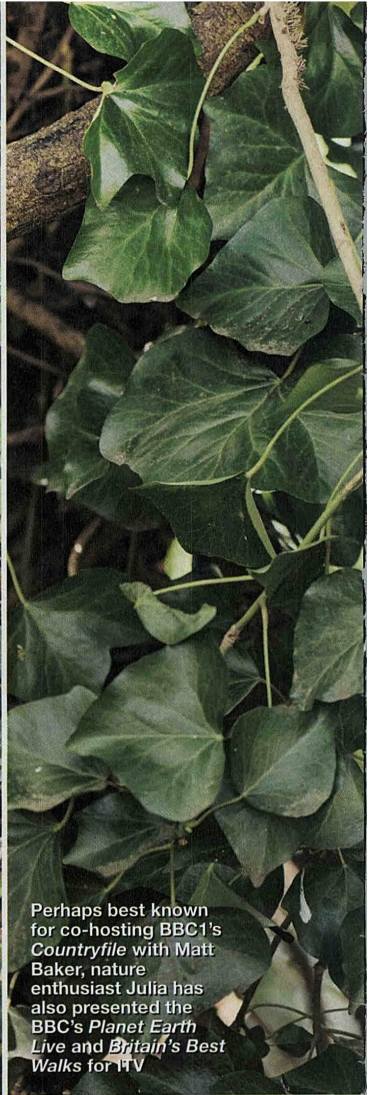




EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

SHARING HER LESSONS ON HEALTHY LIVING
JULIA BRADBURY
ON HOW HAVING CANCER HAS BROUGHT
NEW MEANING TO BEING A MUM



Perhaps best known for co-hosting BBC1's *Countryfile* with Matt Baker, nature enthusiast Julia has also presented the BBC's *Planet Earth Live* and *Britain's Best Walks* for ITV

Julia Bradbury isn't always the most popular member of her household. Her three children get "a bit fed up" with her impassioned conversations about healthy eating and resent the fact that they can't eat as many doughnuts as they once did. They're not allowed sugar at home and have nuts, seeds and fruit instead of cereal for breakfast.

Pizzas are considered a treat, too. "I'd say at times there's a bit of friction," says the TV presenter about family mealtimes. But since her diagnosis of breast cancer in 2021, and her recovery from a mastectomy and breast reconstruction, Julia, 53, has done a "deep dive" into what it means to be healthy, in order to "prevent re-occurrence" and "optimise my chances of staying alive".

Her main motivation is her children – son Zephyr, 12, and twin girls Xanthe and Zena, eight – with her partner, property





developer Gerard Cunningham. "I've always adored being a mother. It's the greatest privilege and I love watching them grow," says Julia as she sits surrounded by the greenery of her London garden.

"It was the saddest moment when I had my first biopsy and I didn't know what was going on. I kept thinking: 'I just want to see my children grow up, I have to see my children grow up.'

EVER MORE GRATEFUL

"Has my relationship with them changed because of the cancer? Probably. I'm much more emotional. I feel more. The fabric of life is right at my fingertips.

"And the impermanence of everything around us. Everything is heightened. It's made every moment with them even more precious, and I'm ever more grateful."

Two years on from her surgery – and in "good health" – she says the cancer diagnosis has given her "a

'Everything is heightened. It's made every moment even more precious'

renewed focus on what's important in my life", as well as the impetus to write a book, *Walk Yourself Happy*, about how the natural world can enhance physical and mental health for all of us.

The former *Countryfile* presenter is known for her passion for walking and her book outlines the benefits of embracing it as the "gateway drug" to nature, as she describes it.

Other wellness areas are covered, such as nutrition and sleep, meditation and breath work, healing and practising gratitude. Expert opinions and scientific studies are interspersed with Julia's own story, which tells how she has overhauled

her lifestyle and radically changed her habits with a daily routine that begins from the moment she wakes up. Rather than look at her phone, "the first thing I do is smile", she says. "I put a smile on my face because it makes a chemical reaction with the brain."

FINDING STILLNESS

She then sits by her bathroom window to soak up the morning light to help set her "circadian clock" before doing 20 minutes of breath work. "That is my stillness time, my time to set my intention for the day, to be grateful for what I have, to take in a little bit of nature and be on my

own. I feel much more peaceful, more able to deal with the stuff that's thrown at me."

She has vegetables for breakfast, never snacks and doesn't eat after 6pm. Late nights watching Netflix while eating Maltesers and popcorn are but a distant memory now that she has a sleep hygiene routine, which sees her in bed by 10pm at the latest. A night owl in the past, Julia changed her bedtime after being told by a sleep expert that the body repairs itself best between the hours of 10pm and 3am. She's also pretty much teetotal.

"I just don't want to drink. For me, the enjoyment is completely taken away by the alarm bell going: '25% risk of re-occurrence', so where's the joy in that?" she asks, adding that she was very happy sipping jasmine tea in a bar the other night. "Although I haven't been clubbing yet. I'd be interested to see what that's like."

Should she ever "fall off the wagon", she knows exactly what

'I have to preserve and look after myself – get over the physical trauma, the emotional trauma'

Since her breast cancer diagnosis and surgery, Julia has become even more passionate about healthy living and has written a book about the benefits of walking



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the cause would be. "Dunking a chocolate biscuit in a cup of tea," she says, wistfully. "I haven't done that in years."

With these new habits, her social life and inevitably some friendships have changed.

"When I had my cancer diagnosis, I wasn't told: 'You're going to die.' There was treatment for which I'm very, very grateful. But there's still a massive re-evaluation in terms of relationships – with friends, family, partners – and I have become very sensitive to the energy that I'm putting into certain relationships, and the energy that I'm getting back from certain relationships," she says.

