

# MY PASSIONS FOR food, flying & fab friends

TV presenter Carol Vorderman, 52, talks to Victoria Young about her inner geek, learning to fly and her new show, *Food, Glorious Food*

**C**arol lives in Bristol with her children, Katie and Cameron. She is currently dating former *Red Arrows* pilot Graham Duff, 37.

**Food, Glorious Food is all about finding the best recipe.** It's lovely because the people who've been bringing their recipes are so different. From a 92-year-old Cornish lady called Eunice, who makes the most traditional pasty, to young kids who've taught themselves to cook to an incredible level, to blokes who only cook one thing, but they do it really, really well.

**And you get to hear all these fantastic stories.** One lady developed the most incredible shepherd's pie for her husband who had cancer. She slow-roasted the lamb for eight hours so it was easy to digest and added red wine for the antioxidants. It was so tasty. Then there was a fireman who was the team's cook, so they all came down in the fire engine and he cooked curry and it was gorgeous. It's a very heart-warming show.

**Food and cooking is about sharing it with the people you love.** My stepfather was Italian and cooked every Friday. I would cook with him and we would make battered steak. I'd start prepping before he got home from working as a builder, so I'd chop peppers into big pieces, then I would sauté them in olive oil, which makes all the difference, and I'd add a lot of tomato purée. We would have a hot steak and the tomato peppery thing and it was gorgeous. I still make it now.

**My mum married my stepfather in the 1970s.** My dad, as I called him, went to Italy once a year and he'd bring back proper Parmesan, which was a big deal in the 70s, when the only Parmesan you could get was in a cardboard tube. He'd also bring cans of proper olive oil, as in those days, you could only buy it in the chemist to pour into your ears! And he'd bring tomato purée and Parma ham.

**I'm not a brilliant cook, but if I had to cook one dish, it would be pasta.** I adore pasta.

Pappardelle is just beautiful. I'd have it with broccoli florets, some Parmesan and lemon. I'm hooked on broccoli – I could eat it every day; tenderstem broccoli, purple-sprouting broccoli. I'm obsessed with it.

**My mum isn't a chef.** She heard the first ping of a microwave and that was it, she never touched a cooker again. So if she did cook, it was a labour of love. We lived ten miles from Rhyl in Wales, where I went to school. When the M&S in Rhyl started selling food, Mum would send me to get these cans of green peppers stuffed with rice and mushrooms. We'd stash them in the pantry, tucked behind the door in this grotty little cupboard with chicken wire across the front. Every Saturday, my mum had to cook for my dad. He'd go out to work at 5am and come back for lunch, and that was the start of the weekend. We had wine – Chianti in raffia bottles – and Mum would take the contents of the M&S tin and put it in a terracotta pot and say, "Gabriel, I've made your >>

**"Age is confidence. From your mid 40s onwards, you become very comfortable in your own skin"**



## I'M A FAN OF WOMAN&HOME

"I like that it's so balanced – because of the mature women it's aimed at. It's a good, ambitious word, 'mature' – in the true meaning of the word. And there's not a wagging finger in sight!"

**“I don’t get worked up any more. It’s taken me a long time to realise that no one should fight what they actually are”**



favourite.” He’d tell everyone what a good cook his wife was. He never knew that she cheated every Saturday.

**My big adventure has been learning to fly.** At my interview for Cambridge, they asked why I wanted to read engineering and I said I wanted to be a pilot. In those days, the RAF wouldn’t take female pilots, so I planned to do commercial training with British Airways. I started Cambridge in 1978, and in 1980, they closed the training school because there was a glut of pilots and they didn’t need any more. So I decided to move to plan B – I just wasn’t sure what that was!

**When I had time to have flying lessons in my early**

**20s, I had no money.** And then when I had more money, I had no time. Now is the first time in my life that I can make time and have the money.

**So I took a big break in December and went to America to have lessons.** I went to San Diego, where good weather is guaranteed because beginners aren’t allowed up if there’s a certain amount of cloud, or the cloud is at a certain height. And here, in winter, you’re down to six hours of daylight a day.

**I’m a little bit of a bloke. I am inherently interested in anything to do with engines.** And I think I’m a boy trapped in the body of a woman as I think like one, even in relationships. My daughter

is like that too. It’s how we’re programmed. We are geeky.

**I was 16 when I went to my Cambridge interview.** I was from a comprehensive school in North Wales. I never thought for a second that I’d get in. I had the confidence to apply because Mum always brought us up to do what would make us happy. And when I was young, I was fiercely bright. My brain can’t stop. I was never going to get on with something like meditation.

**Age is confidence.** **I have lived through an awful lot and experienced so much in my life.** From your mid forties onwards, you’ve seen cycles of society, of economy, of life. You’ve seen

how people have got through them. You realise that what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. And you become very comfortable – well, I have anyway – in your own skin.

**I don’t get worked up any more.** It was a change that happened in my forties. I decided to just do what I do and enjoy it. It’s taken me a long time to realise that no one should fight what they actually are.

