

Julie Etchingam **Anchor, News at Ten**

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Julie Etchingam, award-winning anchor of ITV's News at Ten and Tonight programmes. Since 2010, Julie has played a major role in their BAFTA-winning news coverage, including the general election, the EU Referendum and the US Election, and has fronted news reports on everything from royal weddings to terror attacks. In a career filled with firsts, she was the first woman to co-anchor a UK election night programme, moderate the General Election Leaders' Debate, and in 2014, secure a television interview with Pope Francis. As patron of Anti-Slavery International, she has served on the committee of the Women of the Year Foundation for the past eight years, becoming their president in 2018.

Julie, thank you for joining me.

Lovely to be here.

Julie, it's a great time to talk, the news cycle seems to be relentless this year. That must be quite exciting and a big challenge to boil down all of that onto a nightly news bulletin.

I don't think it's just been relentless this year. For any of us who've been working in news in the last three or four years, it just doesn't seem to have stopped. It's extraordinary. Whether you're looking back to the 2015 general election, to the EU Referendum debate 2016, all of the news stories which kept us so busy in 2017. Snap election, terror attacks, Grenfell – it's been utterly relentless, really. I mean, in terms of the scope of the stories, of course it's kept us all extremely busy but it is really stretching newsrooms – there's no two ways about it. We got to the middle of last year, and there were quite a lot of exhausted journalists by the summer I think, but that is the job and it's a privilege to do it. It's a privilege to be involved in it.

Do you think it shows any sign of letting up at all? It doesn't seem to. We've got a maniac in the White House...

Well, that's your words.

... and all these kinds of things happening, it seems insane.

Well, it doesn't appear that it's letting up any time soon. I think that we now can reflect on the fact that almost every news bulletin will have an element of Brexit in it for the foreseeable future. It's extraordinary. You sometimes get these big news stories that happen, that they are punctuation points. I think back to the 9/11 attacks, for example, and all the different news stories that spread out from that, you could see things that trace back to 9/11 for years and years and years, and it still happens to a degree. Brexit is another of those punctuation points, whichever point of view you have of it, that almost every news bulletin I think for years now will have an element of that in it. I think it presents a particular challenge to a news bulletin like News at Ten, because we have to lead people through it. We have to understand how people are responding to the story and interpreting it themselves, but we've got a duty to try to make it clear. I mean, let's face it, I don't know about you, but I'm endlessly re-reading things about the detail just to make sure that I've got it absolutely straight in my own mind before we unpack it one night, you know, for a night on News at Ten, the next night on News at Ten. So it's a uniquely challenging time I think, in that regard.

The first challenge is of course that you have to understand these things yourself in order to be able to communicate it to others.

Yes. And the thing to remember as well is because we are dealing with it day in, day out, we know a lot of gritty detail about it that isn't always absolutely necessary to feed into every news report. I suppose that's been one of the criticisms of news in general, is that it's very easy for the people and the voices around it who are close to Westminster to get their noses too close to the story in a way, and what we have to do every day is to make sure the reports that we're putting out give people a clear 'big picture' sense of where we're at. It's a daily challenge really, because it's not a great picture story, let's face it. You can unpick it quite well if you've got four or five minutes of radio, for example, or acres of news print, but to boil things down for a television news bulletin is pretty challenging.

Is it difficult, as you've said there, to cover something like Brexit from the television point of view? Because if the local library burns down you've got images of the library burning, and then the firemen putting it out, and then it being rebuilt, it's done and dusted. Donald Trump says something, there he is, the video footage on the podium saying things. But Brexit's quite technical, it's ongoing. It must be quite a challenge really.

Yes, and that puts the onus on our fantastic political correspondents, our political editor Robert Peston, to make sure we're telling that story very clearly. I mean, if it's a two-way interview with one of the correspondents, or indeed with Robert, it's got to be to the point, it's got to make sense and it's got to be super clear at every turn, because this is a story which is incredibly picture-challenged, so we have to work out very carefully how to cover it. Sometimes you need to have a clear graphic that just takes you through the reminders of what a backstop is, for example. Also, and vitally, we have to make sure we're interpreting that story in the field, in the communities that are and can be and will be affected by it, so it's really important for us to be

outside of that Westminster bubble and out in the communities that we are serving with our news bulletins, to understand how they're reacting to it, what their concerns are about it and what the possible impacts might be.

The US seems to be more divided than ever as a society in terms of Trump, but like in the UK with Brexit, it's 48/52, it's hovering around the 50/50. You're always going to get half the audience that perceives that you're not being fair to them. Journalism seems to be under attack as never before, that not only are you going to report the news, but half of the audience are going to think you're being unfair to their point of view.

I mean, there's no two ways about it. The debate on social media about everyone's news coverage around Brexit is pretty high octane at the moment. What you have to do every single day is start your day thinking, "Right, where is the clear line through this to tell this story fairly?" and you just have to keep that challenge in your mind, ever-present. I think that is one of the most testing elements of this news cycle, and of this story in particular, because we know how high passions are running around this issue and are only likely to run higher as we reach these really crucial weeks ahead.

In the era of fake news, do you not feel under attack as journalists as never before, that we can't even seem to agree on a factual position that facts that were once agreed upon are still in dispute, even though there's clear proof either way?

Yes, because trying to get some of the facts in the centre of this debate around Brexit absolutely nailed down for an audience has been hard. Others haven't been. It's navigating your way through the debate that has been the biggest challenge for us. I mean, we don't always get it right, but we are absolutely duty-bound to get as near to the truth as absolutely humanly possible, and you have to find your way through this jungle of emotion around the subject and just look at the cold, hard facts and make sure that you're relaying them.

In the era of 24-hour rolling news, an ongoing relentless topic like Brexit seems suitable for that, but how do you distil into an appointment-to-view bulletin at 10 o'clock?

