

GORDON: THE REAL ME

EXCLUSIVE
By JULIE MCCAFFREY

IT'S the last place you'd expect to find the man who will be Prime Minister and a world leader within days – a no-frills cafe in a quiet London street.

But this is the unlikely venue Gordon Brown has chosen to give his most revealing interview ever to the Daily Mirror.

He stops to talk to customers as he makes his way to an empty table at the back of Eve's Sandwich Bar, a convenient pitstop between one meeting and the next.

And by the time he sits down to his bacon sandwich and mug of strong tea, both are stone cold.

A waiter nervously flaps, asking if he'd like a hot replacement, but Gordon says it's fine and chomps into his sarnie.

On Wednesday he will become PM when the Queen invites him to form a new government after accepting Tony Blair's resignation.

Now, away from the spotlight he is warm, relaxed and punctuates his conversation with hearty laughs.

And in an extremely rare glimpse of the man behind the suit, Gordon reveals how he competes with his three-year-old son John for control of the TV remote. He talks openly about his favourite TV shows, how he bites his nails (but doesn't like to admit it) and comes clean about his exercise regime.

His security team mingle with customers, but no staff sit in on our chat and no questions are vetoed.

Gordon Brown has promised his government will be devoid of spin – at any level.

"People are always trying to tell me to wear different colour ties," he says, keeping his pale blue silk tie clear of the dribbling brown sauce. "But I don't really take it too seriously. In the end I think you are who you are. Although when my wife Sarah gives me advice, I'm very happy to take it."

He is often accused of being unemotional, dour and obsessed with politics. But when asked what his late parents would say if they were here to see him become PM, he falls silent for a moment, sadness fleetingly crosses his face, then he smiles as if hearing their voices around the kitchen table.

HIS father John Brown, a Presbyterian minister, died in 1998 aged 84, while his mother, Elizabeth died three years ago, aged 86.

"My parents would probably say, 'Keep your feet on the ground. Do the best you can. And treat people fairly'. I'll be thinking of them. All the time."

He's fluent talking about his politics, but ask him something personal and it seems to disarm him for a moment. His answers don't come in perfectly-packaged soundbites but instead sound genuine and sincere.

But when he senses he has revealed as much of himself as he is comfortable with, he fixes me with a look that says 'Next question'. Like when I ask how Sarah was looking forward to her new role. "You'd have to talk to her," he says, unwilling to speak for his wife.

Of all his achievements in the past 10 years, it is his family – Sarah, 43, and sons John and Fraser, who turns one in July – of which he is most proud.

"My family have brought me luck. I think they've been very good for me," he says. The Iron

● **I'll follow my mum's advice: Do your best and treat people fairly**

● **I have a Chinese if I work late.. but I like to put my boys to bed**

● **I battle my eldest for the TV remote.. I like sport and The Bill**

Chancellor has told how the searing pain of losing his baby daughter Jennifer Jane, who died 10 days after she was born in December 2001, forever changed him.

And when people ask after Fraser, who was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis last year, he says his youngest son is in robust health.

"I think I'm realising that with very young children you have to be pretty flexible. The boys always wake me. It's 3am when one wakes up and 4am when the other wakes," he smiles, brimming with paternal pride.

A family evening in the Brown

household sounds like any other across the country, with prime time telly on in the background and a squabble for the remote. There is a constant power struggle between young John and his daddy over control of the family television.

Gordon



NEXT STOP: Brown's off

explains: "I have to compete with my son who wants to watch cartoons while I want to watch sport. I'm beginning to worry he thinks sport is a bad thing because it prevents him watching cartoons. He loves all the CBeebies programmes but his favourites change week to week. He used to watch Teletubbies and

Balamory, but Tommy Zoom is on the go at the moment."

And what does Gordon switch to if he can grab the remote? "Football, rugby, athletics or tennis. And I quite like some of the crime programmes... Law And Order and The Bill.

