

# Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE



Issue Thirty  
Spring 2020

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Emma-Jane Taylor

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## Her Edit



## Welcome to Her Edit

To begin with, sad news of the death of Rebecca Fairman, a successful graphic designer, talented ceramicist and founder of the Arthouse1 gallery in Bermondsey. Arthouse1 hosted the Dear Christine exhibition we featured in our last issue, but it was just one amongst many which demonstrated Rebecca's curatorial vision, aesthetic sensitivity and passion for art. The gallery was a labour of love which gave a huge number of early and mid-career artists and curators the opportunity to show in a beautiful space. Not least Rebecca was incredibly warm, gracious and generous of spirit and I will miss our chats in the gallery very much.

Since we began putting this issue together, the wider world has dramatically changed. I've been in lockdown with my mum for six weeks (pictured above) and while we're still smiling, we're all having to draw on our reserves of positivity and resilience. So it couldn't be more timely for us to feature Emma-Jane Taylor's remarkable story of how to survive life and thrive. Emma-Jane will also be sharing her thoughts on how to keep well and flourish during lockdown and beyond on our website in the coming weeks.

We're delighted to feature the story of how Sister Vicky and school head Mary McMillan brought together communities in Nakura, Kenya and Gateshead in the north east of England, supporting women and their families.

Also in the north east, Carolyn Kelly turned her dream of an acting career into a performing arts school with a focus on inclusivity, enabling youngsters to develop confidence and skills for life. Still in the performing arts sphere, young jazz musician Daisy George shows us that the big instruments are not just for the boys. If you're looking for some great music to see you through the coming weeks, check out her top five album choices.

Do keep safe, you keep safe and well with love from the Her Edit team.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jayne'.

Her Edit

# Her Issue Thirty



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IMAGES

Left: students at the Bravo Performance school;  
Right: Daisy Good, left, with fellow musician Jay Kayser, performing earlier this year.

Emma-Jane Taylor is an entrepreneur and Chief Executive of The Works, a series of lifestyle businesses which grew from her training as a dancer and fitness instructor. She is a motivational speaker, mentor and presents The Emma-Jane Show on Youtube.

In 2018, she published Don't Hold Back which detailed the sexual and psychological abuse she experienced as a child, as a self-help book and inspirational guide for others. She lives in Henley with her 11 year-old daughter Betty-Mae.

Emma-Jane spoke to Jayne Phenton about how processing her past has shaped her life and is creating her future.

# EMMA-JANE TAYLOR

## Speak up and speak out

**For some of us, when life gives us lemons,** we slice them and put them in a gin and tonic, but for others trauma can be a powerful motivator. As a nation, our Victorian emotional circumscription has traditionally suggested our grief, psychological wounds and life's battle scars are things to conceal, ignore or even be a source of shame.

However, our more emotionally enlightened times and the explosion of the wellbeing and self-improvement industry has made the survivor's story the heroic parable of our time.

One singular story can have far more currency than statistical verity. From MeToo to Time's Up to Operation Yewtree, the aggregation of people's experiences has created a momentum which has potentially changed thinking, behaviour and driven social change. We are encouraged to 'speak out', to inspire, to be brave, to be better.

For Emma-Jane Taylor, speaking out has been fundamental to restoring her psychological and emotional wellbeing and consequently enabled her to build a successful business and happy life.

'We all have a voice to be listened to, not just heard and that relates obviously to my story. I never used my voice enough to be heard; now I know I'm being heard whether people like it or not.'

Emma-Jane's story is a remarkable one which she relates in her book Don't Hold Back, published in 2018. Promoted as a 'motivational tool book', it is essentially an autobiography in which she shares her recovery from the trauma she experienced in childhood and the life-lessons she has learned via a panoply of therapies. Emma-Jane was sexually abused aged nine, but it is the brutal rejection of her by her father which seems to have had the most damaging impact on her life with the most harmful consequences.