Well, I suppose the beauty of these appointment-to-view bulletins that we have, whether it's the Beeb or us or Channel 4 news, is that the idea, the key idea with News at Ten is that we are aware that our audiences have been listening, or have been picking up snatches of the news throughout the day. They might be absolutely on their Twitter feed all day, they might just be getting a few bits and pieces on the car radio, or they might have read a couple of pieces in a newspaper on a website that morning. Our job is to pull all of those strands together and try to make some sense of it at the end of the day. I'm sure my colleagues at BBC News would say that that is the challenge. At 10 O'Clock, even though you can still have stories evolving, and goodness knows with Brexit we do late in the day, there is an opportunity in the evenings to take one step back and say, "Right, how do we make sense of what has just happened in the last 24 hours since we last sat down?" We

are basically there to give people a good guide through what has happened in their day, if they are just sitting down, before they go to bed, for News at Ten. Our job is to make sense of all the howl round of news that they may have picked up during the day.

I'm old enough to remember when Martyn Lewis and Michael Buerk used to present the BBC Nine O'Clock news, and as a news junkie I used to watch that and then switch to...

I know, it was great wasn't it? I know, I loved it.

Was it a bit unsportsmanlike of the BBC to move their bulletin to 10? I know it was years ago, and I'm probably dragging up the past, but is that healthy in a democracy to have the two major bulletins compete against each other?

Well, I don't know about unsportsmanlike, they saw a gap in the market which we had left open at that point. I think there were a lot of pressures at that stage with evening schedules for TV programming about how you draw in your biggest audiences, and we left a gap open and they took it. It is a competitive industry. What I would say about us going head to head is that yes, they are our competitors, but I think we provide news in a slightly different way. We reach a slightly different audience too; we have more women watching our bulletin, for example. We have people around the country, outside London, very supportive viewers of News at Ten, and we're very mindful of that. We've got ITV heartlands in places like the Granada patch, the old Granada patch, ITV North West, and we think about that very carefully when we're doing our programme. I think we strike a different voice in some ways. Tom in particular is great at, you know, he's very relaxed in his style.

Almost chatty. Some people call it News at Tom, don't they, unfairly?

He's very relaxed in the way he does it, has a different voice. I think we just offer people a choice at 10, which is good.

Clearly, the way that you present and you interview must resonate, because you've had a wave of election leaders' debates and referendums that you've been fronting the coverage for.

Yes, and it's been one of the biggest privileges of my career to do it. I have to say, when I did the Leaders' Debate in 2015 I didn't think I'd necessarily be doing quite as many of them quite so quickly afterwards, because we then of course span into the EU Referendum and we had debates around that, and then we had the snap election last year, so I just feel I've been at debate central for the last couple of years. It was one of those moments in 2015, in the run up to the 2015 general election, where you get your call from your boss and he sits down and he says, "Right, okay, here's something I want you to talk about, we're going to be doing a leaders debate and we'd really like you to front it," and it's one of those moments where you're genuinely torn, because there's part of you that goes, "That's incredible, what a great thing to be able to do," and there's also a part of you that is completely terrified of doing it, because it's a big challenge. And at that point as well, when I first knew about it, I

didn't realise that we'd be having seven leaders on the stage, because the negotiations were still ongoing.

I remember it well.

It started as one particular challenge and became quite a different one.

Was there a technical challenge for you in shepherding and marshalling seven leaders? Because it's a completely different ball game from standing in front of the camera and reporting what's happening, or reading the autocue. This is where it comes down to your ability to marshal and corral those people and give everyone a fair hearing. You're on trial for minute by minute, moment by moment.

Yes, and that's one of the things that's actually quite challenging about it. In a way, you have to suspend your ordinary way of operating, because if you hear somebody say something controversial, your instinct as a journalist is to get stuck in and ask a quick question – whereas, of course, the whole point of the debate is that the candidates in the debate do that to one another. So you have to be slightly at one remove and doing actually quite a technical job, as you say, so it's one of those points where I've got countdown clocks on my podium at the front of the set, I've got people counting down the seconds in my ear on every single answer, and if one person in particular hasn't had as many seconds as another within a particular part of the debate, then we'd have to try and weave that in. So it's like some sort of extraordinary maths challenge as well, and anybody who knows what my ability is like with numbers would realise how challenging that is for me particularly. But there's a lot of technical stuff that's going on there whilst you're trying to draw out something that's also a good argument, a good debate, and make sure that you're getting to the nuance of what the policies these politicians are trying to present were. Also, there's a whole host of technical stuff that gets argued about beforehand. When we had the seven-way debate, of course, you've got quite a disparity in height between Nicola Sturgeon and Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg. Even just the height of the podiums they were standing behind had to be all calibrated so you didn't look like somebody had got a particular advantage. It was extraordinary. And then you draw lots to see who gets which podium, so it's really quite mind bending. Also, it's a two-hour long programme, so you have to factor in a break in the middle of it. We had fantastic young producers and runners working on the programme, just timing how long it would take one of the candidates to get out to get to the loo and get back in time, and we had to marshal them behind the scenes, running them backwards and forwards to make sure that they were on set, back in time. We had one ad break in the middle of two hours, and yes, it was bonkers. It was bonkers.

What is it that draws you to television news in particular? Because, and we'll go through your career shortly, but with the difficulties with television, as you've said, there's technicalities, the ability to get imagery, how to articulate it visually, not to demean what people do in radio and print, but it's less of a bureaucracy and a massive amount of infrastructure to get to air, isn't it?

Ultimately, if you love working in TV news, it's the power of the reporting and the images. I've just come back from a trip to Lebanon in the last few days with a brilliant cameraman, and in that situation, it's the pictures that he or she is able to gather for your news bulletin that will cut through to people, and it's then your job to compliment those pictures and tell a story alongside these images of the day. We are utterly reliant on the incredibly skilled camera crews that we have bringing in eyewitness reporting, and if you marry that alongside a fantastic correspondent, of which we have so many at ITV News, you can really put something into somebody's living room that actually touches them and makes them think. I suppose that's what I love about TV news, and when we're writing the headlines for News at Ten – or the "bongs", as we call them – it's, "What is the best picture of the day?" What can we bring to people that will make them sit up and go, "Look at that!"? Then it's for us to compliment those images with what we script alongside them to give a bit of double-whammy, if you like. That's what I love about TV news is that the really big stories, there will be defining images in them, and to work in a team of people that is responsible for bringing that best coverage to an audience is really quite thrilling. It's an element of the job that I really love; just having been out filming for the last few days, it's been wonderful.

