



JULIA BRADBURY,
BREAST CANCER
AWARENESS

Julia Bradbury's **STRENGTH** *in* **FRAGILITY**

2022 represents the 20th anniversary of the founding of Cancer Research UK and this month is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Sharing a deeply personal experience of the condition, Rutland's Julia Bradbury talks about her diagnosis and treatment of the past year, explaining how in fragility you can also find great personal strength...

THE POEM *Desiderata* is pretty much *Desiderata* is pretty much my very favourite piece of writing. One of its most memorable pieces of advice is to 'find what peace there may be in silence.'

It's a busy world, and so to get away from the noise and to just spend time with yourself sometimes seems like the ultimate luxury rather than a fundamental right.

Julia Bradbury's family have lived in Rutland since the early 1970s and Julia has long been an advocate of fresh air and quiet, open spaces, being a former presenter of BBC's *Countryfile*, and having created *The Outdoor Guide* website with her sister, which provides inspiration for those seeking places around the country to enjoy walks.

Over the past year, though Julia's appreciation for the countryside as a source of health and wellbeing has appreciated considerably as she continues to recover from breast cancer.

The broadcaster began her career working for London-based advertising agency Jaffe & Young before joining her mother Chrissi and sister Gina in the family's fashion business. She credits the experience with providing a valuable grounding in human dynamics. .

"Part of the job was selling" she explains. "Learning to read a customer, to key into their desires and personality gives you a good basic understanding of human interactions."

From there she took on a new challenge working for brand new cable TV station L!ve TV working under Janet Street Porter initially and then former Sun editor Kelvin MacKenzie, alongside fellow presenter Claudia Winkleman.

A big break came in the form of the GMTV Hollywood Correspondent role, based in LA chasing down celebrities like George Clooney, Leonardo DiCaprio and Will Smith. She returned to the UK to launch Channel 5, and after several years found herself working for the BBC on various programmes, including the consumer advice programme *Watchdog* on BBC1.

"It was a brilliant to be on the side of the punters, taking on the corporate baddies – so fulfilling."

While she was presenting *Watchdog* a coffee with a commissioner at the BBC led to her fulfilling a lifelong dream of hiking and walking on the small screen, following in the footsteps of Alfred Wainwright in the now infamous series 'Wainwright Walks.' >>

Words: Rob Davis.

>> Julia has been a keen walker since her Dad Michael took her striding out as a little girl across the Peak District. The series was a breakout hit and led to many more Wainwright’s and eventually her own walking shows, which continue to this day with series like Cornwall and Devon Walks and Best Walks With A View. It was around this time that the rural magazine show Countryfile was due to be rebooted and from 2009 she hosted this hugely successful Sunday night series with her friend Matt Baker, marrying her love of the countryside with her natural affinity for broadcasting.

Julia loves the countryside, and loves the Rutland countryside specifically, so it’s natural that the county has been an important part of her recovery from breast cancer over the past year.

“I’ve seen some amazing landscapes and taken in some incredible views over the years but one of my favourites remains the sight of Rutland Water. I love a walk around the reservoir and Sunday lunch cooked by my MamaMou (the half Greek side of the family is something she’s proud of).

The towns of Stamford and Oakham are lovely, and it’s such a different pace compared to life in the city. It feels like home because this is where I grew up and Mum and Dad are firmly ensconced in Rutland life.”

“I promised myself that from now on, I will be outside every day, come rain or shine,” she says. “Being among trees and in green spaces reduces your stress levels, increases the ‘love hormone’ oxytocin, it lowers blood pressure and just generally make you feel much happier.”

A year ago, in September 2021, Julia went public with her diagnosis, and spoke about her condition candidly in an ITV documentary Julia Bradbury: Breast Cancer & Me which followed her from diagnosis to mastectomy. “I was away filming for This Morning,” she recalls. “I hadn’t worked with the crew before and though I knew the call was coming I wasn’t familiar enough with this team to let them know what was going on, and I didn’t feel able to let them know I might need some time to process the

*Julia’s
Outdoor Guide*

Julia and sister Gina founded The Outdoor Guide in 2014. Today it brings together suggested urban and rural walks, places to stay, outdoor gear and serves as a community for likeminded fans of the country.



information, so when the phone did finally ring I didn’t take it.”

