



“I need more glamour in my life”

Newsreader and presenter Fiona Bruce talks to Victoria Young about being terminally uncool, dancing till 3am – and her joy at turning 50

Since joining the BBC in 1989 Fiona Bruce, 50, is best known for presenting the *Six O’Clock News*, as well as *Antiques Roadshow*. She also presented *Crimewatch* for eight years. She’s married to Nigel Sharrocks, who is non-executive chairman of Digital Cinema Media. They have a 16-year old son, Sam, and a 12-year old daughter, Mia, and they live in London.

Even after 15 years of reading the news I absolutely love it. I’m very relaxed when I’m on air. Although if everything is kicking off, and as I read my headlines I have no idea what the first story’s going be, I’m not that relaxed. But it’s more enjoyable when the programme’s hanging on by its fingernails, which happens surprisingly often, than when it runs smoothly.

The run up to the broadcast is the bit I enjoy the most. I like working in a team and we’re constantly changing, adjusting, and reviewing until the moment we go on air. I have fairly strong views about what should and shouldn’t be in, but the ultimate say so is with the editors, although it’s rare to be in disagreement.

We had a piece come in from Syria the other day. It was supposed to be running third but didn’t come in on time, so none of us had seen it before it hit the air. It was an incredibly upsetting piece; the end was so sorrowful and tragic that I didn’t know what to say. I just had to compose myself and move on.

It’s not easy if you have personal involvement. Last year my close friend, the Sky TV executive Nick Milligan, and his eight-year-old daughter Emily, were killed in a motorboat accident in Cornwall. I wasn’t presenting the news the day it happened but the story appeared on the schedule a second day and my colleagues knew how upset I was. I was told, “Take a day off: we can get someone else.”

Growing up, I had no idea what I wanted to do. No-one in my family

had been to university. Then I got into Oxford to study French and Italian, which was a surprise to me, having come from a comprehensive.

A lot of people had contacts in the media but I didn’t. I took pretty much the first job I was offered when I left university, which was in management consultancy. It was a disaster. I cried a lot and stuck it for a year before I left. Then I went in to advertising because it looked glamorous. It was a good salary and in those days the lunching and office parties were off the scale. I enjoyed it but I didn’t feel fulfilled by it. I’m slightly embarrassed to say that I wanted to do something that makes a difference.

I’d long thought journalism was something I’d like to try. Then I bumped into the editor of *Panorama* at a wedding reception and thought, “I’ll never get a chance like this again, so seize it, exploit it to the maximum, and see if anything comes of it”. I asked him for a job but it took nine months for him to say yes. I kept ringing and pestering him.

Eventually, he said come along and see how you get on. I started as an interviewing researcher, then assistant producer. Then a producer suggested I try reporting, so I went to breakfast news as an assistant producer and did some reporting for nothing on my days off.

“Even after 15 years of reading the news I love it. I’m very relaxed on air”

My first reports were excruciating. I stood rigid in front of the camera; you’ve never seen anyone look less natural. But it was good enough for them to use it in the show and slowly I got a bit better.

I met my husband when we worked at the same ad agency. I didn’t necessarily know he was The One immediately, but I did think it pretty soon after. I’m not sure if he felt the same way straight away – I’m not sure I’ve ever asked him. But I think he probably did.

We bought a house together and by the time I turned 29 we’d been living together for a while. I was

Fiona Bruce: news in brief

- BEST ADVICE YOU’VE BEEN GIVEN? Was from my husband: don’t try to be anyone other than yourself. Not earth shattering, but it worked for me.
- SAVER OR SPENDER? Saver. I’m more interested in people than things.
- IDEAL NIGHT IN? With my family. My husband cooks this amazing dish of white fish with new potatoes, tomatoes and olives. And although this is unlikely, we’d all play a game, like Scrabble.
- EARLIEST MEMORY? In a house on stilts in Singapore, where my dad worked, wearing a towelling jacket that my mum made me. I was about three.
- BIGGEST FEAR? Having a massive coughing fit during the news.
- RELAXATION IS... walking the dog, an Irish Terrier called Molly.
- DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD? I’m agnostic.
- WHEN WERE YOU HAPPIEST? Right now.

pretty sure we were heading towards marriage and so – it sounds so terrible when I tell this story – I said to him, “I’d really like to be married by the time I’m 30 but I’d rather like you to ask me; I don’t want to ask you”.

