THE NATION'S FAVOURITE ENTERTAINER JONATHAN ROSS TELLS WHY HE HAS ALWAYS GOT TIME FOR OSCAR

'He is such a lovely, gregarious, sweet boy. That's what's so heart-rending'

With a wife, children and a menagerie of pets including a dog, cat, iguana, two salamanders, two chinchillas and several ferrets, it's a wonder Jonathan Ross manages to get to work, yet alone devote time to charity. But the father-of-three admits it is thoughts of his own happy family that has sparked a remarkable friendship with a 13-year-old boy who lives just a couple of streets away.

Oscar Thomas suffers from the genetic disorder Lowe Syndrome, which has left him with multiple physical and mental handicaps. And for the past seven years Jonathan has worked tirelessly for the little-known Lowe Syndrome Trust, helping raise vital funds to find a possible cure.

The TV presenter, who is married to writer Jane Goldman and father to Betty Kitten, 15, Harvey Kirby, 12, and Honey Kinney, nine, says: "It seems so unfair and especially with a genetic disorder such as this, which is so random. It makes me think, 'Oh my God, how lucky are we.'

"Whenever I meet someone whose children are ill, I always think how different their life is and how cruel it is that something that should be the most bonding and joyous thing for a couple can be so draining and become the centre of their lives. Jane and I have always been aware of that. Jane does work for Great Ormond Street Hospital and various other things, and I try to do what I can for the Lowe Syndrome Trust."

Oscar's mother Lorraine founded the Trust seven years ago after he was diagnosed with the debilitating condition. Today she runs it and works to raise funds, as well as being a full-time mum to her son.

Her tireless efforts have impressed the 47-year-old presenter, who admits he would find life hard in her shoes. "I've often asked myself, 'How would I cope if one of my children had this condition?' I'd probably get into bed and pull the duvet up over myself and wish it to go away," he says frankly.

"To be honest I don't think I'd be able to cope as well as Lorraine. I don't think I'd have the energy or the focus to pursue the cause in the way she does – I really admire how proactive she is. She can be a nuisance sometimes, but that's great! I'm being asked to do 30 things a week on top of my regular workload so most of the time I have to say no, to keep some degree of sanity and time for my family. What I admire about Lorraine is her persistence. She's always upbeat and polite but always persuades me to squeeze something in when I haven't got any time."

So much so that on the day of our photo shoot Jonathan arrives on his moped at 9am to meet up with Oscar

'Jonathan is warm-hearted and always there for me,' says Lorraine (below, with Oscar and his dad Andrew, an IT consultant). Known as a snazzy dresser, father-of-three Jonathan has frequently donated his suits to fundraising events for the Trust

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Popular Jonathan hosts a weekly Radio Two programme as well as his own TV chat show. He was also Barry Norman's successor on the BBC's flagship film show. He is regularly voted Radio Personality of the Year, was awarded an OBE in 2005 and has been named the most powerful man in broadcasting. Yet he's as well-known as a devoted family man as he is for his showbiz achievements. His name regularly turns up on the shortlist for the Father of the Year awards and Lorraine, 51, says his caring nature has kept the charity afloat.

"I can't thank him enough," she says. "He's warm-hearted and always there for me. He has been with Oscar since he was diagnosed and always asks after him and ruffles his hair. Jonathan is a family man, anyone can see that, and I think it's because of that he feels for us."

The rapport between the two is evident during our photo shoot as Jonathan laughs when Oscar jumps up

beard?' he reveals the secret behind his new look. "I just grew it because it was summer and now I'm keeping it because it annoys people!"

Jonathan became involved with the Lowe Syndrome Trust after Lorraine spotted him working out at her gym in north London. Realising he must live locally, she wrote to him explaining how she was struggling to get started and needed celebrity support. Although involved with several other charities, Jonathan pledged to do what he could. Seven years later, he's one of the charity's trustees.

"The fact that it was a charity that wasn't getting a lot of support made me feel it maybe needed a little bit of extra help," he says. "Because the condition affects a comparatively small number of children, some people are loath to give their time, so I was very happy to get involved."

Lowe Syndrome is caused by a defective gene that results in an enzyme deficiency and usually affects boys. Oscar was born with a hole in his heart, cataracts on his eyes and a kidney condition. But it was only when he was five that doctors at Great Ormond Street diagnosed Lowe Syndrome. Lorraine recalls: "We were devastated. I went into a café and sat there with Oscar and cried and cried. It's a day I'll never forget."