Emma-Jane's parents were divorced, but she had contact every week with the father she clearly adored, until he inexplicably said he could no longer see her. To this day, Emma-Jane has no explanation for her father's decision or his behaviour and has been unable to re-establish a relationship with him. While she now recognises that 'good guys don't do this to you and good fathers don't reject their children', it is still heart-



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rending to hear her talk about the father she 'put on a pedestal'.

'When you've been rejected and abandoned as a child, you have no idea of what that means for your future. I couldn't understand why my dad didn't want to see me. If you haven't had your heart ripped out like that, you can never understand what that looks and feels like. I hurt for years and years. It clouded my judgement on relationships, on family relationships; I became complicated and confused because of what my father had done.'

The young Emma-Jane struggled to process the pain and rejection, became introverted, nervous and lost the ability to trust those around her. Perhaps inevitably, being so profoundly vulnerable made her easy prey for an older man who groomed and then abused her when she was in her teens and set her on a path towards drug use and alcohol dependency.

'I fell into some serious situations with child abusers. I was a very vulnerable child and I blame that situation for a lot of things that then happened in my life.'

She focused on something she loved – dancing – carving out a career performing in the West End, on television and in cabaret, but success was characterised by a chaotic lifestyle fuelled by a diet of coffee, nicotine and alcohol. Aged 22, Emma-Jane recognised she needed psychological help and began the painful process of addressing her childhood experiences through 'the A-Z of therapies' including Reiki and hypnotherapy. She also went to a clairvoyant

'I knew I had to go into therapy. I was really on the edge. I certainly had PTSD which caught up with me. I couldn't sleep in the dark. The fallout from all these situations has such a big impact on your life. I was out of control and that was my way of covering up those deep-rooted fears.'

Emma-Jane radiates optimism and inner strength and despite the tragic events which characterise her story, she relentlessly focuses on the positive. Retiring from dancing in her early twenties, she established the Stageworks performing arts school in Henley-on-Thames.

From leading one class of 20 children, she established a branch in Bristol, which she has since sold, expanded into Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire and now leads a team of 20 who teach dance and performing arts classes to children aged four to 19. The school celebrates its twentieth anniversary this year and Emma-Jane is as passionate about it now, as when she 'started a few dance classes.'

'I had no idea what my business was going to look like; I was just happy to be dancing and happy to be creating for children and adults. I don't think of it as an empire, it's just something I enjoy giving back. I genuinely love what I've built and it's been built on a difficult past from which I've learned.'

It was a pivotal moment in her dancing career which led Emma-Jane to develop her business further. After a long day, she had returned home and eaten a makeshift evening meal of tea, chocolate and cheese, then she was violently sick. While she was clearly fit from her dancing, she didn't feel healthy.

Emma-Jane studied nutrition and weight management and launched NutritiousWorks which offers weight-loss programmes, personal training sessions and boot camps. Testimonials from satisfied slimmers boast of the loss of multiple kilos and centimetres and the gains in fitness and confidence, but if the regime is anything like Emma-Jane's then you'd expect that to be so. Since the tea/chocolate/cheese dinner episode, she hasn't touched tea or sugar for 11 years. She doesn't drink alcohol and her treats are 'the odd oatcake, a few nuts and the odd bit of cheese.'



**'I hurt for years and years. It clouded my judgement on relationships, on family relationships.'**

IMAGE  
Emma-Jane aged around 12 years old  
Courtesy of Emma-Jane Taylor

If this suggests an iron will and a high degree of self-discipline, then I think Emma-Jane has both in spades. She is 'obsessive' about discipline and has a schedule from the minute she gets up, till she goes to bed. Similarly her family life runs on a timetable and she is meticulous about order in her work with whiteboards detailing activities so she can 'see what's going on and what I need to do; everything I need to make life a success. I don't mean in a monetary way, but being a good mum, a good partner and making sure I am at my best for the team I work with.'

She is equally painstaking about carving out her leisure time; work takes a back seat at weekends so she can spend family time with her 11 year old daughter, although she concedes that by Sunday evening she needs a clean, organised household to be psychologically prepared for the next working day.

