





**Erik:** Do you have other members in your immediate family?

**Giulia:** No husband, no kids, no significant other for donkey's years. I'm like one of Jane Austen's contented old maids. The trick is to live the single life without becoming self-centered.

**Erik:** Despite being born in Liverpool, the spelling of your name is Italian, presumably. Did this have anything to do with your father's Italian imports business, or are different spellings for Julia fairly common in England?

**Giulia:** Yes, my Julia is spelled the Italian way because my father was working in Italy a lot of the time in the 1950s when I was born, and as Mum went along on some of the trips I suspect I was conceived there. I was almost born there. I arrived in the world just a few days after they got back from an August trip to Naples and was born with a sunburned nose!

**Erik:** You mentioned starting to work for a local newspaper at the age of 17. That seems pretty young. What was your first job? And, as a follow up to that, for those who aren't familiar with "a full formal apprenticeship," what does that entail?

**Giulia:** I quit school at 16 because I was unhappy there and wanted to get out into the world. My parents agreed as long as I did a secretarial course, which I did and enjoyed. It was an excellent school, but I wanted to become a journalist. I'd met and corresponded with a retired journalist who'd had a fascinating career with Reuters and later The Times, and he encouraged me and helped with references when I applied to the local newspaper group. His word carried weight because I was offered the choice of two trainee positions, and I took the one at the Birkenhead News group (owned by the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo, quite a large newspaper organization). We were twelve apprentices of various ages and backgrounds given six months to prove ourselves at which point we knew we would be whittled down to six – so it was very competitive.

I made the cut and signed up for a three-year indentured apprenticeship. This meant I was employed as a junior reporter and trained on the job towards finally getting the professional qualification, an NCTJ Certificate. Already having the shorthand (120 words a minute back then when I was using it every day), I was able to work as a court reporter and crime journalism was my 'thing' for most of the next two years, though I covered a lot of other news stories, elections and so forth, as well. I got my certificate with a distinction after a terrifying day-long examination with various tricky tests and writing a massive dissertation on Britain's legal aid system and its various shortcomings (which got a first).

Of course now I was a senior reporter – the meager wages doubled overnight and I could apply for other jobs, so I tried my luck at the local BBC radio station. They liked my voice and gave me the chance. I can still remember how scared I was when I read the news on the radio for real the very first day on the job! They believed in throwing young people in at the deep end in those days (I was now 21), and I stayed with the station for seven years, covering some memorable events, such as the death of John Lennon, the urban riots of 1981, the Pope's visit, and the miners' strike.

I then did a variety of jobs outside the BBC for about two years before returning to the fold at another radio station, this time in rural Shropshire. I stayed there for 15 years working as a reporter, producer and finally presenter of news programs, debates, and interview shows and did pretty well, earning high audience figures and the dubious pleasure of minor celebrity.

**Erik:** For those of us who are not familiar with celebrity status, major or minor, perhaps you could touch on the good and bad of being a celebrity.

**Giulia:** Once you're known in a community and regarded as having some kind of influence in political circles, people want you on their committee, trusts, charities and so on. They just want your name on their notepaper, and it's a lot of hassle. I learned to avoid most of them! I'd reached a point in my life where I needed to figure out what really matters as I was trying to do too many things at once. I'd also had a lot of ill health and needed to figure out what I could actually manage. Hence the pack-up decision. Stoic philosophy concentrates your mind effectively on what really matters. In that instance Mum mattered more than my career.

I'm sure it happens to many people. After thirty-odd years in a job, one begins to get a little tired of it all. What once seemed vitally important suddenly starts to look meaningless and vaguely absurd. So one day you're earnestly reading the six o'clock news headlines, and the next day you realize you're barking out terse, to the point of meaningless, statements to the rhythm of a tune that sounds as though it was written for a knife-throwing act in the circus. "That's it," I thought, "enough's enough." Stoic philosophy pops up here of course. Very useful to know how much of something is enough.

**Erik:** Wonderful imagery – the TV personality barking “to the rhythm of a tune that sounds as though it was written for a knife-throwing act in the circus.”

Can you elaborate on how Stoic philosophy “pops up” for you at this time? It sounds as if you were experiencing the kind of world weariness that usually drives people to cynicism, heavy drinking, depression, or joining a convent, but for you it was the Stoa. Can you remember exactly how Stoicism became important to you at this time?

