

JULIA MORRIS

has the last laugh

Australian entertainment royalty, Julia Morris is an excellent advertisement for ageing. She's funny, fearless and tells it as it is – and, about to turn 50, she's clearly more fabulous than ever.

BY CECILY-ANNA BENNETT

Did you know?

'Lady J-Mo' is officially Lady of the Manor of Gosforth – her husband Dan bought her the title online as a Christmas present but in his haste misspelt her hometown of Gosford

Julia Morris is many things to many people. To her husband and 'guiding light' Dan (together for "15-ish years") and daughters, Ruby and Sophie, she's a beloved wife and devoted mother. To laughter enthusiasts the world over, she's a celebrated (award-winning) stand-up comedian. To the nation's discerning watchers of prime time, she's a darling of Australian television, whether playing Gemma Crabb on Channel Nine drama *House Husbands* or presenting *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here*, her inimitable tongue-in-cheek approach the perfect foil for Dr Chris Brown's deadpan delivery. She's also a writer, producer – and a gifted cross-stitcher. She may have celebrity status, but Lady J-Mo, as she's affectionately known, remains warm, witty, endearingly self-deprecating and utterly authentic. There's something endlessly refreshing about a woman who calls life as she sees it. ►

When I meet Julia at *Prevention*'s cover shoot, she's fun and funny but completely professional. In between posing for photos and flashing a million-dollar megawatt smile on command, she's dropping f-bombs and cracking jokes by the minute. When I confess my affliction for having an awkward photo-face, she generously shares her number one tip: "Think of someone you love." (It works.)

Later, she hams it up expertly with the life-size papier-mâché zebra and remains good humoured, even when she scratches her gold Manolos on the tooth of a terrifyingly life-like crocodile. (Though to be fair, she did volunteer to put her foot in its mouth, and conceded the laughs were worth it.)

Laughter is the key

Laughter is Julia's lifeblood, her passion, her money spinner. She's been entertaining Aussies since the days of hit comedy skit show *Full Frontal* in 1995, but she's had a gift for delighting audiences since she was a small child.

"My parents have a fantastic sense of humour and I'd say that my brother has a better sense of humour than I do," she says. "Laughter's been a great way for our family to ride the ebbs and flows of life. It helps your stomach muscles, it pings off people and whatever it sends out into your bloodstream, it definitely makes you feel happier."

Yet there's a contradiction between the larger-than-life, laugh-a-minute personality we see on screen and Julia Morris at home.

"I can afford to be loud day to day, but in my own life I'm reasonably quiet. I'm much less ebullient," she acknowledges.

So which of her many roles give her the most satisfaction? "Nothing is like live performance – nothing fills you up in the way that it does," Julia says. "The acting and the writing and presenting are different parts of your artistic armour, if that's the right expression – but the energy exchange of a live show is so exciting. There's literally nothing like it. Knowing we are not alone in this, that lots of people get it – that's great."

Becoming the best version of herself

In April this year, Julia will celebrate her 'golden jubilee'. Some women hide their age. Others subtract a few years or coyly suggest they're turning 21 again. Julia, who has "never felt bad about ageing", is flying the 50 flag with the unbridled excitement of a celebrity winning a bush tucker trial.

"I've already been telling people I'm 50," she says. "I've really been looking forward to it. There's something about the truth serum that you take on



TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

Julia has delighted audiences for years



LAUGH OUT LOUD

Julia has used her sense of humour to entertain for more than 30 years – on stage, screen and in print.



QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE

Dr Chris Brown and Julia are the perfect match as hosts of *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*



FAMILY MATTERS

Julia and husband Dan always manage to find something to laugh about, even in times of stress.

WHEN I EXERCISE, I PUT HEADPHONES ON AND WALK TO THE BEAT OF THE MUSIC. IT FEELS LIKE MY EARLY DAYS OF GOING TO DISCOS ONLY IT'S DAYTIME AND I'M MOVING FORWARD.

your 50th birthday that allows you to let the balloon go and become the best version of yourself. My stand-up tour [*Lift and Separate Golden Jubilee Tour*] deals a lot with ending the first part of your life and starting the second half: when does that happen, when do you admit it and when do you start to let go of things?

"Then there are revelations, like when is a short skirt no longer appropriate? When do you cover your boobs? You've got to take a look at yourself and work it out. There's greying hair, your posture's not as good, the skin around your knees sags. Having to accept that and let go of my younger self, that's been a huge point of transition for me, but it's like, what can I do about it? Nothing. I don't want a facelift." She pauses. "You know what you do? Leave your glasses off when you look in the mirror. Because you'll look amazing."

It's evident that at almost-50, Julia has a strong sense of who she is, what she likes and how she wants to present herself. She knows block colours suit her, has learnt not to be a yes-woman and has figured out the perfect equation for a healthy life.