By the time we went to Berlin for a long weekend, I was about to turn 30, so I assumed it was coming. I said to my mum, “I think he’s going to propose this weekend. My mum had kept my grandmother’s ring, and I always told her that I loved that ring and could I have it as an engagement ring. She said, “Well darling, do you think you should take the ring, just in case?”.

I said, “No, I think that would be a bit presumptuous mum! What if he’s already got one?” In fact, he hadn’t bought a ring so that was fine. When he asked me it was a wonderful moment, and I said, “By the way I’ve already got a ring”. He said, “That’ll save me a bob or two”.

We’ve been married 20 years last month and we’ve been together 26 years. Don’t ask me the secret to a good long term relationship – I have >>

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I once got into a punch up with another film crew and had to hot foot it across Hyde Park to get away. It was after Princess Diana died and I was making a report for *Newsnight* but got in the way of an Australian film crew's shot. The reporter came to talk to me and I did say something rude, at which point – even though I was visibly pregnant – he rushed up to take a swing. The Mall was filled with people waiting to sign the condolences book and the whole thing was so unseemly. My crew got in between the two of us and I turned to the researcher and said “quick, let's leg it across the park to the tube!”

no idea! Honestly, I think it's just luck. We've tried date nights but I work in a very unpredictable job, so... good luck!

I never go out after the Ten O'Clock news. When I started presenting I'd get invited to red carpet events and I went to a few. But soon I thought, “Life's too short”. I don't have many free evenings. If you work and you want to see your children, something's got to give and for me, it's my social life. So if I can go out, do I want to be with strangers, albeit famous ones? No, I want to be with my friends.

My closest friends are from school. There's a group of six of us, although we live in a different parts of the country now so don't see each other for ages. My best friend Louise doesn't live anywhere near, sadly, but we speak all the time.

Four years ago we bought a house in Oxfordshire. We go there most weekends and it's unadulterated family time, which is lovely. There will come a point where the kids want to spend more time in London but for now it's great.

I've always wanted to learn how to ride and a few years ago thought, “If not now, when?” I encouraged everybody in the family to do it, and my

son and husband tried it but weren't interested. So riding is something I do with my daughter. I can't tell you how much I enjoy it. We're on the cusp of going out alone. But having started so late in life, I'm always going to be terrible.

What kind of mother am I? One that falls short – every day! And, now that my kids are 12 and 16 I'm terminally uncool, which is faintly depressing. Even being on the telly is just not remotely cool to them. The other day we did the *Roadshow* in London and I asked my husband if he wanted to come with the kids. He said yes, but he rang at 2pm and said “I can't persuade them to come”.

I'd love to be as good a mother as my mum was to me. She wasn't a flickering flame – she was a constant light, she was always the same; she was unchanging. She loved me, was always supportive and happy to see me, and what more could you want? I aspire to be like that, although I'm not always there, which is something I've always wrestled with. My dad travelled a lot and if mum had had a career the marriage wouldn't have worked. But she didn't want to work. She had three kids and she wanted to be with them.

I loved my dad so much – he was the loveliest man, and an inspiring figure to me. He was very bright, but nothing was offered to him on a plate. He had to leave school at 16 because he had to earn a living and he always regretted that he wasn't able to stay on for the sixth form or go to university. He didn't let it hold him back and he did brilliantly, going on to become managing director of a division at Unilever.

When I got into Oxford they were both proud of me. But when I started working in front of camera my mum went into a different stratosphere of pride – mortifyingly! She was so lovely; she'd say to strangers I'd been talking to, “Oh do you recognise my daughter? She's on *Crimewatch*.” I'd say “Mum, you've got to stop doing that – it's so embarrassing!”.