**Giulia:** Interest in Stoic philosophy happened thus: my Dad was fascinated by the Shakespeare authorship question which led him to research the life of John Florio. He died with the job left half done, so I carried on, and it was Florio's interest in the Stoics that caught my attention. I soon realized that Stoic philosophy had a huge influence on that whole era, particularly on contemporary literature and religious thought. The relatively youthful Anglican Church was searching for a moral philosophy, and newly translated Stoic works were catching everyone's attention, including Queen Elizabeth, who translated Stoic works from Latin herself.

It's interesting that the leading Freemasons of the time sponsored the translation of Stoic works. James I continued the interest, but it waned with the demise of his reign and the deaths of some of its leading proponents, finally evaporating as the Puritans moved in for the kill!

**Erik:** I assume you're referring to the regicide of Charles I and the Protestant fanaticism unleashed during the administration of Oliver Cromwell. What then?

**Giulia:** My father died in 1999, and I'd spent the following two years racing back and forth between my job in Shropshire and my Mother's home in Liverpool, where she was very ill and going rapidly downhill. When she broke her hip, she broke the spell. I decided to give up the job, sell up the house, pack up my belongings and head home to take care of her. "Put her in a nursing home," people said, but I'd seen the nursing homes, and a dog-pound would have been preferable. I couldn't have lived with my conscience if I'd done that, and that's something I remind myself of whenever the going gets tough. Mum is now 85 and can do almost nothing for herself these days. I hoped I could work part time, but she cannot be left alone for more than two hours at a time, so here I am, living the Stoic life of a full-

time 'carer'.

All the years since my father died I had been working on trying to finish his project to make a study of the life of Renaissance linguist John Florio and his relationship with William Shakespeare. In exploring all the things these two had in common, I found they both seemed to subscribe to the tenets of Stoic philosophy, then very popular among the literary and Court circles. The first English translations of Epictetus were dedicated to Florio. I then found your organization on the internet and met Ben Schneider, who taught me a great deal more about the Stoic philosophy in Shakespeare, a fine subject for study by the way.

**Erik:** Would you give us some insight into your practice of Stoicism today?

**Giulia:** How many of us are 'accidental Stoics'? I wonder. We're drawn to this philosophy because we're already halfway there. Epictetus gives us a splendid armature upon which we can sculpt our own personal model for dealing with life's ups and downs. It certainly helped me to cope with the sea-change in my life, and I believe I have become a nicer person and more effective too. I have learned patience and fortitude, economy and moderation. I grow vegetables, a hobby which requires a Stoic outlook when the weather turns against you and your potatoes drown in the mud. I may even be close to understanding how much is enough.

Stoic philosophy teaches us the difference between ambition (which is good) and mere discontent (which is bad); the value of constancy in one's friends and family; how to be useful; how to enjoy small pleasures and triumphs; how to quiet the pendulum within to a steady tick-tock that doesn't batter the sides of the clock - if you know what I mean. I suspect it also helps us to understand our own orbit - and then use it to the full. To be comfortable in one's own skin is a fine thing if you can do it.

**Erik:** That was excellent, Giulia. For anyone who may have hurried through the last couple of paragraphs, I recommend rereading what you just said.

I want to get back to the work on Florio you inherited from your father. What little I know about Florio is what you wrote a couple of e-mails ago and what I've read in Wikipedia. (It's interesting that Florio's *magnum opus* is the translation of Montaigne, a Pyrrhonian skeptic.) I guess my question falls into two subject areas: What are you planning to do with the research your father and you have done? A book? A collection of papers? And, if your interest in him is oriented towards Shakespeare and Stoicism, have you uncovered any material that you would can share with us?

**Giulia:** My work on Florio has been on hold for a while, but revived recently, because an Italian chap got in touch with me who has been working on the same theme and come to pretty much the same conclusions. That is, Shakespeare and Florio worked together. I think what we may do is produce, jointly, a bi-lingual website to promote more interest in the subject. There's still an awful lot of work to do, too much for one person, and the cost of research is more than you'd think! Maybe we can attract funding for a more professional attack on the subject. It needs it. I don't think I could encapsulate all I've done in a few hundred words to be honest, but I'll chew over a few ideas.

One thing I did discover about the Renaissance interest in Stoic philosophy in England is that it was at the heart of the attempts to build a moral philosophy for the relatively new-born Anglican Church. Queen Elizabeth I and James I were both interested in this, and, if you get into theological writings of the period, Stoic ideas crop up everywhere. I've done no proper research on this, but somebody should! It could have made today's Anglican church look very different, but the Puritans got in the way of