Emma-Jane describes herself as ambitious and brave; her boyfriend says she has 'balls of steel'. Successfully negotiating the therapeutic processing of the damaging events Emma-Jane experienced early in life seems to have equipped her with a superhuman fearlessness and she refuses to 'allow negativity in'.

A key part of her recovery was forgiving the men who betrayed, mistreated and exploited her; if that sounds an ask too far, then it actually seems to have equipped her with self-empowerment and determination. The occasional social media trolls are to be pitied and the first was jokingly seen as, 'a sign I've really made it.'

'I always feel like I will be OK because I will always learn and find opportunities in whatever I'm faced with. When you've experienced crisis and trauma and you've got through that, you know you can always survive anything.'

Emma-Jane is pursuing the next phase of her career as a motivational speaker and mentor - she is marketed as 'The Inspirational Mentor' - and presenter of her own Youtube channel broadcast outlet, The Emma-Jane Show. She continues to manage Stageworks and her fitness businesses, is a regular contributor to Marlow FM Radio, runs the online networking events, SheNetWorks, and is writing her second book, Put Your Big Pants On.

Telling her story publicly, via her first book, was clearly pivotal to the development of Emma-Jane's brand as an advocate for 'speaking out' and aligns to her ethos of wanting to share what she has learned to help and benefit others.

'By speaking up and sharing, I hope to help people improve their lives. It's taken me 25 years to get here - I want to share and help people get through their difficult times. It's really important for me to give back, whether that's as a speaker or mentoring people who need support or help building resilience or overcoming things.

'If there's one key message, I would say there is always someone out there for you; you must trust that and believe that not everybody is going to hurt you. Most people want you to be OK. When I found my strength to find therapy, it restored my trust.'



'I always feel like I will be OK because I will always learn and find opportunities in whatever I'm faced with.'

For more information visit Emma-Jane's [website](#) or catch up with her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#) or tune into [The Emma-Jane Show](#). Don't Hold Back is available to buy [here](#).



Despite being one of the leading economies in Africa, 46 per cent of people in Kenya live below the poverty line. Around 9.5 million children are deprived of at least three of the six basic needs for their wellbeing as defined by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) including health, education, water and housing. According to World Health Organisation figures, there is one doctor and 12 nurses or midwives per 10,000 Kenyans. The majority of work available is in the agricultural sector in a water-limited country subject to frequent droughts.

We're delighted to feature the work of Sister Rose Victorina Wanjiri - or Sister Vicky as she's known - who has done extraordinary work raising funds to support water supply projects and healthcare facilities in her home county of Nakuru. She belongs to the order of the Little Sisters of St Francis and is an inspirational champion for women and advocate for their education and wellbeing.

'I hope that by starting in a small way with my own village, my contribution may bring about change in Kenya.'

# SISTERS DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

## Sister Rose Victorina Wanjiri

**I grew up in the very remote village of Mbogoini in Lower Subukia, Nakuru County, Kenya.** My parents were peasant farmers and I am the seventh child in a family of 11.

From the age of 12 to 21, I got up at 4am every day and, before going to school, walked through a thick forest to collect water from a well which was situated on a steep hill. I had to carry a 20 litre water jar aware of the risk of being attacked by wild animals. My neighbour was killed by a buffalo on that same route.

Life in my village was extremely challenging, but this did not stop me from pursuing my dreams. Girls' education was not a priority because girls were meant to be 'housewives', but I was determined to be different, so I worked extremely hard often doing my homework by firelight.

I passed all my school exams well and in 1987, aged 21, I became a nun with the Little Sisters of St Francis.

In 1988 I trained as a nurse and recently got a Master's Degree in Development Studies. Not even living in my remote village with no water or electricity had deterred me from my vision, but I was aware of the women and girls who remained in my village and continued to endure hardship. So I started thinking of how I could help.

### **Water project**

I approached my friends Mrs McMillan, the head teacher of St Mary's RC Primary School in Gateshead, in the north east of England and Tony Sacco (Chair of the Gift for Life Fund and the parent of a pupil at the school).

They visited my village and saw the plight of children and women and fundraised through their church, led by Father Michael Humble, the school and their local community, to provide water for the village. They continue to do this to support the village. Water is life. They gave us life.