Is it quite a lonely job insofar as once you're on air and you're in the studio there's only you and a floor manager there, isn't there, and you've got the earpiece, but other than that, if something goes wrong, you're going to have to do the typical thing of, "Looks like we can't go live to Beirut now," and you have to ad-lib.

Well, it's not as lonely as it looks, because you've got that magical thing called an earpiece that's connecting you to a gallery with some fantastic people. I mean, yes, in the end, if you're sitting there and a report goes down or a line goes down, you're the one that's got to move smoothly to the next section of the programme, but in the end you are really there absolutely as a part; you might be the front person of that team, but you are part of that team, and the backup in the gallery is the crucial bit. I always say, when people say, "What's it's like having people chattering in your ear all the time?" It's amazing how you get used to it. You can also learn to tune in and out of which bits you need to really be worried about and which bits you don't need to be worried about – but I can tell you now, the frightening moment is when it goes silent, because then you've lost contact with them and you're absolutely on your own, and you've got to try and navigate the programme. Thankfully that hasn't happened too often.

What's a typical day like for you? What's a typical week? For example, when you're presenting the Ten, are you on the Ten that day and you're involved in the production of the programme, and then do you have days when you're off when you're pursuing other projects like the Tonight programme? You said you went to Beirut recently. How does it all go in the mix?

Well, I'm very fortunate because I have a really great mix now. I do one or two nights doing News at Ten. I used to do four nights a week on News at Ten, but with a young family it was quite a pressure. There isn't a single day that is a typical News at Ten day, and it's really interesting because it still happens to me that I might be in a

cab and it's half 10 in the morning, and the cabbie will say, "What you going in now for? Don't you just need to pop in about nine?"

Just read the autocue, yes.

Get a bit of lippy on, you know, and it's not. You go, "No, we don't because we have an editorial meeting in the morning," you know? Right from early morning, I'll be in contact with the programme editor for the day. If it's a reasonably quiet day, I'll be in the office usually for the editorial meeting at half 11 in the morning and then working very closely, we've got a very small team on News at Ten, working very closely to constantly think about, "Are we leading with the right story?" All of those editorial conversations. And we work very closely as a team right until we're on air. We have a fantastic lead writer called David Stanley, but between the programme editor, David Stanley and myself we'll write the headlines, we'll discuss very carefully about what voice we want for the pieces, the film, you know, the VTs that we're showing our audience that night. Then there are other days where we might have a big interview for that day where I'll be out really early doors to get an interview in the can, and I'll be involved in the edit for that as well, and it can be quite hairy. There are other days when I'm out filming sections for the Tonight programme, for example, and then I'll come in a bit later and do News at Ten in the evenings, so it can be all sorts of things. The lovely bit about the job at the moment is that I get a bit of space to go and pursue projects for the Tonight programme, for the Exposure programme, On Assignment, and all sorts of other things. I've got a really lovely mix. I'm very fortunate.

How much of it is from that early morning editorial conference is thrown out by the afternoon because stuff has happened?

Quite a lot, actually!

Also, how do you deal with breaking news? Because on 24-hour rolling news, if it's Sky News or News Channel, you know, the audience is used to everything just being thrown out, and then the camera's just stuck endlessly waiting for someone to emerge out the door, but you can't do that in a bulletin. You have to decide, surely, "Are we going to give this new bit of news three minutes?" and that must come at the expense of something you've already planned.

Yes, well, it's a really good question, because actually you kind of constructed it really. There's never the perfect bulletin, because there's always things that you'd like to have got to, or a shot that somebody else has got that we didn't get, but you do try to build it carefully so that you are giving somebody who's watching a sense of what has happened to the day, a wrap-up of the day. Occasionally though, you will get a breaking story. I was doing News at Ten when the Paris terror attacks happened, and I think we first got news of that about ten to nine in the evening, and I just remember, there's that moment where there's always a bit where you look your programme editor in the eye and you suddenly think, "Right, okay, we need to think really carefully now, because the information is coming in pretty fast, and this is clearly a really big story." And it was a Friday evening, and I think, along with a lot of

newsrooms, Friday evenings tend to be a little quieter staffing-wise than they might be on a mid-week.

With fewer sober people to call in at very short notice.

I couldn't possibly comment! We just had that moment where we thought, "Right, we've just got to throw everything out. We've got to throw everything out and do as much as we possibly can on this." That's where you absolutely... you're calling your producers on the ground, you're calling your fixers in Paris, you're getting onto graphics to make sure that we've got maps. You just need to give people, and take them through what you're getting, and try to make sense of the material that's coming in while you're on air. I was very fortunate that evening. We've got a fantastic correspondent, Juliet Bremner, and basically she said, "Keep across everything, come and sit in the studio alongside me." It means that she can be looking at the incoming information about the attack whilst I'm perhaps linking to somebody in Paris or we're just looking at a map trying to make sense of where these attacks had happened. It was genuinely a night where you sort of throw everything in the air because this is an enormous story. You're literally writing the headlines as you're all sitting in the studio with a few minutes to air. But you know, audiences get that it's breaking story. You try to make it as clear and as polished as you can, but the nature of a breaking news story is that it is raw and it is ragged. And it is your job, as an anchor at that point, to be looking at the news wires thinking, "Right, that's relevant because it'll take us here," and you're trying to sort of make sense of things whilst you're on air. You've also got fantastic producers in the gallery who are doing the same thing in your earpiece. But I suppose I did eight years at Sky News, so I had some good training in that really, from having worked there.

Obviously it was a tragedy and you take no pleasure in it as a person, but as a journalist, is it quite thrilling? That sense of adrenaline when something does break, that you've then got to do it? Or is it something that you've just got to get through?

