

A CONVERSATION WITH...

Brooke Satchwell

INTERVIEW BY TARA ALI

The actress and charity champion on the environment and being "the girl in the cupboard"

Although best known for her stints on Aussie institutions *Neighbours* and *Play School*, you might have seen Brooke Satchwell in the news for a different reason recently – the 28-year-old made headlines when she was caught in the middle of the Mumbai terrorist attacks, escaping gunmen by hiding in a hotel cupboard. Afterwards, at her local Blockbuster store, the man behind the counter asked, "Are you the girl that was in the cupboard?" Satchwell laughs when she tells this story. "It's hard to know what I'm known for these days! It's been 'the girl from *Neighbours*', it's been many things." Satchwell has a film called *Subdivision* due out this year. She also supports environmental causes, including Make Poverty History, Australian Youth Climate Coalition and The Bottled Water Alliance. But not in a bandwagon-jumping way – she's keen to point out the connection between these organisations. "Each one is about engaging people and empowering them, which is the only way things are going to change."

There are so many different causes to support. How do you choose?

I grew up on the Mornington Peninsula [in Victoria] and was lucky to have an idyllic childhood among trees, close to the beach. I had the freedom to roam, and that's something I'd like to pass on to my children and grandchildren. The way things are going at the moment, that isn't looking incredibly promising. I'd worked with Jon Dee, the co-founder of Do Something, back in my *Neighbours* days when he was running Planet Ark, and I bumped into him again when I moved back to Melbourne. He was setting up Do Something, which I thought was a fantastic concept. It connects existing charities and resources and helps them work co-dependently – like a one-stop shop for people to get information and get started. Things spilled over from there.

Recycling, water, the climate... Do you ever suffer from eco-stress?

This is why I stepped in to this area. As life becomes busier and more stressful, it seems difficult to make *any* changes, like giving up a vice or trying to be healthier, let alone climate change. People get overwhelmed. Having a public profile gives you a certain amount of notoriety, and it's worth using that for a good purpose. I grew up surfing and we faced a number of

sewage issues on our local beaches. Water's important to me, so I aligned myself with the Bottled Water Alliance. I was also honoured to put my name to Make Poverty History because it was about education as opposed to asking people to put their hands in their pockets.

That's why we chose you for our *Down To Earth* issue, in support of Earth Hour on March 28, but you don't seem to court publicity...

I was originally interested in behind-the-scenes stuff. I'd dress my sister and cousins up and direct them in Christmas concerts. Then I fell into acting at 15. Having big teeth, blonde hair and blue eyes, I had one of those "picked off the street" moments. I really enjoy acting, but for a few years I found it difficult. I went in at a professional level without studying it or having actively made that choice. I got that fraud sensation – I was worried I'd be found out.

That's a female thing, right?

Absolutely. When your confidence is low, you feel the need for validation. Over the last couple of years, I became a little introverted – I was getting stage fright on set and I think that's because I was uncertain about where I was going. In day-to-day life I was keeping really positive and being the person people knew me as, which then made it very difficult to do my job and disappear into another >>

PHOTOGRAPHY: MONTALBETTI AND CAMPBELL. HAIR & MAKE-UP: DIANE DUSTING/DLM. STYLING: CASSANDRA SCOTT-FINN. BROOKE WEARS DRESS BY AKIRA ISOGAWA (AKIRA.COM.AU)

Brooke goes bush



character, because in my life I was already playing a role. I got stressed that I wasn't living up to my responsibilities. That's why I took 18 months out, to investigate different paths, see what else I could do. I went to India as an attachment to a camera crew to learn sound recording and camera work. I also spent two weeks in Cambodia learning stills photography. I'm broadening my scope. My confidence has grown to the point where I now miss acting.

So you don't feel the need to become the next Guy Pearce?

I was worried that people would think something went wrong when I took time out, but I just decided to do something else and get over my own ego. It was about allowing myself to make different choices and not having to live up to other people's expectations. I had a great time doing *Neighbours*, and it opened many doors, but it's a double-edged sword.

What would people be surprised to know about you?

I'm incredibly shy – even I forgot that for a while. I was brought up to be very responsible and, when you work in entertainment, it's your responsibility to be communicative and open and receptive. I'm the sort of person who apologises when I get to the front of the queue in the post office, so I'm working on that. Also, I'd love to be a rock star. I got a drum kit for Christmas and I'm sure I have an inner Susie DeMarchi somewhere. I love rock and roll but shower-singing might have to do for now.

You seem in good shape...

I'm lucky – I have good genes. My dad's been 65kg his whole adult life. The downside is you take them for granted. I need to address my health issues at the moment – it's all show! I see a personal trainer when I'm in Melbourne and he gets me into shape. I stay active, and the reason I'm not really into clothes is that I like to wear things that mean I'm prepared for anything.

What do you do to relax?

I love to surf. When things get too much I feel I need to do something physical that takes the stress off my body and engages my mind so there's no room to think about anything else. I recently went skiing for the first time in a long time and that gave me the same feeling. But I also love a barbecue full of sausages, family and friends.

Any food philosophies?

I'd love to say yes! I'm not a huge seafood girl; I know how good fish is and I like the idea of it, but it's not my cup of tea. I try and eat well but I'm renowned for my unhealthy binges. I think because I'm active I get away with it. I just came back from America and that was dangerous – waffles, pancakes, ice-cream... I learnt to ask



"I'm obsessed with the weather"

for dressing on the side; I'm not opposed to dressing but I like to be able to see the greens! I sympathise with the obesity issues over there because every second shop is a fast food outlet.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

When I was 19 I was presenting at the Logies and during rehearsals I was being introduced as "the upwardly nubile Brooke Satchwell". Of course, when you dress up for award nights there's some cleavage, but I didn't feel comfortable walking out to that. So we came up with a quip response, saying that it was better than being downwardly puerile. But I wasn't sure if, in the pressure of the moment, I might make the situation worse by tripping over my words – I didn't know whether to say it or not. Then Jennifer Hanson (*Ten News* presenter) said to me, "What are you going to wish you could have told your grandchildren?" That answered the question for me. So I said it, and there was an audible gasp in the auditorium. Bingo! That advice still helps me be braver in situations today. **WH**



Tell us which celebs you'd like us to have convos with by going to yahoo7.com.au/womenshealth.

Satchwell's top eco websites

- 1 savefoodstopwaste.com**
Australians send 3 million tonnes of food waste to landfill every year, and this site offers tips on how to reduce that, including recipes to use up foods we all chuck out, like overripe bananas and leftover vegies.
- 2 bottledwateralliance.com**
This site has great info about how to change and simplify the way you use precious water.
- 3 powershift.org.au**
In July 2009, Australia's holding the first summit to educate our youth about renewable energy, green jobs and solutions for the future. I'm getting involved because the next generations will bear the impact of what we do.
- 4 blogs.crikey.com.au/rooted**
An unbiased, left-of-centre environmental blog that keeps me up-to-date on the debate and offers a broader view.
- 5 bom.gov.au**
I'm obsessed with the weather. For my 30th birthday I want to do a storm-chasing adventure tour at Tornado Alley in the US.