### **Sustainable and environmental conservation**

I still felt women in this village needed more. Farming here was mainly subsistence farming of maize and beans. I made a request for funds to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development through a special initiative called One World No Hunger to train women in sustainable agriculture.

Working with my religious order, we established a training centre in the village which has now successfully trained over 200 women and equipped them with the skills they need. This has not only improved their nutrition, and that of their families, but it is hoped it will be a small source of income for them too. The men wanted to be involved, so we have just started training courses in apiculture (bee-keeping) for them.

I often feel like a bird in a big forest among huge animals, but I hope that by starting in a small way with my own village, my contribution may bring about change in Kenya.



Mary McMillan is the former headteacher of St Mary's RC Primary School in Wickham, Gateshead. She initiated the project which led to the school being 'twinned' with two schools in Kenya, St Anthony's Primary School in Nakuru and the Catholic Parochial School in Nairobi, a relationship sustained for over 15 years.

St Mary's continues to work with the parish Gift for Life group, fundraising and supporting the work of the Little Sisters of St Francis. These projects have included enabling rural communities to access clean water, funding for sustainable farming projects, support for young mothers and a residential home for 'street boys' in Nairobi. Here she shares her experience of meeting Sister Vicky and witnessing some of her inspirational work.

**'Another aspect of Sister Vicky's work is empowering women to recognise their abilities and talents to change and manage their land.'**

## Mary McMillan

**I first met Sister Vicky in 2003 when I** became involved in a link project with the St Anthony's Primary School in Nakuru run by the Little Sisters of St Francis. Sister Vicky was providing health and maternity care provision from a classroom and raising funds to build a health centre on the site. She achieved this some years later and is now in the process of raising funds again to expand the centre with a second storey.

This project replicated one she had successfully initiated in Kasarani, Nairobi with the support of her superiors, her religious community, local community and donors. They created these amazing facilities for pregnant women, new mothers and the whole community by giving them access to good healthcare.

Another aspect of Sister Vicky's work is empowering women to recognise their abilities and talents to change and manage their land to provide food for themselves, their families and the local community. This is a huge success which continues to develop with additional aspects of farming including getting local men engaged in bee-keeping.

Throughout the years we have maintained the link with the Little Sisters of St Francis through reciprocal visits to various schools and sharing the similarities with, and the differences from, our pupils. Whenever we visited Kenya we would go to see the progress of the work of Sister Vicky and her team on the health, water and farming projects.

We have shared our enthusiastic feedback back home and consequently parishioners from our local parish of Our Lady and St Philip Neri, here in Wickham, have visited Kenya and witnessed for themselves the huge improvements to the quality of life for the families there.

We were deeply moved to witness the efforts of the people in Nakuru to address the life-threatening impact of extremes of climate and drought. We established a fund called Gift for Life. It was originally to support the completion of a water project in Subukia which has enabled local women to establish a sustainable farming project.

I am now retired, but the headteacher who followed me is committed to maintaining the school's links with Sister Vicky, so children in

both countries continue to be able to share life experiences.

I am an active parishioner and along with Tony Sacco, the Chair of The Gift for Life, and others we maintain our links with Subukia and we support projects through regular giving from our limited parish funds.

Sister Vicky is a humble, dedicated nun whose commitment to her order and calling is palpable. She works tirelessly for all the people she serves, but particularly for women, as they are the primary care-givers to babies, children and families. She has truly taken the empowerment of women forward and is inspirational.

## IMAGES

All images courtesy of Sister Rose Victorina Wanjiri

Daisy George has been playing music all her life, but it was listening to an album by legendary jazz musician Charles Mingus when she was a child, that led her to take up the double bass.

A graduate of the Royal College of Music, Daisy is now forging a career in music playing venues around London.

Jazz fan Jayne Phenton was delighted to meet Daisy and hear about her journey.

# ALL THAT JAZZ

## Daisy George

**Think of celebrated women in jazz and you might immediately think of Billie, Ella or Anita.** Apart from their talent and rightful places in the jazz pantheon, the thing they all have in common is that they are vocalists.

