



# WAR CRY

## **CHILDREN'S BOOK COMES OF AGE**

*The Gruffalo* celebrates  
20 years in print

## **NO SILVER BULLET FOR ENERGY CRISIS**

Scientist on developing  
safe and economical  
power

## **SUNFLOWERS AND A STARRY NIGHT**

Art exhibition  
puts Van Gogh  
in the frame

# **A KNAPSACK ON HIS BACK**

**JB GILL LOVES TO  
GO A-WANDERING  
IN NEW TV SERIES**

# Crossing paths with the countryside

**R**AMBLING in the countryside is a national pastime for many people and presenters JB Gill and Mehreen Baig will be exploring different paths across the country in *Walks of Life*, a new BBC One series that started last week.

Tomorrow (Sunday 24 March), in JB's first episode, his journey takes him along a 12-mile stretch of the River Severn where he discovers its links to the Christian faith.

'What connects the dots between all the walks that we're doing is the stories of the people that we meet along the way,' he tells me as we speak about the programme.

'We see lots of different places and landscapes in very different parts of the country,' he explains. 'On our walks we meet various characters, and all of them have some sort of

**Everyone we meet has some sort of connection to that land**

spiritual, physical, emotional or historical connection to that land.'

While some of the landscapes that JB and Mehreen visit will be familiar to viewers, the programme aims to bring those areas to life by looking at the lives of the people who reside there. With their help, the two presenters uncover the stories behind each location's spiritually significant sites such as places of worship, monuments, burial

**JB GILL talks to Sarah Olowofoyeku about the journey his new programme has taken him on**

grounds or places of pilgrimage.

'One of the journeys I went on was in Dartmoor,' says JB. 'Lots of people go walking there and it has a deep history and culture. But it's a bit of a wasteland and quite a bleak, barren landscape. So what was interesting was meeting the people who have visited Dartmoor a number of times and then have chosen to make it their home.'

'I also went to Edinburgh, which is one of the most popular cities in the UK. People come from all over the world to visit it,' he says. 'But I go on a walk that's probably a bit off the beaten track, so even if people have been to Edinburgh, perhaps they'll see something in the show that they haven't experienced before.'

In all eight episodes, the journeys taken by JB and Mehreen will feature either a

literary, historical, biographical or artistic theme. The aim of the programme, says JB, is 'for people, whether they've got a spiritual background or none, to be able to engage with the countryside, with certain stories or with the spiritual aspect of it as well. Mehreen is from a Muslim background, so both of us have a different take on whatever we experience.'

JB finds that he is able to connect with nature on a spiritual level. 'When you go outside and look around, there are so many things that we can see and we know how they happen, but it's very difficult to explain why,' he says. 'For me, it's impossible not to see elements of God in nature. I'm a deep thinker as well so I enjoy having that space and the time to think. I love just being outdoors and seeing how things function.'

**It's exciting for me to demonstrate the different aspects of the country**

Along his journey, JB met others who shared the same faith as him, as well as those who didn't. But what stood out for him were the things that people are doing with their everyday lives up and down the country. He gives the example of a church in Scotland that is reaching out through social enterprises to members of its community who are marginalised because of addiction or other difficulties. One such enterprise is a wood workshop.

'The stuff these people are making is incredible,' he enthuses. 'It shows that they are talented and do have something to offer. What that church in Scotland is doing is amazing because it's what Jesus did. We can't expect respect as a

church just because we are a church. We have to go into the places where people don't want to go, to the people who feel like they're not welcome and communicate with them.'

In another episode he meets a group of Christian surfers in Cornwall serving the surfing community in a chaplaincy-type role. He also meets a woman who is a practising Buddhist, and people who are involved in a social enterprise centred on Punjabi food that is empowering women in the Sikh community and beyond.

'My biggest takeaway from this show were all these hidden stories,' JB explains. 'There are so many things that can be shared between communities and they should be appreciated.'

At a time when the country seems to be quite divided, JB is sure that a programme such as *Walks of Life* is a positive way of showing and celebrating the diversity in faith and race across the UK.

'It's a unique show,' he says. 'It's really exciting for me to demonstrate the different aspects of the country and the incredible elements that we have within our communities. It's about introducing our nation to the hidden gems within our countryside. There's something for everybody.'



JB Gill



Mehreen Baig