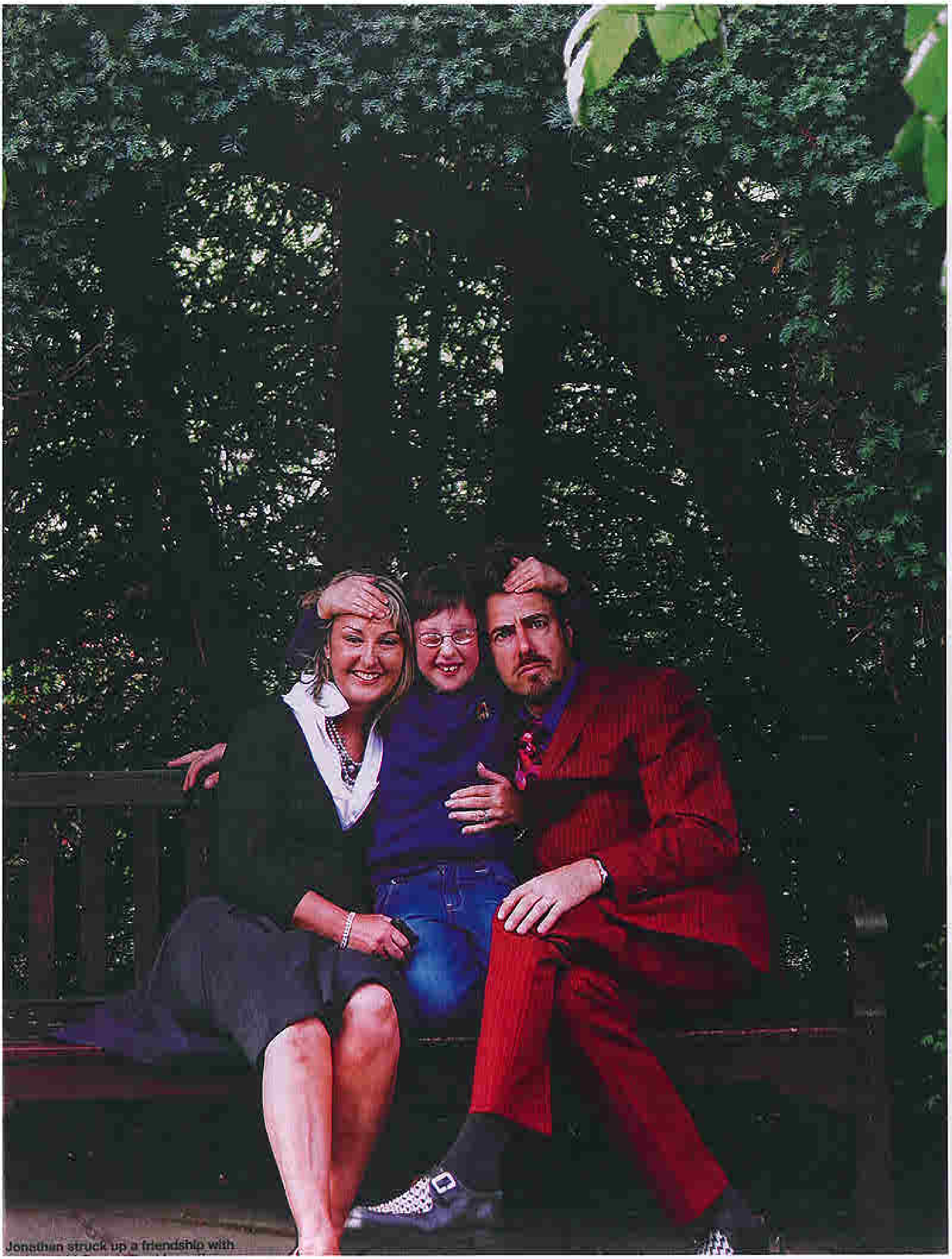
As he has grown up, Oscar has developed behavioural problems and was recently diagnosed with glaucoma, but can still attend a mainstream Montessori school. Many children with the condition have far more severe symptoms. Life expectancy is low and sadly many do not survive beyond their teens, but typically boys with the condition are happy, cheeky and fun-loving – as Jonathan testifies.

"Oscar is such a lovely, gregarious and sweet boy and every time I see him I forget how full of life and how much fun he is," he says. "That's what's so heart-rending about it. If more people met him they'd be more aware of what a terrible condition it is. You have young boys, like Oscar, who are normal, energetic youngsters yet are suffering these awful debilitating symptoms."

Over the years the charismatic presenter has attended countless fundraising events for the Trust and frequently donates his trademark stylish suits for charity auctions. To help raise further funds he is hosting a celebrity charity evening in central London on 25 September.

Says Jonathan: "When you see a little kid like Oscar bouncing around, your own problems don't exist any more. You see him enjoying every minute of life and you realise that's what you have to do too and if you can help a little bit, then you should." **H**

INTERVIEW: SUE CRAWFORD



Jonathan struck up a friendship with