for that because it's about balance.

Q You turned 50 last summer – do you worry about being sidelined in your career?

A I'm still ambitious and driven and I mitigate what may be a potential slide in my work by pushing for my own projects. The last four out of five series I've done have been my ideas and I've co-developed them. I have to be resilient because you do get knocked back, but I always try and work a way around any stumbling blocks.

Q Similarly to your mother, you chose to leave school to work in an advertising agency. Do you regret not going to university?

A When I was younger, I didn't have a thirst for knowledge like I have now. Last year, I did a 12-week course at Harvard on the environment and the climate crisis and the impact on health. One of my missions is to spread awareness about the importance of nature in people's lives. I think that because we're inherently selfish, until we understand how important nature and the natural world is for our health, we won't stop destroying the world.

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TOP Julia Bradbury at Durdle Door in Dorset on *Britain's Greatest National Treasures*

in the Lake District on *Britain's Favourite Walks: Top 100*
RIGHT Backstage at *Good Morning Britain*

Q You love the great outdoors and open spaces, but live in London, one of the biggest cities on the planet. Are you concerned about pollution?

A Of course! We're lucky because we have a garden and have planted hedges that suck up toxins and we've also created a vertical garden with flowers that attract bees – basically, we've done everything we can to bring nature into the city. I love both the city and the countryside – I'm a split personality. The reality is that in the UK, around 80 per cent of people live in an urban environment, so I would never want to be negative about living in a city. I would rather work towards our towns and cities being greener. I want more green roofs, more trees, gardens, hedges, window boxes and electric car charging spaces.

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Q Here at *Psychologies*, we hold meetings while walking our dogs and find the best, most creative ideas come in muddy fields...

A It's wonderful when you go for a long walk with a friend and there are beautiful pauses in the conversation, perhaps because you're concentrating on breathing to get up a hill. Then you get to the top, share the view and carry on talking. Who knows where the conversation will lead? My dad started me walking in Derbyshire and I've always had a connection with the outdoors and big landscapes – adding the physical motion of walking to it helps me think through my problems.