"I eat better than I ever have," she says. "I've definitely worked out – with the many different sizes I've been over the years – that food is 95 per cent of it for me and the other 5 per cent is doing some exercise. I don't like exercising very much, but it's like plugging in the charger. I put the headphones on and walk to the beat of the music. It feels like my early days of going to discos only it's daytime and I'm moving forward."

She also nourishes herself by giving back, as an ardent supporter of the National Breast Cancer Foundation (for which she raised nearly \$200,000 when she won *The Apprentice* in 2011), as well as ►

The Emily Tapp Melanoma Foundation (having had numerous skin cancers, including malignant melanomas, removed), and Swags for the Homeless. “I love the idea of a lightweight bed for the homeless,” Julia says. “If you survive a day out in the world with mental-health problems, being invisible in our society like homeless people tend to be because we’re too scared to face it, then surely having somewhere to lay your head at the end of the day would be a minimum requirement.”

Honesty is Julia’s best policy

Last year, she discovered that self-care is every bit as important as paying it forward, when she started experiencing bouts of blinding fury.

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Describing it as “definitely menopausal and also from general overload”, she made an appointment with a psychologist to get a greater understanding of what was driving her rage.

“The psychologist said, ‘I don’t want to tell you to stop working that hard, I just want to give you some skills, so when the anger starts, you can start turning that feeling around.’ It’s called cognitive behavioural therapy and it’s about looking at the situation, the facts and taking control,” Julia explains. “Now, when I’m in traffic and people are giving me the shits, I think, ‘You know what? That guy must be in a bigger hurry than me because if

he’s willing to take that chance on the road, off you go, mate.’ It has taken some practice, and I still get angry, but I try to save it for things that *should* genuinely make me angry. It’s all about perspective.”

When I ask if she’s discovered the secret to managing an increasingly hectic work life with her family commitments, she’s brutally honest. “How do I juggle? You sacrifice your friendships, is how you do it. Quentin Bryce says you can have it all, just not all at once, and it’s absolutely the truth. Most of my friends I’ve had since school, but I would no sooner have the time to ring up a buddy and say let’s go have a coffee than I would to fly to the moon,” she admits.

Getting professional help to deal with her sense of overload was possibly perfect timing. This year, she’s more in demand than ever, with television and stand-up commitments, plus other to-be-revealed projects on the go. And while the juggle-struggle is real when you’re a sought-after TV talent, comedian, actress, writer, producer, wife, mother and friend, Julia’s sixth decade is starting to look unerringly spectacular. You could say it’s perfectly befitting the golden jubilee of Australian entertainment royalty.

“As a stand-up comedian, you never know what work is coming your way – but I have the whole year wrapped up,” she says. “I’m touring again, then I’ll be in Africa for *I’m A Celebrity*, as well as hosting *Blind Date* for Channel 10.

“Here I am at 50 – I thought I hit my apex years ago. No, apparently not. Is it going to get bigger than that? It might. It just goes to show there’s no point in lamenting your youth. Whatever, it’s gone by in two seconds; I forgot to notice. So the first half’s over? I’ve still got the second half to go. I’m ready, let’s go. Now I’m going to have some fun.” **P**

I’m A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here! Season 4 returns to Channel Ten this month.

JULIA’S WISDOM FROM HER 50 FABULOUS YEARS

There’s always something to laugh about. Even when Dan had breast cancer, we found stuff to laugh about because you’re just living from day to day. You’re the same as always, there’s just a bigger drama to deal with. Laughter has always got us through.

Honesty is my calling card and even more so as I get older. I want my daughters to know that apologising is an easy thing to do. Don’t hide that you were wrong; wear it like a badge.

You can suck up a lot more and not be as reactionary when you understand where your feelings are coming from. To have

a psychological intelligence is, I think, the greatest gift anyone can have in their lives – I wish I’d got onto it earlier.

I treat my house like a resort. Even though I don’t live in a resort, I like to ask myself, “What would I do if I did?” Well, if I was in a resort, I would lie in the shade with a book. So

I might put on a load of washing, but then I go out into the backyard, lie on a hilarious old-school lilo and I read.

“Don’t sweat the small stuff.” It sounds so clichéd, but it’s true. I mean, who cares how the dishwasher is stacked? Just sort it out. Try your best. It didn’t work today? Try again tomorrow.

Not just a funny lady, Julia took herself off to acting school in LA for two years to stretch her performing chops.

STYLIST: JACKIE SHAW. HAIR & MAKE-UP: KRISTY ENGLISH. JULIA WEARS: VERONIKA MAINE DRESS (OPENER AND THIS PAGE); LEINA BROUGHTON DRESS FROM BIRDSNEST.COM.AU (PREVIOUS PAGE). SHE WEARS HER OWN SHOES AND JEWELLERY THROUGHOUT.