Of course there's adrenaline, because the adrenaline is there to make sure that you are trying to be as accurate as possible without inflaming a situation, or basically going down routes that aren't necessary accurate or correct at that stage. I think the challenge with a breaking news story like that – and it happened also on the Westminster Bridge attack, which I got sent down to the studio with a few minutes' notice to get in the studio and get on that story – you've got to get the tone right, because the story that you're handling is a story of enormous tragedy for many people. And there'll be people tuning in who will be horrified to see what's unfolding, and you're very conscious of the people whose lives are on the line at those moments when you're telling the story and you're unpacking it for your audience. So I think that the adrenaline is there, yes, to give you complete focus on sticking to the facts and avoiding speculation, but also to give you a sort of corrective in your voice and your attitude to the story to make sure that you are really getting the tone right.

Tell us about the other projects and programmes that you're involved in. I know the Tonight programme, for example, seems to be the opposite of breaking news. It's long-form investigative journalism.

Not always, actually – sometimes we’ve thrown things in the air with that as well. But yes, it is generally, most of the time, long-form.

Tell us how the other programmes work then, how you fit them into the schedule.

Well, we’ve got two teams that work on the Tonight strand for ITV – one team is based up in Manchester, and another team is based in our newsroom, the ITN team. They work very closely together. But it means that we get out all over the country and pick subjects that are really close to our audience’s heart. I mean, the programme goes out at 7:30 on ITV on a Thursday evening just after Emmerdale.

Prime time.

Prime time. We pick a whole range of subjects, but we think very carefully about what our audience at that time of the evening is going to be interested in. I’ve reported on everything from... we did a programme about the very controversial subject around transgender children. I worked on a piece last year about the surgeon Ian Paterson, who’s carried out unnecessary breast surgery on patients, which was quite a harrowing one to work on. When we had also the big debate around Me Too, we did a couple of programmes actually, on discrimination against women and sexism against women and verbal and physical abuse of women in workplaces. Really put that out to our audience to see where they were at on it. It’s quite interesting, we sort of did a panel discussion one evening about would you consider this scenario here. We played them some scenarios and said, “Would you consider this an unacceptable way to behave in an office?” It was quite interesting sort of gauging about where people were at with that subject. Then when we’ve had huge stories like Grenfell, for example, or both the Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks, we’ve done fast turnaround programmes. So my news colleagues are out in the field and I’m there sometimes for the Tonight programme, and we’ll get out there and try to turn around a half hour, shaped programme as quickly as possible. They can be quite stretching, but they’re incredible to work on, you know? So it has a really good mix. I mean, for example, a couple of years ago we did a programme about the menopause in the workplace, and it’s obviously one of those subjects which doesn’t get a great deal of airing, but our audience responded to it in a way that I have never seen on the Tonight programme. It was extraordinary. We did a Q&A session off the back of it, and we were absolutely inundated – we suddenly realised that we had tapped into part of our female audience that were desperate to talk about this. It’s quite an eclectic mix, really.

And fronting Harry and Meghan’s wedding was rather different, but you made a great success of that. Was that quite a jolly in a sense there, to wish them well? Other than the technicalities, you’re on air to say, “Look how lovely they look, everyone’s having a great time.”

It was an extraordinary day. It was really... the thing is with those stories, that even though on the front of it, it’s a very jolly story and a lot of people are very interested in it. You still have to do the prep for it. You can’t sort of just think because it’s a happy story that gives the nation a bit of a lift after some pretty heavy months, that

you can't prepare for it any the less. I suppose there's just a lot of homework. If you're going to be on air for seven hours, there's a lot of homework to be done. We did everything from walking the routes of the carriage procession, we went and learnt so much about Windsor Castle and the chapel. I was watching episodes of Suits. I mean, I'm not going to try and pretend that this is the hardest research to be doing, but all of the aspects of Meghan's life that were going to be interesting to our audience. And, of course, the very well-understood and reported on aspects of Prince Harry's life, too. But you've just got to be across all of it because you're aware that you're on air for hours on end basically, and you need to have the details still at your fingertips. Again, you just want to do a good job. I quite like that element of it, you just sort of tuck yourself away with your books for a bit and get your head down and close the door. It's a quite satisfying thing to do.

Is it like cramming for an exam where you become a total expert on Harry and Meghan and everything for the whole week and then you forget about it?

Then you forget all of it.

For a bit.

Well, I wouldn't say total expert, but you do have a certain bank of knowledge about something, which I always think you sort of front load your mind with it and it all sort of drains out of the back when you're onto the next story. You've got a big responsibility to deliver that well for your audience. But again, just to get the tone right as well. The thing that morning, we were all up at, sort of, I don't know, 4:30, 5:00 that morning before we were on air. We came out of the hotel we were staying in in Windsor, and it was just the most glorious, sunny day. Not a cloud in the sky, even as the sun was coming up. It was beautiful. We had a little buggy that took us quickly down to our studio position. The crowds were already out, they were all sitting on the grass, there was quite a lot of prosecco out over breakfast. Not for me, I hasten to add, at that stage. There was just a really lovely sort of countryside party feel about it. It was extraordinary! And you sort of tap into that a bit really. Working alongside Phillip Schofield, that's a different partnership for me, and it's great fun. We're there bringing different things to the party, if you like.

I remember when he was in the broom cupboard.

I remember when he was in the broom cupboard!

I'm old enough to remember that.

So am I!

Was there a particular joy in presenting something that's clearly a joyous story? It seems to be just human nature that negative stuff is the stuff that makes the news. When you're reading the news, it's largely... I can predict that it's not going to be good stuff.

Yes, it's a huge joy to do it, because as I say, you're just feeding off the atmosphere around you. You're not presenting in a little bubble. Actually, to go to the other royal wedding of course, of William and Kate, we had a brilliant producer for that programme who I know you've spoken to for this podcast, Cristina Nicolotti Squires. We took a very clear decision to make sure that our studio was at ground level. And it was all open, it was an open-air studio at ground level, so that the crowds who'd gathered on the mall were literally over our shoulders. You could feed the atmosphere of the mall into the programme itself and I think it worked really well. It was one of those technical decisions that gets made by directors and producers, but has a distinct editorial impact on a programme. I thought that was a really smart move by them to just put us in that spot because you could hear and see everything. People were sort of shouting out to Phillip and you could get a sense of how people were having a bit of a knees-up for the day. We just made sure that we had that as part of the programme.

