

“LIFE IS MUCH SIMPLER WHEN YOU ARE ALONE”



My mum and I never had the “coming out” conversation – she didn’t want to know

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stupid situations that of course were not going to end well. These days, I do avoid some situations – just not as effectively as I should.

**I’ve never had therapy although I possibly should.** But being alive for 51 years means I’ve dealt with a lot of stuff. I do notice the patterns of behaviour that repeat, and the things you should tolerate – and the things you shouldn’t.

**I’d much prefer to be miserable and alone than in the wrong relationship.** Obviously, I’d rather not be miserable. But if my choice is being in an unhappy relationship or being miserable and alone, I’d rather be alone. You have to find a way to be happy by yourself because if you aren’t happy why would someone want to share 50% of their life with misery guts over there?

**Meeting people is easy; it’s meeting the right person that is hard.** I doubt very much that it will happen at this stage. My life partner will be a Brazilian nurse who I marry the day before I die. And actually life is much simpler when you’re alone. You need a lot of time to have a relationship. But also having a lot of time is the enemy to a relationship – it can easily become like, “Er, you need to have more to do!”

**The Ireland where I grew up wasn’t a pleasant place.** When I left there, aged 20, it was stifling and claustrophobic; it felt designed to keep you small and hold you back. But that Ireland has vanished – Europe has been very good for Ireland and the fear and darkness and smallness has gone.

**My childhood was pretty much bog ordinary.** Even while it was happening it

didn’t interest me; it was boring. I had no TV, no movies, no magazines. I was aware that there were better places to be than this and so it was kind of a waiting game.

**My relationship with my mum and dad was good.** I still love my mum – and we actually have a really good relationship. And I loved my dad. The trouble is I left home young and was away for a long time. It was only when he really started to get ill with Parkinson’s that I actually started to spend a lot more time at home. The good thing was that we knew for a long time that he was going to die, and so when he did, there was no unfinished business.

**My mum and I never really had the ‘coming out’ conversation – because she told me not to have it.** It was something about “don’t upset your father”. And I only got that message via my sister! She didn’t want to know... but she did know, and it was a weird dance we all played.

**Since then, my mum has run through the gamut of social change:** she has a daughter that has divorced; she has a gay son; she has a celebrity in her family; she is now a widow, she’s gone through all these changes and come through the other end far more modern and liberal than she was before. My mother has encountered all these things that she thought were the end of the world, and realised that they’re not.

**But Mum has never read my autobiography, which I wrote 10 years ago.** And she has no desire to read it. The book’s there in her house and if she was very bored she could read it – she’s just chosen not to, partly because I told her not to. That’s because, almost everything in there she knows and the rest will upset her, and in the most pointless way: it will >>

Graham Norton talks to Victoria Young about never coming out to his mum, turning 50 – and his new book about his life and loves

TV presenter Graham, 51, hosts *The Graham Norton Show* on BBC One, his show on Radio 2, and the *Eurovision Song Contest*. He grew up in County Cork in Ireland, where he still has a house, but lives in London with his two dogs. His new book, *The Life And Loves Of A He Devil* (Hodder & Stoughton) is out now.

People who’ve read my advice column in the *Daily Telegraph* say I’m emotionally wise and articulate. And sometimes I read it back and think, “God that’s really good – did I really come up with that?” I just wish I could absorb some of that knowledge and apply it to myself. It’s easy to look at other people and say what they should be doing. It’s just not so simple applying my advice to my own life!

I haven’t exactly gone looking for heartache. But I have entered some



**IDEAL NIGHT IN?** Telly and dogs. I really like *Episodes*. And I love things like *Vera* and *Broadchurch*. And I do cook. Most people would probably be shocked at the amount of food I eat; my shopping is family-of-four sized! But I’m very healthy; you won’t find any rubbish in my house. And I do go to the gym.

**IDEAL NIGHT OUT?** Dinner with friends; letting it turn into a boozy night, sitting around a table. After the show, I’ll go with friends for a late bite to eat, we get very drunk and then I can stumble home.



Graham and his mum, Rhoda

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upset her in retrospect because it'll be stuff she didn't know was going on at the time.

**My sister's never read it either.** I think if my sister wrote a book, I might have to read it, but we were at dinner one night and someone asked her how come she'd never read it. She genuinely wasn't trying to be rude but she said there are just so many other good books to read. She's a librarian; she has a stack of books to get through and mine's not one of them.