"I saw a bit of the Apprentice and like Sir Alan Sugar very much. He's been a good friend to me and he's encouraged young people to be far more entrepreneurial.

"I liked Dragons' Den with Duncan Bannatyne and thought Britain's Got Talent was interesting because of its idea that



RELAXED: Despite his hectic schedule the next PM takes time for a chat and bacon sarnie with the Mirror's Julie McCaffrey



Pictures: JAMES VELLACOTT



JOY: With Sarah and boys

years." If the leader-in-waiting isn't strictly truthful about anything, it's his nail-biting habit. "I don't think I do that much at all," he says, swiftly hiding his gnawed nails from view and looking away.

For now, he feels "humbled, privileged and a huge sense of honour" about his impending new job. And just a little bit chuffed? "Well, I'm pleased people have good faith in me to do what I can, and pleased that I've been given the chance.

"I'm looking forward to getting up in the morning and feeling I can do some good. Meeting people and making them realise that we value their contribution and helping people do what they would otherwise never have been able to do.

"I love the Mirror's Pride of Britain campaign because it thanks and congratulates people and really encourages them to do good things. It's a great thing if you can make a little difference, helping people along the way."

BEFORE meeting for our interview he'd spent time with patient groups to discuss their experiences of the NHS.

He had listened sympathetically to patients, written their names in a bold, untidy scrawl and stored his rolled-up notes in the breast pocket of his suit as a reminder of their problems.

It is the people, rather than a gaggle of spin doctors, which will inspire and guide the next PM. Gordon says: "If you don't build your work around what's really happening to people, their real life experiences, then you'll never get things right."

"I'll never forget my first case as a Member of Parliament. A woman came to me because she'd been underpaid by her cafe boss. I managed to get her £1,500 – and that was in 1983. She was incredibly grateful – but told me not to tell her husband she'd got the money!"

His plate and mug long since empty, Gordon apologises for having to rush away. "I have people waiting for me at the Treasury."

With a friendly squeeze of my arm, a promise to meet again and a cheery goodbye, he tries to make his way out of the cafe. Old ladies stand up to shake his hand, builders with sweat-drenched T-shirts tell him he'll do a grand job and the cafe owner asks for a quick photograph for his wall, pleading that nobody will believe he's really been there.

"No problem," smiles Gordon, patting him heartily on the back. "You make a great bacon sandwich, by the way."

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you've got talent so let's help discover it and develop it. It's a good principle."

The television tug-of-war between father and son might run for years, but when it comes to using computers, little John has already won.

"I can use a computer, but I'm not as good as my son," he confesses. "I type with two fingers and using the mouse only became possible after a while. It shows how much young people are in charge of the computer age."

Having a fearsome work schedule means Gordon often has to rely on takeaway food. He says: "I'd be

lucky if I got home for tea, because I'm usually working later than that. Funny enough I was working in the Treasury the other night and ordered in a Chinese lemon chicken."

But he puts his boys to bed as often as he can at home in Downing Street. However, returning to his constituency and red brick family home in North Queensferry, Fifeshire, something Gordon wants to do as soon as his work load permits.

"I feel totally relaxed there," he says. Going home also gives him the chance to watch the local football

team he has supported since his boyhood in Kirkcaldy. "I've already got the Raith Rovers fixtures list for the start of the new season," he smiles.

He isn't fazed by the inevitable stress he will encounter as a world leader and points to the last 10 years' experience at the Treasury as proof that he can cope.

He believes keeping fit helps deal with pressure and is often found pounding the treadmill at the Westminster gym at 6.30am, flicking through the days' newspapers. Asked

if he has a six pack, he roars with laughter. "I said I try to keep fit," he says, still chortling. "I used to play football, rugby and sometimes tennis. But now it's running or swimming – easy things."

"I try to exercise in the mornings, but sometimes it's not so easy when you've got meetings first thing and young children. The treadmill is what you do if you can't run around the town. And all that's left of my tennis game is the serve."

"But I used to play tennis when I was at school for the local team, and was the boys' champion for two