You're also present on Woman of the Year. Hopefully women newsreaders are getting equal pay now with their male colleagues. #MeToo. #BBC. We should put #ITV in there.

Well, ITN hit the headlines for its gender pay gap. I think across this industry we know there's a lot further to go yet. Yes, I'd like to think that women newsreaders are being paid fairly. I think it's very easy for prominent women to have their names with the story, which inevitably is going to happen. But I think all of us in that position know that it's for the women who are in all of our newsrooms at all levels that this really affects. When you have bad headlines about gender pay gap, which doesn't just affect the women in senior positions, but further down the line too. That's where we really need to raise our voices because it's utterly unacceptable. It is illegal to pay a man and a woman differently for the same job. It's just a no-brainer. Yes, ITN is now moving in the right direction after some difficult headlines last year, but just pay men and women the same for the same job. Can we just get on and do it? We just want to be thinking about other stuff, not this. People have been fighting for this for decades. I just... all of my female colleagues, you just want to tear your hair out really, that it happens. Just get more women into senior jobs, pay women fairly, and let them get on with their jobs.

It seems to me to convey a deeper problem in society, that if we have the lead anchor of our flagship ITV News at Ten bulletin that has to campaign to be paid fairly with others that there's a problem in our society that needs... it's much deeper than merely what we pay our newsreaders.

Of course it is. We really need to shine the spotlight on all sorts of walks of life and jobs where women are being paid unfairly. The Fawcett Society, which does amazing campaigning around this issue, had some statistics out this week saying that one in three men and women don't understand that it's illegal to pay discriminate between men and women doing the same job. There's still a lot of work to be done on that, and I think that those of us who are in a privileged position and who are paid well for what they do, it's on us to make sure that that spotlight is shone on those industries and jobs where... it'll be a long time before men and women get paid fairly. These women need to find a way of making sure that their voices get heard. We're in

a very privileged position, but there are whole swathes of different industries and professions and workplaces where... let's just get it sorted, it's just mad.

Did you always want to be a journalist? How did you start your career? Did you always want to be on air? Did you want to replace Trevor McDonald back in the day?

No, I did always want to be a journalist. I suppose I was very fortunate because my mother spotted it before I'd even thought about it properly, and I kept a diary from a very young age, five or six. The older I got, the more I would mention news stories in it. Actually, when I got into my late teens and early 20s, I was sort of keeping news cuttings in the diary as well alongside it. But my mum had spotted that I was a bit of a keen diary writer. I rather hope she wasn't reading them, but she knew I was writing them. She just suggested to me one day, she said, "Do you think you might like to be a journalist?" I was, I don't know, 12, 13, maybe a little bit younger. It was such a significant moment, I can even remember where I was standing when she said it. It was an absolute light bulb moment where I just thought, "Oh, that's it! That's what I want to do. That's what I want to do." Now I didn't come from a family of journalists. My family, they're all teachers in fact. I didn't know anybody in the industry, I didn't know how on earth I'd get my toe in the door or anything like that. But I was very fortunate that I had a mum who was perceptive enough to just see what sort of might light my fire, if you like. It was just from that moment, I thought, "Okay, right. Well how do I go about this?" Then a bit later, when I was old enough to go and get some work experience, my mother handed me a copy of the yellow pages.

There might be quite a lot of our audience that don't even know what that is.

She said, "Right, well if you want to organise some work experience, you better find out the phone numbers of the local newspaper and the local radio stations, and you need to pick up the phone and organise it yourself." Again, fantastic advice, which stands me in good stead even now.

Self-starter, empowered.

Yes, go and literally run your finger down the yellow pages, find the number for the Leicester Mercury, find the number for the BBC radio station locally, and the independent radio station. After I'd sat my O-levels, I got a bit of work experience over the summer holidays and that was it – I was off. I just loved it.

We'll carry on, if we may, about your career, but just as a brief aside, do you think that people starting out in media, aspiring journalists, have it harder or easier these days? Because in one sense, anyone can write a blog or do a podcast, and there are lots more opportunities to be noticed. On the other hand, everyone's got a blog and a podcast, so how do you stand out? There are fewer jobs in the newsroom now than ever before.

Yes. I think there are significant challenges to young people coming into this, but they have also got an opportunity to accrue some really significant experience and

technical skill before they really choose that as a career path. I mean, when I was a BBC news trainee – I was a news trainee for BBC Midlands Today – I was struck by the amount of technical stuff that we had to learn to do with editing and all the rest of it. I think now, when I look at the junior producers in my office, their technical set of skills is incredibly impressive. They're editing stuff for News at Ten at their desks, they know how to use the cameras, they know how to do the whole bit. I had an element to that when I came into this job, but they have an opportunity really to learn all of that. They can bring quite a lot to the party, but the jobs in network newsrooms, of course, are highly competitive and they're really difficult to make sure that you're at the front of the queue for. What I would always say to young, aspiring TV journalists is, if not you, who else? Why shouldn't it be you? So just have the persistence and the confidence to really push for the jobs and always put yourself as far forward as possible.

So was that your first big rung on the ladder then, that you mentioned there? The BBC journalism and news trainee scheme?

Yes, it was. I kept my journalism going through my time at university as well. I used to work at the local radio station there and did a student radio programme. But really loved my time at university because I was doing English literature, so I just felt it was this one spell in my life when I could just completely indulge that passion for English literature. I kept the journalism going, and then put in for the BBC news trainee scheme. It's the regional news trainee scheme for BBC Midlands Today, and was fortunate enough to be picked for it. Each region selected a trainee, and then we were all sent to BBC Bristol for our training. I was the only woman in the mix with six other guys, so it gave me quite an early heads-up on what I might experience a little later on. But it was a fantastic course.

