

RELATIVE VALUES

Julia Bradbury and Gina Bradbury Fox

The TV presenter on how cancer brought her closer to her big sister

Julia

I had a beautiful upbringing in a village in Rutland, climbing trees, spending time outside, smothered in love. Mum was much more forgiving of me as the younger child, so I'm sure Gina would argue that I was spoilt. I don't blame her for thinking, "How did she get away with that? The little shit." There is ten years between us and I adored her. She was my cool big sister, but she found me deeply annoying.

Gina is a force of nature. She's also incredibly kind and loving. One of her strengths and possibly a weakness is that she's very open with people without knowing them well. I take longer to get to know people, and if I don't like somebody I walk away quickly.

When I was 18 I moved to London and we shared a flat in Maida Vale. It was tumultuous at first — we'd have big rows about the laundry and tidying up — but we became the best of friends, inseparable. We'd go partying together and share a juvenile sense of humour.

My first big break in television was working for Live TV with Janet Street-Porter at the helm. Then I got a job as LA correspondent for GMTV and was in between agents when I came back to the UK. Gina was married to a TV executive at the time who suggested she become my agent. She also managed my accounts. If today I ask her, "Can I have that receipt from 1998?" she'll find it.

It worked well for a number of years, then my career was going in an upward trajectory, which needed a different approach. She's now my business partner for our website, The Outdoor Guide, which is all about walking, and runs "me" — anything outside the remit of my agents and managers.

We can have screaming rows and slam the phone down on each other. We have a massive vent and then it's fine. We always apologise and forgive each other. My eight-year-old twins, Xanthe and Zena, and my 12-year-old son, Zephyrus, squabble and I say to them, "You'll be friends when you're older."

Gina is selfless in so many ways. I'm more selfish. I'm not saying I put myself first all the time, but Gina will always offer to help. She offered me her eggs when I was going through IVF to have my twin daughters, for goodness' sake. My IVF consultant told her, "I'm afraid you're too old," but that was typical of Gina. After I had my mastectomy reconstruction following my breast cancer diagnosis in 2021, I could have had another operation to inject more fat around my breast implant. She offered me her fat, but it wasn't allowed.

Between them, Gina and my partner, Gerry, came to every hospital appointment during my treatment. She was there when I got wheeled in for my mastectomy and she was there when I was wheeled out. She came

to the hospital every day. She washed my hair and dried it, and made me healthy banana bread. She has been the most amazing sister.

I allowed myself to feel all the pain, vulnerability and fear because it was an important part of my recovery and healing process. If you quell a trauma, you risk damaging yourself internally. Meditation became very important to me because that's when I could let the tears flow.

My lifestyle choices didn't help when it came to my cancer diagnosis — the stress, lack of sleep, high-sugar diet, alcohol, the pace with which I'd led my life were all contributing factors. I've now adopted a new approach that includes healthy food, lots of sleep, walking and daily time in nature. There is no sign of the disease and I'm taking the best possible care of myself.

I hope I'm a kinder person since my diagnosis, and I've learnt to be more tolerant. It has brought Gina and I closer. We haven't had one of our big, stormy arguments — yet. I'm sure it will come. I've undoubtedly pissed her off, but she has just not screamed at me about it.

Gina

Julia is my half-sister. My father died when I was five and two years later my mother remarried. Julia was born when I was ten. She looked up to me but said I was a

"Gina offered me her eggs when I was going through IVF to have my twin daughters, for goodness' sake"



Main: Julia, 53, and Gina, 63, at Hestercombe House in Somerset. Right: with Gina's son, Jack, in 2000



bully. I didn't let her watch the last episode of *Lassie* and made her go to bed, and she has never forgiven me for it. But she got away with murder and always has done.

Julia has always been an extrovert. When I was 15 I was a pirate in a play at the village hall in Rutland. During the interval Mum and Dad couldn't find her but she was up on the stage, strutting up and down. She is incredibly quick-witted. She's also very driven and can be insensitive at times, but I think that goes with the territory of talent. If she wants to do something, she'll do it. Whereas I'm constantly thinking of other people.

When Julia lived with me in London she was a receptionist at an ad agency and got the bug for that world. One day she said, "I'd love to get into telly." She was tenacious, knocking on doors and working for free.

I have always aligned myself with people I love who I can help. So when it became apparent that Julia had an aptitude for television she asked me to run the business and money side of things. At that time there were lots of demands for her to do voluntary work, so I deal with all that now. She's like the swan, gliding along the lake, and I'm the legs underneath pedalling furiously.

She's multitalented, but I wouldn't be in her shoes for all the tea in China. My buzz is watching her succeed because I'm the enabler. I'm not a jealous person and

STRANGE HABITS

Julia on Gina
She twitches her toes when she talks. It's noticeable when she's wearing flip-flops

Gina on Julia
When Julia and I lived together her pet hate was hanging out the washing. I'd find a ball of washing squeezed into the airing cupboard

I'm certainly not jealous of her. She can't do what I do, and I can't do what she does.

When Julia was diagnosed with cancer it rocked our lives. I remember going to an appointment, waiting in the car. After an hour and a half I rang her and she said, "The consultant has found something." That was on the Monday. On Friday she was told she had a 6cm tumour. The world stopped. All I kept thinking was, "She has got young children, it should be me."

She didn't have to have chemotherapy or radiotherapy and she has had the all clear, but she's still in survival mode. She has low moments but she hides them. That's an issue for me; everyone knows everything about me. She'll say, "You're too gobby." She festers and I don't think that's healthy. But I've never had cancer, and no one knows what's going on in the mind of someone who has. All I can do is be there for her.

I've learnt that you can't look too far forward in life, and I'd rather live in the here and now. But we laugh that one day we'll be in a home together in our wheelchairs being pushed around by our children ■

Interviews by Rosalind Powell.
Walk Yourself Happy by Julia Bradbury (Piatkus £20). To order a copy go to [timesbookshop.co.uk](https://www.timesbookshop.co.uk). Special discount available for Times+ members