

Julia Pimsleur Levine: Language is A Family Affair

By Julie Revelant

Quick stats:

Julia lives in Manhattan with her husband, Darren of 6 years and their two sons, Emmet and Adrian, 5 and 2 respectively.

Julia Pimsleur Levine knows what it takes to make big ideas a reality. An award-winning filmmaker and producer for 20 years, Julia's documentaries have been shown at the Sundance Film Festival, on HBO, CINEMAX ReelLife and PBS. Bilingual by age 6, Julia's father—the late Dr. Paul Pimsleur—was a renowned language pioneer who created the Pimsleur Method™, which revolutionized the way adults learn foreign languages. So when her first child was born, and she wanted to find a fun and effective way to teach him French, it seemed only logical that she take on the project herself. In 2006, Julia officially launched the Entertainment Immersion Method™ and her Little Pim products that teach babies and young children foreign languages. *Little Pim* has won multiple awards, sold thousands of copies, and is available in over 600 stores, including Barnes & Noble and online retailers nationwide.

Why did you decide to start *Little Pim*?

My son was just a few months old and I was already exposing him to French by talking to him and through CD's but he loved videos. He was watching other baby videos and I thought it would be great if the little bit of time that I allowed him to watch TV he could also be hearing French. So I tried to find something like that but there really was nothing on the market that was high quality and age-specific for young children. That's when I decided to create *Little Pim*.

Did you launch the business full-time?

I was working as a non-profit fundraiser and I actually did both for about a year and half. I started *Little Pim* as a side business with one part time employee and the website. I gave time to prove that it was valid and had legs and once I felt it did, I knew that unless I went full-time, it would never achieve its' full potential.

What were the steps involved?

I knew I had to create a character that was fun and engaging so I commissioned the Panda character, found an illustrator online and hired him to create it. Then we started working on the

method and actually developed it for two years. I looked at what was working in early education, and watched hundreds and hundreds of videos. I worked closely with a neuroscientist, Dr. April Benasich and talked to her about what would help the language to sink in best. I produced the pilot and did all the writing myself. I also attended a weekend-long training for people who want to produce for preschool television and I learned a lot about the importance of some of the structural aspects of producing for young children. I put as much attention into the creative, fun part as I did into the language, learning part.

How did your experience as a filmmaker help?

My filmmaking background is critical because one of the key driving forces behind it is that it needs to be just as entertaining and fun as anything else a child could watch. I have very high standards for quality; so for instance, the whole series is shot in HD. That quality was very important to me and it's usually one of the first things that parents notice and they enjoy watching it with their kids because of that.

Why do you think it's so important for children to learn other languages?

There's a critical window of opportunity from 0-5 when kids can easily learn more than one language. For parents to take advantage of that is really important. Also, in this global economy, knowing a second language is no longer a luxury, it's become a necessary skill for getting a good job and remaining competitive in the marketplace.

What were some challenges along the way?

One of the greatest challenges is distribution. Even if you make a great product, when you're in a crowded space like the kids' space, there are so many big players you're competing with and it's so hard to get shelf space and even real estate on the internet.

What was the biggest key to your success?

The panda! The kids love the panda. Everyone wins: the parents are thrilled because their kids are learning something and the kids are excited because they love this character and they're also very proud of their new language skills.

What's advice do you have for a mom who wants to launch her own business?

Don't be afraid to have a very big vision. It's probably not worth doing it unless you're willing to do it on a very large scale. Also, don't be afraid to seek the skills you don't have to complement



yours. Professional development is one way and also, surround yourself with people who know the things that you don't.

How do you manage work/life balance?

I have a new theory about work/life balance—it doesn't exist! For me, there's "work/life contrast" in the sense that I want to do both parenting and working to do the degree that one makes me miss the other. Every day is different and every day it's a different juggling act.

What does your mother think about continuing your father's legacy?

What's not well-known is that she was very influential in creating the Pimsleur Method™ with my dad so when it came time to do Little Pim, she was incredibly helpful in conceiving the method and overseeing production. My mother had her own small production company when I was a child and so she was my first role model as an entrepreneur. She's super involved as our Language Consultant and is credited as Consulting Producer.

What's next?

We're partnering with companies that have a big presence in the digital space. We're working with PBS Kids Play! on the first language teaching game and we're also going international and making more digital products like iPhone apps and other interactive games.

For more information about Julia Pimsleur Levine and *Little Pim*, visit www.littlepim.com.