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She nailed *I'm A Celebrity!* but 18 years ago Nadia Forde faced her biggest challenge - being abandoned!

By Gemma Calvert

The odds were stacked against Nadia Forde long before she zip-wired into the *I'm A Celebrity!* jungle. Save for being linked with golfing pro Rory McIlroy, 25, the Irish singer and lingerie model was unknown in UK showbiz circles. Hardly the greatest start when relying on the power of the public vote. But Nadia, 25, soon proved she was more than just bikini beautiful under the waterfall shower.

Chomping down on crocodile feet, jungle trekking in torrential rain, lying in a coffin of rats and horror of all horrors, receiving sex advice from Edwina Currie... Nadia braved and conquered it all.

"There were moments when I was like: 'This isn't going to break my heart, this is going to scare the crap out of me, but it'll overcome it,'" says Nadia, when we meet for our shoot. "I thought, 'I've been through harder things in life than being in a coffin with rats...'"

Indeed she has. Nadia was just seven years old when her family fell apart. It started when her dad Stephen walked out on Nadia's Italian-born mum Berenice following an affair, leaving her to raise Nadia and her younger brother Stephen, now 19, alone.

A year later, Berenice went on a three-week holiday to Indonesia and ended up staying for two years. Nadia and Stephen were bounced between their grandma Berrie and aunts Cindy and Beverly, and by the time Berenice returned, her relationship with Nadia was over.

Three years ago, Berenice, now 49, was diagnosed with terminal lymphoma (a type of blood cancer). She is still receiving life-extending chemotherapy treatment but, although she and Nadia are on speaking terms again, their relationship remains strained.

Wrapped up in a cuddly jumper, her skin still tanned from the Australian sun and her throat raw from a winter cold, Nadia talks for the first time since the show about her family life less ordinary...

Nadia, how did it feel when you realised that your mum wasn't coming back from Indonesia?

Like nothing was ever going to be the same again. When we understood that my mum wasn't going to come home, I stayed with my nan and it wasn't until my mum returned that there was an incident where the police were called for my welfare. They took me from her that night and from then



on I lived with family members. My mum wasn't healthy enough to be a mother. There was never a relationship there. She wouldn't be able to tell you what I'm like as a person, I wouldn't be able to tell you what she's like. So how did you eventually find out that your mum had cancer?

The GP rang my nan. At first I was really angry, but I made an effort to go and see her because I was afraid she was going to pass away. She had another scare a few months ago, so I want to see her again. Unfortunately, it's not straightforward. It's not like a film - you don't get reunited with your estranged mother and hit it off, go back to where you left off. It's not that easy.

Has your mum ever apologised for what happened?
No, I'm not expecting her to. What has she got to apologise for? She was trying her best in her own way.

Have you talked to your mum about the past?
There's no point. That time's over - it's done. We just have to try and manage it the best we can.

Do you think it's hard to connect because, deep down, you're both too similar?
No, my mother isn't well (psychologically) so it's not like we're similar personalities that are clashing. It's not like that at all.

So what similarities are there between you?
I have the same laugh as her and I look very like her. It's mad because if I laugh like her, I didn't get it because I watched her do it. It's just hereditary.

Your jungle mate Kendra Wilkinson, 29, had similar problems. Did you talk to her about your situation?
She was estranged from her father for a long time and she says it's all about forgiveness. I have forgiven. I don't feel like my parents have done anything wrong. They were just human beings making mistakes.

So what's your relationship with your dad like?
He got retrained to his new partner, but she wasn't fond of me and my brother. My dad definitely went with that. We don't really fit into it. We saw him every couple of weeks, because that was the order by the court, but it got to the stage where it wasn't enjoyable because his wife hated us. I made the call not to see him again.

When did you last see your dad?
I jumped into him a couple of months ago. But there's a problem when you feel you have to talk about the weather with your dad, and not about what's really going on in your life.

Has he been in touch since you left the jungle?
I got a message from him saying "well done".

Have you had any counselling to talk through what happened with your parents?
No, my best friends know everything about me. I feel like they're my family and I have a great extended family. Families come in lots of different shapes and sizes. Mine comes with lots of aunts and a nan. My nan's never made me feel like she wanted to be my mother. It's just a special relationship.

Talk to us about the rumours you hooked up with your camp mate Jake Quickenden, 26...
There was no romance at all. Did he flirt? Yeah, he did. He flirted with everybody.

But did you fancy him?
You can't deny he's good-looking. He's an attractive guy, you can't deny that. 6'8". In his own way, I'd hang out with Michael (Bauer), 6'8". In his own way, he's such a gentleman. Michael, again, I love him so much, he's such a gentleman.



Above: Nadia and Carl Frampton in the jungle
Middle: Nadia spent time with mum Berenice

'I FEEL LIKE MY FRIENDS ARE MY FAMILY'

It's also been rumoured that you're close to golfer Rory McIlroy. Have you dated?

No, we're friends. We've got the same bunch of mates and every time I've seen with him, people think I'm going out with him. Rory's a great guy, he's a gentleman. [But] there's no mystery.

We loved your jungle bond with Edwina Currie, 68. Edwina's definitely a little spate pot and I like how liberal she is. I didn't know about her and John Major until I got out of the jungle. I also didn't know about Jimmy's 'Bully' Bullard label.

So did you think Jimmy Bullard, 36, was bullying Jake in the jungle?
Jimmy's not a bully. He just has banter and [with] some people, he goes a bit too far. There's no malice in him whatsoever.

Tell us some gossip from when *I'm A Celebrity!* finished...
Jimmy hijacked Edwina's message. He got the message to come out, and then he went in and started messaging her. He took his top off and started rubbing his torso over her body. She didn't know it was him for about 10 minutes.

You've been single for just under three years. Why haven't you found Mr. Right?
I wasn't in the right place for a long time. I broke up with my ex Irish rugby player Luke Fitzgerald, 27, and it was heart-breaking. I've dated Luke, but I don't rush into anything. I'm a girl who's going for it all snail's pace. I think it puts guys off.

Your debut album is out next year. How does it feel that Louis Walsh described you as the Irish Cheryl Fernandez-Versos?
Hes like a big challenge for me. When you've got Louis on side, you think: "Maybe I'm not wrong doing this!"

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