

GEORGE MCGAVIN

A childhood stammer led entomologist Dr George McGavin to a career in science and a place to hide – but he surprised himself by finding his voice and becoming a TV presenter

SCHOOL DAYS AREN'T

ALWAYS THE BEST DAYS

- As a toddler I was slow to start talking – and then spoke with a stammer. It's a common neurological condition, that affects one in a hundred adults, but as a child, I found it completely mortifying and I became the butt of jokes and bullying at school. Even though I was a natural extrovert – and my parents called me a show-off – having to read out loud in English lessons was such

Below

George's extrovert nature helps with his public speaking

torture that I would have fought off bears to avoid having to do it. At 14, I pretended to be mute. I kept it up for about a year, but my inner extrovert was bursting to get out, so I had to start talking again!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PUT UP WITH NEGATIVE PEOPLE

- I'll never forget asking my father for a Timex watch for Christmas when I was ten years old. Referring to my stammer, he replied, "You can have one when you can speak properly." I never did get that watch, of course. Incredibly, when I was 40, on a phone call home to him, he still had the temerity to say, "You really must do something about that stammer. You won't



ACCEPTING WHO YOU ARE CAN BE VERY LIBERATING

- A little part of me had naively imagined that by becoming a scientist I could hide myself and my stammer from the world. I discovered that progressing with my career meant having to speak up at conferences, give lectures and even talk to the press. Although I hated my stammer when I was a child, I now see it as part of who I am.

get anywhere until you do." It was the final straw. I was married with two children and a very successful career, for God's sake! I put the phone down on him, and we never spoke again. It's something I've never regretted. In fact, it made me feel free.

TAKE TIME TO APPRECIATE THE NATURAL WORLD

- Despite growing up in a creative family – both my parents were artists – I loved nothing more than to lie in the grass, studying the fascinating world of insects going about their business largely undetected by humans. They've been around for more than 400 million years and there must be about eight million insect species on the globe – although only about one million have been described. They are the most abundant, successful and important multicellular life form on Earth. Without them we'd be gonners.

WE ALL NEED A HERO

- My passion for the natural world led me to read Zoology at Edinburgh University, where I had an amazing teacher – Henry Bennet-Clark – who gave me the confidence to develop as an entomologist, studying the insect world. Henry was an extremely kind man and, when

"THE BEST TEACHERS HOLD THEIR STUDENTS' ATTENTION BY KEEPING THEM ENTERTAINED AND THIS APPEALED TO ME"