While there have been women instrumentalists in the genre from the beginning - Lil Hardin Armstrong, Alice Coltrane, Nina Simone - and big bands such as Woody Herman's had women players, the number and their visibility is low. Even now, less than five per cent of jazz instrumentalists in the UK are women.

Of all the jazz gigs I've been to in the last year, I could probably count the number of female players on one hand. So I was delighted to meet 23 year-old double bass player Daisy George at a gig in Peckham earlier this year, part of a cracking rhythm section supporting tenor saxophone player Denys Baptiste. Talking to Daisy a little while later, it seems I'm not the first to note that the double bass is not the first choice of instrument for women.

'For me it was always just that I like playing and listening to good musicians. What brought it home to me was people coming up to me after gigs saying, 'It's so nice to see a woman double bass player.' It's never bothered me, but I hope my presence is encouraging for people who are bit scared of entering a male dominated environment.'

Daisy comes from a musical family - her mum taught music, her sister played piano and her grandfather was always singing. Around the age of seven she took up the violin, had piano lessons and would play home-made drum kits. She says, 'If I hadn't played music, something would have been wrong.'

Although Daisy studied music at school, she found it quite academic and not really aligned with her passion for actually playing and learning as she did so. The first time she picked up a bass guitar was to support a school friend who wanted to start a metal covers band, but needed a bassist. Daisy thought, 'How hard can it be?'



‘The only thing that’s important is not to lose sight of the meaning of the music and what you’re trying to portray.’

But it was her mother’s love of jazz that captured Daisy’s imagination. Julia sang semi-professionally and would take her daughter to jazz gigs and festivals, which she loved. By the age of 15 Daisy began to question why she wasn’t playing this music that she liked so much. As she already played a string instrument and could read the bass clef, the double bass seemed the natural choice. Her early 18th birthday present - and for many birthdays to come - was her first double bass.

‘I was trying to learn to play the bass and jazz at the same time. I begged all the ensembles I played with if I could change to bass from the violin. Because there are never enough bass players, they always said yes. It felt so natural and I fell in love immediately. In my last two years at school, I still did classical lessons, but I also attended summer schools run by the National Youth Jazz Collective, Mehr Clef and the Montgomery Holloway Music Trust. That was incredible because I was suddenly surrounded by people my own age playing and they were really good; I was totally out of my depth, but I ended up going to college with some of those people.’

Daisy became completely absorbed in jazz and because she likes to be expressive and creative, says it feels like a natural home; the classical world can be more prescriptive with dress codes and protocols.

She travelled from her home in Twyford to London every Saturday and spent as much time playing in the capital as she could. She auditioned for a place on the junior jazz course at the Royal Academy of Music. Places are limited and some students have been playing jazz since they were ten years old, so competition is stiff, but a tutor had seen Daisy play three months earlier and recognised the incredibly fast pace of her development; the place was hers.

‘I needed the isolation, the focus and the direction that music college provided. I may now have a horrible amount of debt and living in London is hard enough as it is, let alone being a freelance musician, but I needed the security of college to move here. There are arguments against music college, especially around studying jazz, that it becomes about the technical aspect.’

‘The only thing that’s important is not to lose sight of the meaning of the music and what you’re trying to portray. You’re trying to make the audience feel something and it’s a collective experience and there’s a danger you can lose that if it just becomes an academic study of the subject. Jazz didn’t come from that and you don’t want to lose the roots of where it comes from.’

‘Studying has enabled me to be as fluent as possible, but the real learning comes from working with other people and doing gigs.’



It shows how far jazz has come that a music which was born out of African-American black communities with its roots in spirituals, gospel music and blues, has become a subject of study at music colleges and universities, but the breadth of the music now is such that it can embrace everyone. Daisy says her mum has been hugely supportive and goes to lots of her gigs. Playing a less popular instrument clearly has its advantages for a young musician.

‘Being a bass player I was always working from day one of moving to London. There was always a gig and it’s built up slowly. Some months I wonder if I’m making enough and in others I get these amazing gigs and can pay the rent!’

