

INTERVIEW BY ROB MCGIBBON

Regrets? She has a few. Like cheating on her first husband, turning down a part in a Spielberg movie – and making a faux pas in front of the Queen. But her biggest disappointment? Finding that at the age of 46 she’s no longer wanted on television...

What is your earliest memory?

Lying down in the cabin of my dad’s speedboat, which he had built with his own hands. I remember I had a dummy in my mouth and the sound of the water lapping against the hull of the boat. It is one of the very few comforting memories I have from my early childhood.

What sort of child were you?

I was a tomboy. I lived on my own with my dad in a flat from the ages of eight to 12 when my mother moved to Holland after their divorce. I was always hanging out with a 35-year-old man, so there weren’t many ‘lady-like’ things he got up to. He was into making boats, fixing his car, or building things, which is why I am incredibly practical. I became my dad’s housekeeper and looked after him, but he had a string of girlfriends – sometimes on the go at the same time – so I often found myself sidelined. I wasn’t a confident child at all. I had no self-belief, which may have something to do with being constantly told by him that I was clumsy or stupid.

What is the closest you’ve come to death?

Giving birth. With my first and my last babies I haemorrhaged incredibly badly. Doctors rushed into the hospital room just before I was sick and passed out, so I don’t have much recollection of it. I just remember thinking, ‘This lot will save me,’ then I was out cold.

What’s the worst thing you’ve ever done?

I was unfaithful to my first husband [TV cameraman John Turnbull] and it was soul-destroying for us both. It was an act of pure selfishness and immaturity and it nearly killed me. I wouldn’t do it again.

And your biggest disappointment?

Finding at the age of nearly 46 that you are no longer wanted by the TV industry. Unless you are young and ‘of the moment’ – ie, you’re in the papers for all the wrong reasons – you’re out of favour and that baffles me. I worked hard for my career, but now it appears to count for nothing. Nowadays you need to be dumb or pretty to be on TV and I don’t suppose I am either.

Who would be your dream dinner date be?

If I’m wanting a bit of a flirt, it would be Sting (sorry, Trudie) but if I wanted a truly fascinating evening, I’d go out with Vladimir Putin. He would certainly be different...

Tell us a secret about yourself...

Steven Spielberg wanted me for the part of Tinker Bell when he was first thinking of doing Peter Pan [which became the movie *Hook*]. My stepfather was in the film business and we met Spielberg. I was 16 at the time. Sadly, Mum said I had to concentrate on my O-levels.

What is your biggest fear?

I worry every day that something might happen to my children. My daughter Bo is 13 now but she was born with a serious congenital

heart defect, so I’ve lived with that every day. I also have Cameron (19), Martha (nine) and Malcolm (six), and I don’t know how life could go on if anything happened to any of them.

What is your biggest regret?

Wasting a lot of time doubting myself and feeling sad or angry about the nasty rubbish people have written about me. All in all, I think I’m pretty bloody marvellous. So there!

What has been your most embarrassing moment?

Ugh, there have been too many! I was introduced to the Queen at an event in 2005 and I was told not to say anything unless she spoke to me. She came up to me, I curtsied, then there was a painfully long silence. It became unbearable, so I simply said: ‘How are you?’ I think her people wanted to send me to the Tower. I used to embarrass easily but it has disappeared with age. Now I think, so what?

What is your favourite word and why?

The Swedish word *lagom*, which means ‘just the right amount’ or ‘about right’. It’s not a word I would use to describe my good self.

Who would play you in a film of your life?

It would have to be Goldie Hawn. I’ve been a huge fan of Goldie’s since I saw *Private Benjamin* as a teenager. She’s really savvy and a bit kooky. If not, then Meryl Streep would be great because the role would demand many layers of her exquisite acting.

What one law would you change if you could?

I would make the drink-driving laws zero tolerance, so one drop of booze and you’re done for. That would end all doubt and quibbles.

What do you believe in?

I was christened as a baby but my young parents were atheists and only did it because it was the ‘done thing’. I have been attracted to Buddhism for the past five years, so I think that’s where I’ll end up.

Who’s the biggest star in your phone contacts list?

I haven’t got anyone. I lost Amanda Holden’s number when I swapped phones a couple of years ago. Does that count?

What are you best at?

I’m a bloody good cook, especially baking. I’ve been cooking since I was 13. I’m a perfectionist though, so I always want to be better.

What is the worst thing anyone has ever said to you?

When someone in the media has questioned my mothering abilities. After my unstable childhood, I have given my children more love, security, care and understanding than anyone could hope for. I have four kids by four men, but that means jack s**t. I care for all my children. Our family is an amazing unit.

Ulrika’s novel, ‘The Importance of Being Myrtle’, is out now, £6.99

SHRINK RAP

Inside the head of... Ulrika Jonsson

‘YOU NEED TO BE DUMB OR PRETTY TO BE ON TV NOWADAYS – AND I DON’T SUPPOSE I AM EITHER’

THE LAST WORD

LAST FILM YOU SAW?

I dribbled off to sleep to *Dallas Buyers Club*. I get up early most days, so I inevitably fall asleep early, too. My husband Brian assures me it was a great movie.

LAST BOOK YOU READ?

I’ve just started reading a Swedish

book called *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed out the Window and Disappeared* by Jonas Jonasson. I read in Swedish to stay in touch with my roots.

LAST GIG YOU WENT TO?

I took Bo and four of her friends to see

One Direction last year. It was hysteria and hysterical.

LAST TV SHOW YOU LOVED?

Last Tango in Halifax. Sarah Lancashire, Anne Reid and Derek Jacobi are some of my favourite actors and the writing is fabulous.

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