**Every cell of my body is “Live and let live”.** I will never criticise people and their choices. But equally, don’t criticise me because you don’t like what I’m doing.

**We all have this long list of things we should be doing** – and should be feeling >>

## the real me

guilty about if we are not. So I started doing a list of things I had done. Even if it was working out all my financial stuff for that year. I started doing “where I’ve saved money” lists.

**Men was a subject that, over the years, Mum tried to give me advice about.** Thankfully, I never listened. She has the worst taste! On my 18th birthday, she told me I’d better get on with marrying my then boyfriend as otherwise I’d be left on the shelf. She was just worrying and didn’t mean any harm by it. I had to sleep in the same bed as my mum until I was nine. Now she lives nearby in a flat because

she can’t drive and can’t do stairs. I talk to her all the time.

**I’m not going to talk about who I am dating now – I never do.** But when I became properly single at 49, I just loved not being in a relationship. You can do what you like, when you want, with whom you want, however you want. It’s just great and I absolutely had a blast.

**I am very glad that when I was 39, I did that detoxing.** I did it partly for slimming reasons, but it was also for health and I think it has made a difference to my outlook. Now I don’t do any exercise – but I’m always on the go. I’ll walk to work sometimes,

but it’s part of that thing of not worrying about it.

**I have a healthy attitude to food.** I don’t diet but I have hungry days and other days where I just can’t be bothered to eat, which is probably a combination of psychological, physical and hormonal. I’ve learned that instead of beating myself up about food, it’ll balance out.

**My best friend in the whole wide world ever – that’s how she is addressed – is called Amanda Prowse.** She is an army wife; I’ve known her for seven years and we are like twins – as in, Danny DeVito and Arnold Schwarzenegger twins. She is blonde and beautiful, and not remotely bothered about clothes or going out. She is intensely bright, incredibly funny and she can’t even count to ten. We met through the children’s school. She is an author and her second novel will be out in February. I absolutely love her.

**Louise, my other best friend, lives next door** and I’ve known her for seven years too, also through the school. She is incredibly kind, very bright and runs her own business. She’s very funny and I adore her. Together we are The Three Musketeers, and we get together as often as we can.

**I am very decisive.** No decision is right or wrong, but you have to accept the consequences. I do say to the kids, “Dither, dither, dither: all the time you’re dithering, you’re not getting on with it!” I’ve always known what I wanted. I haven’t had the kind of comfort zone not to. Sometimes I’ve been very poor. That always stays with you. I’ve never spent more than I’ve earned. I do

splurge, but I’m in a very fortunate position and I understand that. Paying off the house was my main focus. The kids would say let’s get something bigger and I would say no because we couldn’t pay off the mortgage.

**I like tight clothes.** Baggy things annoy me. I can’t be doing with hanging things. Scarves annoy me too. My Bristol wardrobe is very simple. Two pairs of jeans; a pair of jeggings; polo-neck jumpers in the winter and Superdry T-shirts, which I love because they wash well. Plus cowboy boots and a pair of trainers and black leggings that you might wear in the gym – if you ever went. My whole Bristol wardrobe probably cost me £250.

**My children are charming, kind and love their family.** They are always on the phone to me because they want to be rather than it being their duty. I have an amazing 15 year old and an incredible 20 year old. That has helped increase my confidence that I’m doing it right.

**I only give my daughter advice if she asks for it.** But she asks all the time. We are very comfortable together and I’d never say, “You should be doing this.” She’s learning to fly as well and is with the university air squadron at Cambridge. We’re both obsessed with it. We also went to Silverstone together when Mark Webber, my favourite racing driver, won and it was just brilliant. That is proper mother-and-daughter quality time. And then we sit and talk about particle physics. It’s brilliant.

Food, *Glorious Food with Carol Vorderman begins in February on ITV1.* **w&h**

## THE REAL CAROL VORDERMAN

### What are your passions?

Engines and laughing.

### What makes you laugh?

Funny people.

### What’s your biggest achievement?

Getting to Cambridge when I did. That was the biggest step for me.

### What keeps you awake at night?

Noise and light.

### What do you do when you meet with failure?

I forget about it within seconds. I don’t dwell on things.

I learn but don’t dwell.

### What’s your biggest challenge?

Saying no to new ideas. I’m a very excitable

person and often try to do too many things at once.

### What do you value in a partner?

Someone who makes me laugh and someone who is not materialistic. A caring person, I suppose.

### When did you last feel really happy?

Today. Generally, I am pretty happy. I’ve had some times when I’ve not been happy, but there have been reasons for that.

### What’s the one thing you would change about your life?

I just want to go through it again! Life is great. I am very lucky and I do feel blessed, particularly with the children.

**Any regrets?** There is one relationship I wouldn’t have got into, but I won’t talk about it because that was just a waste of time and I can’t bear wasting time. There is too much to do.

### Are you a control freak?

No, I am very relaxed about things. I don’t have OCD, not even a tinge of it. So what if things aren’t perfect?