**Age is the enemy of adventure.** It's a subtle thing that creeps up on you, but I no longer feel reckless and clueless. I'm so glad I'm not a parent! Just knowing how stupid I was, and that terrible combination of fearless, reckless and clueless. That can lead to fabulous adventures... but then there are the other people who fall off a cliff or end up buried in a pit somewhere and that would be my terror. If I had a child, they'd have to be locked in a room.

**My life is shockingly non-celebrity based.**

The friends I'd phone in a crisis are all people I've known for a long time. I meet celebrities for work, and sometimes I see people after the show exchanging numbers and part of me has a little pang of jealousy thinking, "I want to exchange numbers with you!". But then I'd have to call them; we'd have to see each other and it'd be just another thing I'd have to do. I mean, I got paid to chat to them, why do I have to do that in my own time? I have other people I want to talk to.

**What's nice about getting older is reconnecting with older friends;** people who were all busy for a while running

### MY LOVES

✦ **DOGS** There is something about being on a beach and watching the dogs tear around playing with each other. I defy anyone who watches that to be depressed.  
✦ **BOOZE** Relaxation is... white wine.  
✦ **HONESTY** I value this in a partner more than anything else.  
✦ **IRELAND** There are a lot of things I love about Ireland. It's a modern place and it's a forward-

thinking place, a liberal place. And it's still very warm, it's still friendly, and people are still great storytellers.

✦ **WORK** I was never ambitious – but my career suggests that that isn't true. I do like working but I'm very happy at the level at which I work now. Socially I say yes a lot; professionally I say no 90 per cent of the time because I ask myself, "Will doing this make me happier?" The answer is invariably no, it will not.

### MY HATES

✦ **REGIONAL NEWS** If it was real news it would be on the news and if it was really regional I could see the outside of my house.  
✦ **LOUD SNEEZES** It's very attention-grabbing – just develop a personality if you want attention.  
✦ **GRAPEFRUIT** I got sick on it as a child and I still seem to get sick on it now.  
✦ **RATS** If they were the size of mice then they would be fine but they've just grown a bit too big.

around and doing stuff, whether it was career or babies. In my fifties the dust is settling and we are finally seeing each other across the room again.

**Turning 50 was fine – I had a big bash, and I actually liked it.** Forty was a bit of a shock and 60 is going to be horrible. But then, having interviewed Sheila Hancock

and Nicholas Parsons who are in their eighties and nineties and still living life to the full, still working, still engaged, maybe that's not true. You don't have to turn into that person whose life shrinks and who obsesses about things like the postman leaving the gate open.

**My two dogs give me great enjoyment.** Bailey is a big labradoodle and Madge is a scrappy little terrier. It's stupid – they are animals who can neither talk nor understand, but there is a real bond. When I am feeling very sorry for myself, or life is very complicated, I just

look at how excited, say, a biscuit can make a dog and instantly feel better.

**I hope I'm still quite grounded.** One of the things that helps is not having had any success until my mid-thirties. I genuinely feel sorry for people who make it huge when they are 20 because it robs you of a really exciting bit of your life.

**I've had money for about 20 years now.**

I do spend it on ridiculous things but equally I'm prepared for it all to go away because there was a time when I didn't have a lot of it. Money is old people's fun, not young people's fun and I really don't enjoy young people who have money: it is ageing and inappropriate.

**I'm both a spender and a saver.** Day to day, I'm not really a spender. I don't have staff or anything like that to a point where it's stupid – I should. I live like a rich student – some of the clutter is expensive but it really is just like digs. I'm not gadgety; I find that stuff annoying. Clothes were a big indulgence but as I got older, I got over that. These days I spend my money on art.

**This Christmas I'll be in Ireland with my family.**

There'll be nephews and nieces but it's never a big event – we're a tiny family. My sister and me do most of the cooking – under supervision, obviously, from my mum. **w&h**

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## Memorable moments

✦ **THE INTERVIEW I REMEMBER VERY FONDLY** was Dolly Parton. I was a big fan of Dolly, and we were an unheard of show, and she took a leap of faith by coming on it, which made me feel great.

✦ **THE WORST INTERVIEW** I've done was Harvey Keitel or Lindsay Wagner. Lindsay was worse because she knew what to expect – she'd seen tapes, whereas Harvey hadn't, he came in clueless. She gave nothing – and Harvey obviously hated it.

**The Life And Loves Of A He Devil by Graham Norton (Hodder & Stoughton) is out now**

