

Being bullied has made me stronger

Coronation Street's Kym Ryder reveals why it's OK to be different, why her kids have made her life better, and why being in the soap is such a great job...

When Kym Ryder was named Tesco magazine Mum of the Year, it was an honour she was thrilled with.

The actress had children David, now 12, and Emily, 10, by the time she was 21. 'Luckily I've never been much of a party girl, so I don't ever feel I've missed out,' she says.

'My kids have just made my life better. I owe everything to my parents, they gave me the best possible start. I would love my kids to look at me in the same way and be proud of me.'

Kym has travelled a long way from the insecure teenager who was picked on by bullies while growing up in Wigan.

'Even now my stomach churns when I pull up outside a school,' she says. 'And my worst fear is that my children will suffer from bullying too.'

'I don't know why I was picked on. Maybe it was because I was bit different - I wanted to be in shows rather than chase after boys.'

'But whatever the reason, some of the other girls at school would use any excuse they could to call me names.'

'Like the fact I didn't develop as quickly as everyone else, or that my dad had lost his business and we didn't have much money.'

'They'd call me a scrubber because of the old car he drove. It was hideous.'

'I'm still haunted by the memory of those school bullies punching me in the face and pulling my skirt up in the middle of the playground.'

'I used to blame myself and think there was something wrong with me,' she says, close to tears.

'But the main thing to remember is that the problem lies with the bully, not the victim.'

'Working through the experience has made me a stronger person.'

'But there should be more severe

punishments for children who bully. If there were, maybe there wouldn't be children taking their own lives as a result.'

'School years are a very sensitive, and often difficult, time in a child's life so the last thing they need is to be bullied too.'

'There's nothing wrong with being different. The funniest thing is when I hear that those same bullies have told people they used to be friends with me,' she laughs. 'It's pretty ironic.'

Kym, 32, has put her own unhappy experiences to good use by supporting the charity BeatBullying.

'I felt very isolated from other children growing up so it's nice to be able to share my experience and show you can come out the other side of a traumatic situation and be better for it,' she says.

Kym still suffers from panic attacks, which may be connected with the low self-esteem that resulted from being bullied at school.

'People find panic attacks difficult to understand,' she says. 'The attacks are irrational, but it's a real illness and it's not simply a case of pulling yourself together.'

'When I have an attack I can't breathe. It's as if someone's sitting on my chest, and everything feels really strange. I had one when I was driving and I thought I was dying.'

'It was terrifying. But they're a lot more common than people realise.'

'Mine started at 21 and they can take over your life. I couldn't go into my corner shop. It might seem silly, but I'd start to sweat because I knew the last time I was in there I'd had an attack.'

Kym had counselling and tried hypnotherapy, but neither helped. It wasn't until she had a series of bizarre therapy sessions with a life coach, which included

'School was hideous. I still suffer panic attacks'



Kym and Jack, David and Emily

being squirted with paint and regressing to talk to her late grandfather, that Kym experienced a breakthrough.

'I hadn't driven a car on the motorway for years as I didn't want to get into a situation where I couldn't stop if I had an attack,' she explains. 'But now I drive myself to work, which I never thought I'd be able to do.'

'These days I consider my condition to be like an old friend. I know what will happen if I do have an attack, so they don't last as long. In fact, I haven't suffered an attack for over two years.'

Kym's determination shines through every area of her life. Despite recently separating from her husband of six years, former EastEnders Jack Ryder, the pair remain good friends. And Kym is adamant the split won't affect her children.

'I choose to keep our home life private as much as I can. I don't like reading about other people's relationships - it's no-one's business but the people involved - which is why I tend to stay out of the limelight.'

'The attention can be especially hard on your family as they're not used to it. And I want to protect David and Emily.'

Meanwhile, Kym's career is thriving. She has received professional acclaim, winning awards for best soap newcomer for her role as Michelle Connor in Coronation Street. And for Kym her current job on the nation's favourite street is a dream come true.

'My first day at Corrie was nerve-racking,' she says. 'I was meeting all these people I'd watched for years.'

'I worried about whether they'd welcome me or think I wasn't really an actress, and how the press and the public would react.'

'But everyone was lovely. I've been good friends with Beverley Callard (Liz) and Ian Reddington (Vernon) ever since.'

'The main reason I left the pop group Hear'Say was because the music industry is very fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants.'

'You have to be seen everywhere. People are buying your product so you have to remind them you're there.'

'I didn't have any time to see my kids. And I just couldn't survive like that.'

* A full version of this article appears in the latest issue of Tesco Magazine, from Cedar Communications



the BUZZ



WHAT THE DICKENS?

The BBC adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit* this autumn will be big news. Joining the illustrious Amanda

Redman, James Fleet, Andy Serkis, Tom Courtenay and Mackenzie Crook, is recent BAFTA winner Ruth Jones of *Gavin And Stacey* and ex-Doctor Who assistant Freema Agyeman.

FAMILIAR FACE IN A NEW PLACE

Former Coronation Street and The Royal star Paul Fox has just joined *Casualty* as a cast regular playing the horribly arrogant private clinical nurse manager, Simon Tanner.



VOICE BOX

Carole Shaw, Stockton-on-Tees



'My moan is why are most reality shows hours long and some even span the whole weekend, and yet a great show like *Benidorm* is only half an hour? It's a brilliant comedy and true entertainment, with fantastic actors like Johnny Vegas and Wendy Richard and deserves at least an hour-long episode.'

It's worth £20

GOT A TV GRIPE? We'll pay £20 for every letter published. Write to: VOICE BOX at our address on page 3!



BROOK'S BACK

Kelly Brook has been signed up by digital channel Living to become a judge on its *Dirty Dancing*-inspired reality series. Brook will help find the next *Johnnie and Baby* from the hit 1980s movie in the second run of *Dirty Dancing: The Time of Your Life*, replacing Jennifer Ellison, a judge on last year's series.

Living's *Dirty Dancing* show was filmed at the original location of the film in Virginia, with the winners securing a year-long contract with dance agency Bloc. It's one of Living's key series for the summer season.

* Coming to a screen near you

* Joanna Lumley is in Norway for BBC1's *Land Of The Northern Lights*. * Katie Price, aka Jordan, may star in a remake of 1988 vampire movie *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*. * Smile's Lily Allen is working with James Corden and Mathew Horne of *Gavin And Stacey* fame on new sketch show *Horne And Corden Have Come*.

WANNABE ON TV?

Channel 4 *Supremanny* Jo Frost can help transform family life, creating order from chaos in just a few weeks. If you have two or more children and would like to take part, please contact the *Supremanny* team on 01273 224823 or email: supremanny@ricochet.co.uk

YOU WOT?!

'The worst buy from a contestant had to be a strawberry trug. She thought it was something for putting strawberries in when you pick them. There's no such thing. I had to say to the woman: 'That's not a strawberry trug. That's a few bits of orange box nailed together, love.' She'd paid £40 for it.'

- David Dickinson describes a very unreal deal. Catch him on ITV1's *Dickinson's Real Deal* every Monday.