Basically it was just a landscape dominated by blokes.

Well, far less now. It's completely different now, really. But it sort of prepped you quite well for the fact that you might often be in a situation where you might be the only woman on the team, for example, or the only woman around the table, or the only woman in a meeting.

And clearly you got there by merit, but was there a sense from maybe the others sometimes that you were the token woman, that you were there to fulfil a quota?

Actually, no. In all honesty, no. I mean, I was being trained alongside some really amazing young men who were really committed to their careers in journalism. All of us felt incredibly privileged to be getting a BBC News Traineeship because it was gold standard. It was fantastic, and they still are.

I know.

So actually, no. I mean, one of the things that is quite interesting is that when you're in a room full of trainees and somebody brings in the coffee, as a woman I think I just used to deliberately sit on my hands and say, "I'm not going to be the one who gets

up and pours the coffee here,” or whatever. You’re just quite aware that you’re the only woman in the mix. But actually, no. We all just rubbed along together very well and it was a fantastic spell in my life, actually.

So you did the training at Bristol and then you went back to the Midlands, was it?

Yes.

What came next?

I had a fantastic spell working at Midlands Today, because of course it’s in the middle of a brilliant news patch apart from everything else. I mean, I remember very clearly arriving there... there was a news blackout around the dreadful kidnap of Stephanie Slater. It was fascinating to be there as a junior journalist at that stage because I was working alongside some quite senior correspondents. And just seeing that interaction between the police and the newsroom in that stage was absolutely fascinating. There’s some really big stories on our patch at that time as well. But the other great thing about that course is that it was a bi-media course, so they were training you in radio as well as TV. I had a wonderful news editor called Peter Lowe, who’s now at Sky. He said, “Right, you’ve had a few months in a really great news patch with lots of urban stories,” you know, stories that are going to make network, but it’s not just the regional news programme. He goes, “There’s another great news patch that I want you to cover, and it’s Radio Shropshire.” So I was sent out into beautiful Shrewsbury with a completely different sort of news patch and different challenges. It was a great way to be trained really, because you just learn to tell stories at an absolute grassroots community level. I think when you’ve worked in a region, whether it’s a local newspaper or regional news, you always have an attachment to that patch. I mean, it was my home patch as well, because I grew up in Leicester, but you always know a little bit about the politics of the patch, what makes the people tick, what sort of reception you’re likely to get if you pitch up there with a camera and do a vox pop. I still think back to those days and think it was a really brilliant grounding for TV news.

But did you have a sense of ambition at that point, that London was calling in some way?

I actually really loved my time in regional news, and I had no idea how I might get into network news, I really hadn’t got very much of a plan at all, and then bizarrely, there was an advert in the Media Guardian for a new presenter of Newsround, and I’d never thought of Newsround as a possible next career move.

Great show.

And so it came up and I just thought, “Well, actually it might not have been the route I’d consider to make a move to London, but why not go for it and see what happens?” And I was very fortunate to get it, and I didn’t know what to make of it really, but of course the beauty of Newsround is that it still covers all the big stories but you’re covering them for a different audience.

It's a better show in many ways because it explains it.

Yes. We used to get enormous audiences. I remember stats from back then saying quite often, the audience would be half to two-thirds adults, parents watching with their kids, and we'd get feedback saying, "You explain the news to us." You wouldn't do a story on Newsround about Northern Ireland, for example, without having a few lines, very simple, straightforward lines to say why we are at the stage we are at, and actually that's quite a lot of what most people want with their news. So it was a real lesson and an education in learning to write to picture, to learn to write sparing, clear scripts for television news, and I had an absolute ball there. It was fantastic. I arrived there, we went straight out to South Africa and did a film about the children of the New South Africa with Nelson Mandela being elected president, I was in Hong Kong for the handover, I covered so many stories – politics, international, filmed with the elephants in the Kruger National Park, mountain gorillas in Uganda – and it was just a remarkable programme, and much-loved, and so essential. So essential.

What came next?

Newsround, I then moved to BBC Breakfast News as a reporter, so it was one of those things actually, it was quite funny, on the same floor at the BBC, there was Newsround and Newsnight, and we shared editors and camera crews with Newsnight, so you had this slightly two different ends of the scale programmes, but working quite closely together. And then on the same floor too, there was BBC Breakfast News, and I just had an opportunity, they gave me a try-out as a reporter on that, so I became their Sat Van reporter for a few years, which was great fun. So you'd spend a week in the office, planning stories and setting them up, it was UK-based, and then you'd spend a week on the round with the Sat Van doing live hits into the Breakfast News programme, which was slightly Bridget Jones, you know, you'd find yourself doing all sorts of stuff to get a decent story on air.

Tell us about when Sky came calling then, because that's a different job entirely isn't it? Although you're in the studio, all hell breaks loose, and you're there on air for hours and hours.

Well, again it was one of those things. I'd never really thought about working at Sky News, but I'd got to the stage at the BBC where I couldn't quite see where I was going next. It didn't seem to be quite happening for me. I was also at the stage in my life where I wanted to have a family, and actually, you know what? It helps being in the same room as your husband occasionally. So I was definitely looking for a change, I didn't feel I was making the progress I wanted to at the BBC, and I was on air one morning, on the Friday morning, Breakfast News, and I had my email inbox open and an email just dropped into my inbox from Nick Pollard, who was then the Head of Sky News saying, "Hi Julie, fancy coming in for a chat?" And I thought, "Do you know, I think I might actually, because I can't quite see where I'm going next here." I suppose I'd set out to work at the BBC, I'd been there for nearly 10 years, loving it, but I'd hit a bit of a wall career-wise, and suddenly here was an opportunity I hadn't really contemplated coming up. So I went to see Nick, and he offered me a presenting slot on Sky News which, apart from the fact it's a brilliant job offer, and it's a fantastic news organisation to work for, I just thought, "This spell in my life, where

I'd quite like to try and find a bit of a more regular pattern to working, this'll work very nicely on both levels, career-wise." It was presenting their Sunrise programme, so it still meant getting up at stupid o'clock.

