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if you're good at something, you can feel it in your heart



“**L**ook at you with your T-shirt and swishy hair. Is it nice weather over there?”

Cherry Healey disarmingly chides, melting away my nerves at having BBC London’s prized presenter perched on my breakfast bar.

It’s 8pm in Shepherd’s Bush in the UK, and lounging on her bed, the Cambridge-born journalist is every bit as lax and lovely on Skype as she is on screen. A Londoner from age 10 and with candour as her calling card, Cherry has spent the past five years tackling big issues – dating, sex, drinking, body image, getting married, having kids and money to name a few – in her immersive documentaries where she’s as much a part of the show as her subjects are. Her recent series *Cherry Healey: Old Before My Time* explores the long-term effects of alcohol abuse and sees her reflecting on slightly wilder years.

As the now mother-of-two regales me with tales of her rebellious youth, I wonder if confidence has always been onside.

“Like any human being, I’m confident and insecure in different areas – I value myself, but don’t always feel confident. Do you value yourself?” asks Cherry.

She can’t help but turn the interview around, it would seem. While baring her soul (and often skin) on screen, Cherry interviews people going through a similar patch, usually from vastly different perspectives. “There’s a cathartic loveliness of knowing we’re all in this together,” she says.

“When people are really honest about how they’re feeling, it’s calming for everybody.”

Her journey into gonzo journalism was a “mixture between opportunity and desire”.

After vetoing a desk job, Cherry started in production at the BBC.

She jumped at the offer of an immersive journalist role and was straight into the action. “If they were drinking, I’d drink,” she says of her interviewees.

“If they were going out on the town, I’d go out on the town. If they were wearing crazy clothes...” You guessed it.

“I just loved it,” she recalls.

“It’s one thing standing outside and looking in, but it’s quite another standing next to someone and actually wearing their shoes.”

Did she ever wish she could have taken them off? Grimacing on recollection, the interview with a dominatrix springs to mind.

“She was extremely cold and shut down any questions that were personal,” says Cherry, and then with hearty resolve, “I’ll get her one day!” But it’s not all dress-ups and role-play.

“I met a couple that smacked their children,” she recalls. “If it’s anything to do with children, it’s very hard.”

Does she struggle not to intervene?

“Sometimes I can’t help myself,” she admits, remembering the case of a woman determined to declare her love to a man after just one date.

“I try not to tell people what to do,” she adds, pausing to smother a laugh as her husband enters the room mid-interview, covered in baby sick.

“But,” she continues, composing herself, “I could tell that this was a terrible decision and asked her a hundred times, ‘Are you sure you want to do this?’”

The inevitable rejection played out. “I stayed with her for ages afterwards,” she says, compassionate as ever, but surely it’s hard not to judge?

“Of course, I always do,” she concedes.

“It’s impossible as humans not to put someone in some kind of box – that’s how we process the world. The best that we can hope for is that we understand how silly our first judgement is and shed it as quickly as we can.”

With her own judgement “held very lightly”, Cherry is fast to befriend her

subjects, still keeping in touch with many through “the glory of Twitter”.

“Sharing is a huge part of how I process things,” she says. While pregnant and filming *Cherry Has a Baby*, she “was absolutely bricking it”, but able to talk through her fears.

“The more women I met, the calmer I felt.” When walking down the aisle in *Cherry Gets Married*, she felt equally prepared.

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“It was such an awake and conscious moment. It’s very rare in life that there’s enough time to really ask yourself those big questions. It’s a massive blessing that I’ve had the opportunities and time to think about those big steps.”

Four years ago and with the camera rolling, Cherry gave birth to her daughter, Coco. Her son, Edward ‘Bear’, arrived late last year, and on motherhood she is utterly sold.

“With all my heart, I love it. But they absorb time like you wouldn’t believe – I’m lucky in that my job is flexible.”

She relishes the sporadic nature of freelance work, adding, “You don’t know what the hell is going on, but there’s excitement in that. There’s the thrill of the chase and when you seal a deal it’s a fantastic feeling – you’ve generated that all on your own.”

A brand ambassador for Cottonelle toilet paper (google the brand and Cherry’s name to see the top link “Let’s Talk About Your Bum”), writing across multiple titles and contributing monthly to *Mother & Baby Magazine*,

Cherry is now as much ‘personality’ as presenter.

“At no point does it come into my mind,” she insists, coy on the topic of fame.

Baby formula, a vomit-covered husband and losing her baby weight takes precedence.

“That other stuff happens on a different planet,” she laughs. “If it’s happening, I’m glad – I hope it means

more work!” It’s likely her next documentary will tackle just this – the work-life balance.

“How to forge a career at a time of your life when your body wants to have babies,” she gleefully divulges.

Behind the camera, Cherry has invested in some smaller projects, “to get closer to the production – I miss that”, she says.

A book is also in the pipeline, perhaps an autobiography? “Kind of,” she cautiously permits.

“Things that I have learned.”

On success, she’s humble, still feeling like she’s “blagging it”. But of her strengths she’s sure.

“If you’re good at something, you can feel it in your heart,” she says.

“If you know you’re a good journalist, then go for it,” adding that one of her favourite sayings is Woody Allen’s “80 per cent of success is showing up”.

“It’s so true,” she says.

“Find that story, access that person, and the rest just happens. Someone’s got to do that job – why not you?” ■

CHERRY BOMB

SHE WAS MARRIED on air and gave birth in the same fashion. We talk work, confidence and baby vomit with acclaimed British TV presenter CHERRY HEALEY.

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