Of course you can’t talk to a someone creative without asking who their own heroes and influences are. For Daisy it was the Charles Mingus album, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, that she listened to all the time as a child and would try to play along with, even before she learnt the bass, transfixed by the magnificent sound and the energy. More contemporary influences include bassist Avishai Cohen and Israeli pianist Shai Maestro.

‘It’s [the bass] not a show-off instrument and often hidden at the back, but it has a certain role to play. I feel I have a lot of freedom when I play bass within in my alley, but the roles in a trio are much more equal than traditionally. I play what I sing and have a very melodic approach to improvisation and feel very at home.’

While she says she’s never been conscious of a gender bias, she concedes that female jazz bass players are few and far between and hopes that there is a slow progression towards women taking up the bass and other ‘masculine’ instruments like the drums. Having played with all female ensembles from a young age, her experience in the profession has been inclusive and she hasn’t had a negative experience. However, she does want to show that ‘it’s really cool to play the bass’ and ‘not just a thing the guys do’.

Daisy is doing just that, enjoying the breadth of the work she does with others and focusing on her own music and tour her own project next year. The Daisy George EP is out next spring, but Daisy enjoys a wide variety of genres and plays around five nights a week with jazz bands and pop singers.

‘I feel like I’ve learnt the most playing different music with different people in different situations. I think that’s how you learn the most. There’s always something to take away.’

The element of performance and creating a shared experience with the audience is very important to Daisy and she wants to play venues which will be inviting to everyone and as inclusive as possible. As a new wave of jazz musicians come through, they are bridging other genres and jazz, introducing a different generation to more ‘traditional’ jazz. Her favourite jazz spot is Kansas Smittys in London’s Broadway Market, but acknowledging the challenges that face music venues, if she’s not playing, Daisy lends her support. So what does Daisy listen to at home?

‘I could list 100 albums and each one fulfils a different purpose depending on my mood. Music affects my emotions very deeply, so a change can be quite profound. I might listen to 20 different albums on the go over a couple of months, until I’m introduced to a new one. I like so many different things and everything has its own place. I just love music and want everyone to experience the great way it can make you feel. I think it’s healing. Mum does music sessions with people with dementia. It’s a simple thing, but proves how powerful music can be.’

**Daisy’s new self-titled EP is out next spring; tour dates to be released later in the year. Until then keep up to date with live events and music on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)**

## Daisy’s top five albums

The Stone Skipper - Shai Maestro

Pratley - Pratley

Testifyin! Live at the Village Vanguard - Benny Green.

Where the Light is: Live in Los Angeles - John Mayer

When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go? - Billie Eilish



IMAGES

All images courtesy of Daisy George



IMAGES  
All images courtesy VonFox productions

Carolyn Kelly loved performing when she was a child. As a dyslexic, she struggled with academic work at school, but found acting gave her the space for expression, ambition and purpose.

It has driven her to found Bravo Performance, a performing arts school with a focus on building children's confidence, resilience and developing skills for life which they can use outside the rehearsal room.

There are branches in Gateshead, Northumberland and South Tyneside. Here Carolyn shares her story and tells us why she's happy not to have a part in EastEnders.

# A BRAVO PERFORMANCE

## Carolyn Kelly

**I was honoured to be asked to write for Her Edit** and feel very lucky to do so. In a pretty testing time in the world, it's wonderful to have a platform that continues to celebrate strong and successful women. It's empowering.

I want to tell you a little bit about my business and what I do, but more importantly, I want to tell you about how I got there and why the journey is just as important as the outcome; because if I've learned anything, it's that things never usually go to plan!

Drama has always played a huge part in my life. I was never the most confident of children, but being the third of four siblings, I soon learned how to make myself seen when I needed to.

With ambitions of becoming an actor, coupled with a wild imagination, I found myself daydreaming my way through primary school and then went on to academically struggle through secondary. Looking back, I realise that

I had undiagnosed dyslexia and had never been offered the support I needed. I remember becoming extremely frustrated and I failed to understand why academia didn't come naturally to me, as it did for my peers and siblings.