The crock of sparrows, as my dad would say.

Yes, but I actually think it was probably one of the best moves I've ever made. I absolutely loved it, there was something... Sky News was pretty well-established then, but it still had that pioneering spirit, it still had that sense that it had a freedom over 24 hours to try things out, to have a different voice for news, and I was very, very fortunate to get there when I did. And I was very fortunate to have a boss like Nick Pollard, who is still my mentor, and really has helped me navigate my career ever since I had that first meeting with him. So it was fortunate on all sorts of fronts really, because I had both of my kids whilst I was at Sky News as well, and actually that was one of the slightly tricky conversations because I'd only been there a couple of months when I found out I was expecting my first son, so it was one of those moments when you have to go and have that slightly awkward conversation.

You didn't preface it with, "Breaking News?" I hope you did.

No, I did not!

I wouldn't have been able to resist it.

No, I didn't, but it was one of those moments, and I think this is one of those, actually when I've reflected on it as a woman, a lot of women will feel like that, if they've got a male boss, is there's that moment when you've got to go and tell your male boss something very personal about yourself that's going to affect your working life, and it was a bit nerve-wracking. And what made all the difference was the way Nick took the news, and how lovely he was about it, and how full of congratulations, "This is all going to be fine, we can make this work." And it made all the difference. When we're in an era where we're thinking, "How do we get more women into TV news and make sure they stay there?" I don't think there's any difficulty in getting them in, it's making sure that women stay in TV news, it's having bosses like Nick who say, "This is fantastic news, let's find how we can make this work for you, and make sure that you've still got a career here at Sky News." And he helped me every step of the way in that, and I just think that every now and again you meet somebody in your career that makes a significant difference in how it turns out and he was absolutely one of them.

You were at Sky for what, eight years?

Yes.

So did ITN, ITV News come calling then, how did that happen? Was it another email to you when you were on air from John Hardie?

Not quite.

“Could we have a chat?”

It wasn't John Hardie, it was Mark Sharman actually at ITV, and he'd been at Sky before, and I think it was a text message saying, “Do you fancy meeting for a coffee?” And I'm like, “Yes, okay Mark, I'm not quite sure, I'm so happy in this job, I don't know what it is that would make me...”

You've got to keep your eyes and ears open.

You've got to keep your eyes and ears open, but I just thought it'll have to be something really good for me to move, because I loved working there at Sky, I loved the mix of the work that you could be in the studio and out in the field, it was that mix that I'd been talking about. Anyway, Mark took me for a coffee and just sort of, “You know, we'd like to get you on board, is there anything that you'd like to do?” And I said, “Well actually I'm really happy, I do think ITN and ITV News does a great job, but I'm really very happy.” And he was obviously just putting a bit of a feeler out and then I said, “Well, go away and think about it.” And then he called me again he said, “Actually...” and this was all done in the most extraordinary top-secret manner, so I met him for a coffee and he said, “Look, we're thinking about bringing back News at Ten.” I went, “Right.” And he said, “We're hoping to get Trevor back to do it.” And I'm going, “Right,” thinking, “Where do I fit in, then?”

Because you're literally not Sir Trevor.

Because I am so very clearly not Sir Trevor MacDonald. And he goes, “We'd like you to come and present it alongside him.” And it's one of those moments where you sort of look at somebody and think, “Oh, okay, hadn't quite seen that one coming.” But of course, it's one of those moments where you think, “Oh good heavens, this is a great opportunity.”

We've had Sir Trevor sitting in that seat. It was an amazing interview.

I know, I know. I feel happy to be sitting in this seat. Yes, so it was just one of those moments, and it was hilarious because we had a couple of months were only a handful of people knew about ITV's plan to do this, so I remember going to a private dinner at Mossiman's with some of the ITV execs, and we all arrived at different times and arrived in the room... it was extraordinary, the secrecy that led up to that, and then persuading Trevor to get back on board, and it was the first time I'd met him, of course, so I was in complete awe of meeting him.

So was I.

He's just...

Sir Trevor MacDonald.

He's Sir Trevor MacDonald! He's a legend. So I sort of found myself suddenly in this highly secretive process about ITV bringing back News at Ten, with all that entailed,

and working alongside Trevor, and I just felt as if I'd been taken to another planet, it was extraordinary.

Well it could have gone wrong, any big, bold career move like that is inherently risky.

It could have gone wrong, and was not easy at the start. I think a lot of people perhaps at ITV thought that just bring Trevor back and it will be all right – and actually, we had to re-establish ourselves as a strong news voice at 10 o'clock, and that doesn't happen overnight, even with Trevor. And it was bumpy. We were still trying to find out what we were as a news bulletin, what our priorities were, what we cared about, how we distinguish ourselves alongside the BBC, so it was quite a testing time, those first 12 months, I have to say, and there were times when I wondered whether it had been a bit of a gamble, but as with all of these things, well not all these things, but quite often, eventually, they find their feet. But when you've got a lot of expectation and a lot of people with very strong views about how a programme should be, inevitably it's going to be quite a bumpy spell.

I always ask this question and no one ever answers, and I wouldn't expect you to, but what's next for you, I mean clearly as a well-respected...

Well, that's because people don't want to talk themselves out of a job that they're in!

Exactly. But are there any remaining jobs, given that you're at the top of your game, that you would be flattered to be asked, presenting Question Time etc.?

Yes, I was very flattered to be mentioned in the mix for that. I think, you know what has always driven me with this job, is I just want to do it better. I just think there's always stuff you can learn, there's always a story or an area that you haven't looked at, or you haven't thought about enough, or you haven't done a good enough job on, frankly. There's ways, I just like the fact that this job gives you an endless capacity to learn and to improve, and I suppose that's always been my driver, and as we've talked about, I've just been very fortunate that opportunities have presented themselves that I would never necessarily have planned, but would have been daft to turn down – and somehow it's sort of worked out until this stage. I love working on elections, I love working on US elections in particular, I've done some reporting out there as well, but it's really just making sure that you're doing the job that you're doing properly, and I'm very fortunate to have a wide palette of work, I'm not just working in daily news, I get a chance to get under the skin of things with longer form journalism.