"There has been a little bit of a reckoning where I'm thinking: 'I don't think either of us are benefiting very much from this,' or: 'Have I got the emotional

room for that?' It brings everything into a sharper focus."

So has she jettisoned some relationships? "Yes, I have," she says. "Not necessarily purposefully in some instances; sometimes things have drifted, and you kind of go: 'Okay, I'm just going to leave that there.' I genuinely don't have time to nurture 20 friendships, but I don't think anybody has."

COMMUNING WITH NATURE

She has also made peace with the fact that she sometimes has to say no to things – particularly work offers – if she doesn't feel she has the energy to take them on.

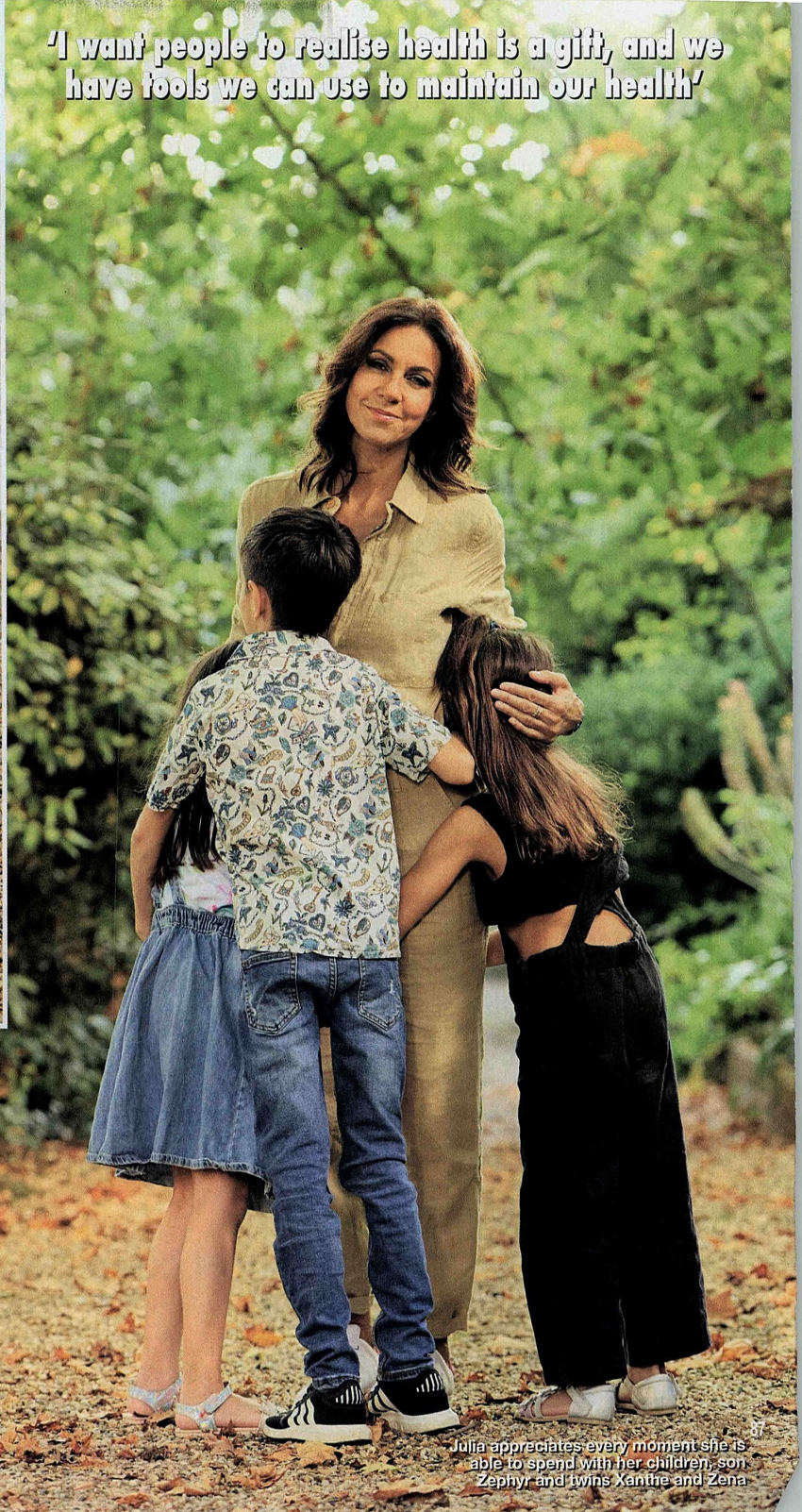
"I have to preserve and look after myself – I've got to get over the physical trauma, the emotional trauma, and recalibrate my body. All that takes time."

When she recently made a travel

PHOTOS: CHILLI MEDIA, DAVID VENN




'I want people to realise health is a gift, and we have tools we can use to maintain our health'



programme about Ireland for Channel 4, for example, the filming schedule was split into two so that she wouldn't have to be on the road for eight weeks.

Julia is hoping her book is filled with practical but achievable tips and advice for those seeking a healthier lifestyle. "I want people to realise that health is a gift, and we have tools that we can use that are within our own orbit to maintain our health."

And, she insists, you don't need a garden to commune with nature.

"Go to the park, get a window box, grow some tomatoes. You have to make room for nature and seek it out." 

INTERVIEW: ROSALIND POWELL

Walk Yourself Happy by Julia Bradbury, £20, is published by Piatkus on 14 September.

Julia appreciates every moment she is able to spend with her children, son Zephyr and twins Xanthe and Zena