

Running to Learn

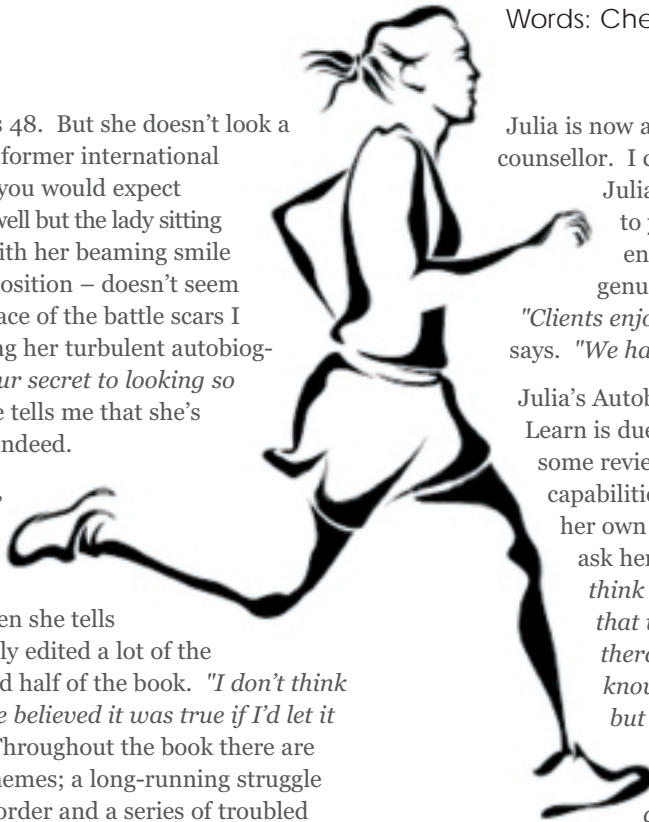


Words: Cheryl Hersey

Julia Armstrong is 48. But she doesn't look a day over 40. As a former international marathon runner you would expect Julia to have aged well but the lady sitting in front of me – with her beaming smile and energetic disposition – doesn't seem to be carrying a trace of the battle scars I expect after reading her turbulent autobiography. *"What's your secret to looking so young?"* I ask. She tells me that she's 'healed' very well indeed.

Julia's life story is, at times, more gripping than a soap opera, so I'm astounded when she tells me that she actually edited a lot of the drama from second half of the book. *"I don't think people would have believed it was true if I'd let it all in!"* She says. Throughout the book there are two reoccurring themes; a long-running struggle with an eating disorder and a series of troubled relationships, which are set against the backdrop of her international running career. As a reader I was often shocked by her honesty and openness but as Julia points out, few people are really truthful about what is going on in their lives. If they were, they would get more support when they needed it. *"I know that if I had told people about my eating disorder, I would have had more support,"* she says. When I ask Julia what inspired her to write the book she tells me that it was the best way for her to start sharing some of the things she has learned in life, but from a place of understanding. Then she adds, *"and I thought it might make quite a good read!"*

As a professional athlete, Julia had to learn to deal with pressure at the highest level. As her international running career came to an end she began to work with young athletes who were struggling with similar issues to her own and through giving and receiving therapy she began a journey to heal herself. *"If you can learn to deal with the pressure of competing internationally, you can learn to deal with anything,"* she says.



Julia is now a trained lifecoach and counsellor. I can see that just being with Julia would make a difference to your mood, she's full of energy and I can tell that she genuinely cares about people.

"Clients enjoy working with me," she says. *"We have laughter in therapy!"*

Julia's Autobiography, *Running to Learn* is due for release April 9th but some reviewers have questioned her capabilities as a therapist, based on her own tumultuous life. When I ask her about it she laughs, *"I think it's an interesting view that we expect counsellors and therapists to have all the knowledge to help someone but without any of the life experiences. People think that lifecoaches and therapists are perfect but one of the reasons I'm good*

at what I do is because I've suffered myself. If it's relevant to the session I will share my own stories with my clients. They can be shocked when they discover that I'm not perfect but it often encourages them to open up a little more. I know people that only offer selective information to their therapists for fear that they might disapprove!"

As we part company Julia tells me she's off for her second training session of the day – she's running this year's London Marathon in aid of the Lady Taverers, a charity that aims to give young people, particularly those with special needs, a sporting chance. This year's race is a milestone for Julia as it will be 26 years since she ran her first ever marathon. She tells me she feels that she's finally back to full strength but as we say goodbye I have a sense that this remarkable lady will just keep on getting stronger.

Julia's book, *Running to Learn* will be available from www.juliaarmstrong.com and www.amazon.co.uk from the 9th April priced £9.99.