You went to a state school, you went to a comprehensive in Leicester. Do you think there is something here about getting a better mix of people in newsrooms?

Well, I think it's a very live debate at the moment, and it's one that we have absolutely got to have. I was very fortunate to try and carve a path from my comp into university and beyond. My big advantage was incredibly supportive parents who just challenged me to go and crack on and do it, and inspired me.

I hope I give your mum a cut of your salary. She was the one who made you do it.

She was incredible, she's absolutely the person who set me on that path, but I came from a family that had no connections with the news whatsoever, and I suppose if there's anything, if there's a shred of anything that I've said that might be useful to anybody listening who's trying to get into this industry, is that it is doable, there are significant challenges, but I think also newsrooms are now getting a bit wiser to the fact that they need to bring in people from a greater spread of society and different backgrounds. And I don't just mean whether you've been to a private school or a state school, I mean from all sorts of socio-economic backgrounds, from the full range of diversity that we need to be seeing in our newsrooms because fundamentally, newsrooms cannot tell the stories of the country that we are living in, and the mix that we have in this country, unless we have that mix in our newsrooms. And I suppose I'd just be really supportive of any young student who's thinking, "Well, this is a job, there's easy ways into it if you can afford to do a post-grad in journalism at a smart college, and then maybe stay with your mum and dad in London and not worry about paying the rent so you can go and do a news placement somewhere." I just think that newsrooms have got to work really hard now to make sure we're getting as wide a variety of voices as possible.

And also geographic spread. I remember at the time when the BBC moved a lot of its operations up to Salford, in Media City, I remember thinking at the time, "This won't work, this is political correctness, population engineering." I was wrong, it's been an incredible success. You have presented Newsround, CBBC, Five Live, BBC Breakfast, they all run from Salford now and they're the better for it, frankly.

Yes, and we did the ITV Leaders Debate, the seven-way debate, we did all of ours up there in fact. And there is something really thrilling about doing those programmes in Salford, the audiences that come in for those debates, of course we organise those audiences very carefully to make sure there's a balance in that audience, but they're from that area.

They're from out of London, basically. That there London.

From out of London and it counts. It makes a difference to our audiences to see us in their patch, of their patch, it's crucial.

Last question then, what's been the best story you've ever worked on in your career? What's been the one, that's been the most memorable?

Well doorstepping Pope Francis was quite a moment.

Was he The Pope at that point?

Yes.

Wow.

Yes.

How did you doorstep? Did you just... how did you get past the Swiss Guards?

Well, I was...

You didn't dress as one, did you?

No, I didn't dress as a Swiss Guard! I don't think you'd get very far as a woman in the Vatican if you dressed up as a Swiss Guard.

You could have one of those fake comedy beards on.

No, no, no, no! I was moderating a conference on modern slavery at the Vatican. It's a subject area I've done a lot of stories about, I feel very strongly about, and I'd been asked to moderate a conference in the Vatican, it was in one of the colleges in the Vatican. And I was there alongside Cardinal Vincent Nichols, and actually Theresa May when she was Home Secretary, and we knew that the Pope would be addressing the conference, he was going to come in on the last day, so I'd said to Cardinal Vincent Nichols' press secretary, I said, "Look, this is a good story, I want to do stuff about modern slavery, it gets in onto our bulletins, it gets this subject onto the agenda," I said, "Look, if we're in the room with a camera, maybe..."

"Could we get His Holiness on?"

"And maybe we could just have a quick..." and so it was just extraordinary, I mean, first of all, when I was moderating the conference and we knew that Pope Francis was going to come in right at the end, and it was rather interesting, because I remember saying to the home secretary, Theresa May at the time, "I'm not quite sure where he's going to sit when he comes in," because there isn't a special chair out or anything for him. Anyway, he arrived at the door, and Cardinal Nichols, who'd been sitting next to me, got up and went to meet him at the door, and I suddenly realised that the only seat in the house that was free was the seat that Cardinal Nichols had just vacated, and I just remember looking at Theresa May along this row of people and looking at her saying, "I think he's going to come and sit here." And it was just one of those moments that happens in slightly slow motion where I just saw Pope Francis walking towards us, and Cardinal Nichols gesturing to come and sit right next to me, and I just stood up and my knees were literally knocking.

He's the Pope, in fairness.

He's the Pope and my head's going, "Don't swear, it's the Pope." and my mum is watching this on the Vatican YouTube channel and nearly falling off her chair seeing Pope Francis walking towards me, probably thinking, "I hope she's not going to say anything inappropriate." Anyway, I have to invite him to his seat and sit down, and I'm sitting alongside him, he's incredibly gracious and incredibly passionate about that subject.

He used to be a nightclub bouncer, that's what I always remember about old Pope Francis.

He's extraordinary.

Legend.

Anyway so we got to the end of this thing, and I'd sort of had a chat with Cardinal Vincent's press secretary beforehand. I said, "Look, I'm just going to go outside, I'm going to go into this little corner." I said, "Do you think if he's walking this way, if we get eye contact, can you bring him over?" Anyway, so he brought him over, and we doorstepped the Pope. And we talked to him about modern slavery. I mean, you had to be realistic, you weren't going to suddenly launch into a 30-minute moment with him, but of course no British journalist had got a doorstep with the Pope, so that was quite satisfying. And I'll never forget, I was working with this brilliant producer, James Jordan, and cameraman Ben England, who I kept looking at thinking, "I hope you've pressed record mate," and James Jordan just phoned back to the newsdesk and said, "It's in the pot. We've got it." It was great. So it wasn't necessarily, in the scale of things, the biggest story which I've been very fortunate to work on a lot of them, but that was quite a big moment.

Julie, it's been a hugely enjoyable conversation, thank you ever so much for your time.

Thanks ever so much, it's been great to talk to you, Paul, thank you.