Dad died a year and a half ago. Mum died a year and a bit before that. They were married for over 50 years and Dad missed mum terribly and then he had a stroke. I'd do anything to have them back – but not unwell. Life was hard for them at the end.

When both my parents were unwell I was in that situation that will be very familiar to many women. I had young children in one part of the country, and elderly unwell parents in another. I was in a constant state of guilt. Was I there enough for my mother? Was I there enough for my children? I was trying to do my job at the same time and I had a husband to think of. Trying to manage all that was difficult. My brothers mucked in as well but none of us lived near them. In a way it's irrelevant what anyone else does. These two people had done everything for me, and would do anything for me. I could never really have done enough back.

I derived my confidence from them. I had a close relationship with them and they were so supportive. And I went to a good school, which made me feel that if I set my mind to it, I might be able to pull it off. Certainly I left feeling “give it a go – you may well succeed” and I really thank my school for that.

At 12, my daughter is not that interested in my opinions about anything. So it's all about trying to find the right moment to have conversations with her and with my son. To me it's as important to talk to my son about the role of women as it is my daughter, although how much they want to hear is very little.

I don't mind making an idiot of myself for *Children In Need*. It's not exactly an exhibitionist streak – more of an, “I don't care” side of my personality. They approach us three weeks before the show and we squeeze in rehearsals but are still terrible! It's good fun though.

But I'd never do anything that would call into question what I do in news. On the *Antiques Roadshow*

I'm myself. There's no script and I'm just saying what comes into my head. But I'd never do a show that trivialised the news. You can't present the news if people don't believe in you. I don't think that means you can't have a laugh sometimes.

The thing that makes me happy is being with my family. It's become a bit of a joke with them. On holiday I'll say, “Oh it makes me so happy being together”. But everyone is so sick of me saying it, they just think “Oh god mum, shut up!”.

There's definitely not enough glamour in my life! Television is so unglamorous. In the studio you have to have a microphone and ear piece, which are attached to battery packs. If you're wearing a suit, that's fine, but if it's a dress you have to find a corner to wriggle these things on – it couldn't be less glamorous.

I used to watch *Antiques Roadshow* and what I loved about it were the stories. Now, I still love the stories – but I also love buying antiques, and it's changed my taste. If there are things I need for my house, apart from a bed or white goods, I want them to be antique.

I've got no idea what I'll be doing in ten years. I'd like to do more charity work and to become a magistrate. And it would be great to become half decent on the back of a horse. There are so many things still left that I'd like to do.

I turned 50 in April and it was great. I had the party of my dreams: lots of friends came and I danced all night. It was the best party I've ever been to. I felt full of joy. Having lost both my parents and also a friend, I felt aware of how lucky I am to still be here and that was a thing to celebrate. There were no downsides – I

✦ **WORST INTERVIEW?** Prince Phillip. It was not my finest hour, but it was very revealing of him and as a reporter you have to take your ego out of it. It was certainly memorable.

✦ **DREAM INTERVIEW?** I'd love to have interviewed Mandela. Queen Elizabeth would be tremendous, but it's an impossible dream since she doesn't do interviews.

“Now that my kids are 12 and 16 I'm terminally uncool, which is depressing”

PHOTOGRAPHS: TREVOR LEIGHTON; STYLING: JILLIE MURPHY; HAIR: IAN MCINTOSH AT CAROL HAYES MANAGEMENT; MAKE-UP: CHARLIE DUFFY AT CAROL HAYES MANAGEMENT; USING SISLEY COSMETICS; PREVIOUS PAGE: TOP AND GOLD SKIRT, ROCHAS AT FEATHER FASHION; GOLD CUFF, H. STERN AT HARRODS FINE JEWELLERY; GOLD HEELS, LUCY CHOI; THIS PAGE: VELVET TOP, J. BRAND; BLUE DENIM JEANS, PAGE AT DONNA IDA; CUFF, MALENE BERGER; GOLD HEELS, AS BEFORE



“You can't present the news if people don't believe in you, but that doesn't mean you can't have a laugh”



Want to know what item Fiona's had valued herself on *Antiques Roadshow*? Go to womanandhome.com/fiona