Instead, Julia took the call back home. Her consultant Gerald Gui of the Royal Marsden Hospital in London confirmed the results of her diagnosis via a recent biopsy, that in her left breast was a large tumour.

“When you’re diagnosed with cancer, it’s like moving instantly into slow motion. I just thought, ‘NO.’ And then ‘OK, I’ve got to live. I need to be here, I want to be here.’

I initially kept the diagnosis between myself, my sister Gina and my partner Gerry. I didn’t want my children to hear that mummy had cancer from the media before I’d had a chance to tell them.”

“For me, the most painful thing of it all was thinking of my children. The most joyful thing about motherhood is watching your children grow up, every day you have at least one gorgeous moment with them, and so the thought of leaving them behind just made me so sad. We didn’t know what to tell the kids, because we didn’t want to tell them ‘mummy’s going to die,’ but we didn’t want to lie to them either. We took them for a walk around the garden, and decided to just be honest. ‘Mummy’s not very well.’”

“We mentioned the word ‘cancer’ and we were honest, but their reaction hit me like a sledgehammer. I didn’t anticipate that one of my children would ask me whether cancer was contagious, whether she could still hug me.”

“I didn’t see it coming but there was a lightbulb moment; ah, of course, they’re living through Covid-19, all this talk about contagious this, contagious that... I said ‘yes darling, I need your hugs now, more than ever.’ It was heartbreaking, but I’m really grateful to the charity Fruitfly Collective, which is a charity that helps parents to talk to their children about a cancer diagnosis.”

“Gerry, too, was devastated but he’s so supportive. He said that we’ll look after the kids, and told me we’ll do everything we can to get you through it.”

“If it doesn’t cause you anxiety, I think it’s good to find out as much information as possible. The research I did through my diagnosis and shared with my family helped

THE OUTDOOR GUIDE FOUNDATION...



Julia and Gina Bradbury have always been acutely aware of the benefits that growing up around nature brings to youngsters. But especially in the post-pandemic era and amid a cost of living crisis some children aren’t sufficiently well-equipped for the outdoor life.

It’s reckoned that a fifth of children don’t spend any time around nature, and that 75% of kids in total spend less than an hour a day outdoors. Furthermore, a third of primary school children live below the poverty line.

That’s why The Outdoor Guide Foundation has been established with a view to providing Britain’s primary schools with sets of waterproofs and wellies for youngsters to borrow in order to experience fresh air and the natural world. As Pride goes to press the Foundation delivers its 2,000th set of outdoor kits, comprising high quality waterproof trousers and a waterproof jacket with hood as well as a pair of Dunlop wellies. Each set costs £27.50 and already 200 schools have benefited.

“These kits allow children to jump in puddles, roll around in the mud and kick through leaves without messing up their school uniform,” says Gina. “We’ve been really well supported especially by Rutland and already we’ve supplied kits to Edith Weston Academy locally and to schools in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bristol and Derbyshire. You can donate to the Foundation online via Just Giving, search for The Outdoor Guide Foundation. ■

us all to understand the enormity of what a mastectomy would mean. It helped to change the balance between fear of the unknown to an understanding of what I needed to do as part of my recovery."

"Once you've got your diagnosis and you know what type of cancer it is, you can think 'right, this is what we can do,' but even so it's difficult to process. I was told that I had to have a mastectomy, and that was shocking."

"I was facing a total amputation, and talked though the reality of the operation, discussing reconstruction. But you just don't know how it's going to work, how it's going to feel. For someone who's used to being in control of their life, you feel helpless."

"But one in seven women will find themselves with breast cancer, it's a club that nobody wants to be part of. And even though I knew that the operation would save me, knowing that I wouldn't be the same again left me scared and shocked and frightened."

Julia's filming for her series on trees for *This Morning* was completing immediately before her operation.

"I was scared to hell. Real dread. I cried almost every day from the moment I fully understood what was happening, but on the day of the mastectomy I was strangely calm. It was a bit overwhelming but I felt as if it was happening to someone else and I was making a programme about it! I remember the anaesthetist explaining what was happening when I was being wheeled into the operating theatre, and then she said 'think happy thoughts.'"