I left school at 16 and went on to study acting at college. I blossomed from being a fairly under-confident and angry teenager into a happy, focused and confident performer. A few months before I turned 18, I had one dream; to move to London, go to drama school and get a job in EastEnders. I was clearly aiming high at this point! So, after a whole host of drama school auditions and a successful acting diploma under my belt, I was ready! That is until, I found out I was pregnant.

Being 18, unemployed and pregnant is not anyone's childhood dream, and honestly it was absolutely not an ideal situation. However, that one earth shattering moment changed my life in so many ways, you can probably imagine.



## ‘Are you happy? Are you passionate? Kind? Focused? To me, that’s the most important version of success.’

Not only did it give me a new found level of determination, but, though I didn’t know it then, it would inspire me to push myself and create a business that I would have never had the courage or confidence to build otherwise.

I applied for a place at a local university to study acting whilst I was pregnant. I had my interview and audition when my son was five weeks old – I had to take him with me, juggling monologues and breast feeding was as stressful as it sounds. Miraculously I got accepted and my place at university was secure.

I began to feel confident that I could juggle being a mum and having a career. I may not have a part on EastEnders, but I reminded myself that some parts of my life resembled a soap opera and that was quite enough drama for me.

As I approached the end of my third and final year at university, I was apprehensive about what I was actually going to do when uni was finished. I needed a job that was secure and paid well enough to support my tiny modern day family, but I wanted it to be something I enjoyed, something in performance. I didn’t want a ‘real job’.

So after various breakdowns and changing my career path entirely, I sat down with my parents

and told them all about a little idea that had been bubbling away at the back of my mind. I wanted to open my own drama school. A drama school with a difference.

Working with children was something I had never really thought about, until I had a child of my own. I didn’t know a lot about children, but I felt there was a gap in the market for something creative in my area. I didn’t have a clue about starting a small business, but as my idea grew so did my passion and I was determined to get out there and figure it out.

With the help of my local council and the Prince’s Trust, I slowly put together a business plan and got to work. Within two months Bravo Performance was born.

The idea of running a substantial musical theatre school and putting on big productions is amazing, but I knew from early on that that wasn’t the route I wanted my drama school to go down.

Although I came from a musical theatre background as a child and acting was my strength, I was never the strongest dancer or the most natural singer, so I would generally get slotted into the back row for shows. I understood why, and appreciated that putting on a big production is no easy job, but I couldn’t

help feel downhearted and began to constantly beat myself up, obsessively comparing myself to others.

I think my idea stemmed from those memories and helped me to build a drama school that is unique and completely all inclusive.

Our main focus at Bravo Performance is to help build confidence and imagination through drama and performing arts. We use drama games and character building exercises to help the children figure out ‘who they want to be’ within performance. We do everything from improvisation, script writing, storytelling, costume making and presenting. We’ve even been known to write our own rap songs! We try to cover anything and everything that the children who come to Bravo show an interest in. No idea is too crazy, we give everything a go.

What started as one small class with three children in my local community centre has now grown into six venues, teaching around 200 children throughout the North East every week. Bravo now has a number of teachers helping to run the sessions and many people behind the scenes supporting us too.

I think what makes Bravo Performance different is that our classes help the children we work with to see drama as a life skill rather than

solely a talent. Something that they can go on to use in every aspect of their lives.

I’ve witnessed at first hand the benefits of introducing drama to even the most painfully shy children. We show them it’s OK to be silly, it’s ok to let yourself go and it’s more than ok to be different – embrace it!

We have big plans for the future and we are working towards franchising so we can spread the Bravo Performance drama craziness far and wide.

I am so lucky that I absolutely adore my job and I am able to do what I do. The amazing children I meet every single day never fail to bring a smile to my face.

I believe passion and a willingness to learn (even when you keep getting it wrong) is the key to success. And let’s not forget, success isn’t always about how much money you earn or how expensive your car is. Are you happy? Are you passionate? Kind? Focused? To me, that’s the most important version of success.

**Find out more about Bravo Performance on their [website](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)**

# Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE

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