"That was when the tears started to roll out of the side of my eyes down my temples, before everything went white. I woke up six hours later and the operation was over. My new life had begun."

Julia is now seven months on from the operation to remove a six centimetre tumour, two lymph glands and her left breast.

"I didn't want to look immediately after the surgery, when it was sore and angry. I wanted to be emotionally ready and a bit more physically healed. My follow-up appointment shortly afterwards was to find out if the cancer had spread. The whole cancer was excised, and no radiotherapy or chemotherapy was required."

"I wish I could say that the mastectomy is over, and the prognosis is good and that's that... but the reality is it could come back. The re-occurrence risk hanging over me has led me to find out as much as I can about my type of cancer, researching everything related. The most important thing to me now is not to get cancer again. The period of being alert is generally five years."

"People talk often these days about outcomes and about how recovery rates are good, but I don't think there's enough emphasis on what handling breast cancer involves. It's a lot to process and to understand, beyond your physical wellness, when cancer crashes into your life and also into the lives of your family and friends and loved ones."

"With motherhood and age and experience, comes the ability to frame problems and try

to work through them, even if the solutions you come up with aren't perfect. I'm better at this age than I would have been in my 20s, and with my biggest motivation now to stay alive for my children I'm trying to use my resilience and health to make a positive impact on my body."

"I discovered from a hormone test called the *Dutch Test* that I have massively high cortisol levels (cortisol being the stress hormone), so most nights I try to be upstairs with the lights low and no screens, either meditating or doing something gentle by 10pm."

"I'm conscious of everything that can contribute to chronic illnesses from what I eat to my lifestyle. I've switched to a mostly plant-based diet, I exercise six times a week and I weight train two or three times a week and into the mix I add tennis, yoga and gigong [a system of coordinated movement, breathing, and meditation]. I did a something called a *SNPs test* which revealed I have a higher than average risk of recurrence, and I'm doing more tests which have shown up some other interesting things out about my health and body which I'll share in the future. I would urge people to take care of themselves in a proactive way – don't wait for something seismic to happen, like me."

"What I'll take away from the last year is that I'm grateful for what I have, and I'm touched by the support and kindness I've experienced even from people whom I've never met. Filming the other week in a cake shop a woman knocked on the window and formed a heart shape with her hands and mouthed 'I love you.'"

"Another in a pizza restaurant when I was with my girls walked past the table and put a folded napkin into my hand. On it she'd written 'loved your documentary, one us has walked your path, wishing you good health and a wonderful future.'"

"Cancer is a lifetime diagnosis, not something that's *dealt with* once you've had your treatment. It's something to deal with for the rest of your life and that's a big learning curve, a real adjustment."

"It's put me in a different place and a different footing, completely changed my life. I feel the preciousness of life, more so than ever now, and I'm going to take this bad, horrible thing that's happened to me and turn it into something else... something better." ■

FACTS & FIGURES: Breast Cancer Awareness...

■ There are around 55,900 new breast cancer cases in the UK every year, that's more than 150 every day (2016-2018).

■ Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK, accounting for 15% of all new cancer cases (2016-2018).

■ In females in the UK, breast cancer is the most common cancer, with around 55,500 new cases every year (2016-2018).

■ Each year around a quarter (24%) of all new breast cancer cases in the UK are

diagnosed in people aged 75 and over (2016-2018).

■ There are around 11,500 breast cancer deaths in the UK every year, that's 32 every day (2017-2019).

■ Breast cancer is the 4th most common cause of cancer death in the UK, accounting for 7% of all cancer deaths (2017-2019).

■ Since the early 1970s, breast cancer mortality rates have decreased by around two-fifths (41%) in the UK. Rates in females have decreased by almost two-fifths (37%), and

rates in males have decreased by more than two-fifths (44%) (2017-2019).

■ More than 9 in 10 (95.8%) of women diagnosed with breast cancer in England survive their disease for one year or more. Almost 9 in 10 (85%) of women diagnosed with breast cancer in England survive their disease for five years or more (2013-2017).

■ It is predicted that around 3 in 4 (75.9%) of women diagnosed with breast cancer in England survive their disease for ten years or more (2013-2017).

Source: Cancer Research UK.