

KATIE PIPER:

‘Women CAN’T HAVE IT ALL’

The presenter and activist on turning 40 and how *Loose Women* is fighting ageism in the TV industry

The word “inspirational” is used to describe a lot of people, but few have earned it quite like Katie Piper. Ever since she rose to prominence under the most traumatic of circumstances, the writer, activist and TV personality has been using her platform to raise awareness and improve the lives of others.

It was 2009 when Katie bravely put herself into the spotlight, one year after surviving an acid attack that caused major damage to her face and left her blind in one eye. In the years since, her charity – the Katie Piper Foundation – has offered continuing support to burn survivors, as well as people who’ve been through other types of traumatic scarring.

Now, the mum of two is a regular fixture on our screens. She’s always popping up

on daytime ITV, competed on *Strictly* in 2018, and joined the *Loose Women* panel in 2021. And this year, she’s back in the hosting chair of *Katie Piper’s Breakfast Show*, her ITV weekend mornings show.

With series three in full swing, we caught up with Katie to talk early starts, nights out, and being a “chaotic scruffbag” (her words, not ours)...

Firstly, how are you?

I’m good! I’ve got young kids [Belle, ten, and Penelope, six, with carpenter husband Richard Sutton], so I’ve been up since 6am, seizing the day. I’m an early bird. If I want to exercise, I’ve got to do it before everyone’s up – it makes me feel more productive. I go running with my neighbour, nothing too strenuous, maybe five or seven kilometres. Or I jump on zoom with

a female PT and she’ll basically destroy me for an hour.

You’re putting us to shame...

I see it as currency. I’m a normal person who wants to hit snooze and not get up when the alarm goes off. But once I’ve exercised, it sets me up to face the day.

Are you used to early starts with your breakfast show?

We actually pre-record on a Wednesday, but weekend breakfast is the perfect gig for me, because I’m up watching the telly on Saturday and Sunday with the kids, tweeting and Instagramming about it.

How involved have you been in the making of the show?

Very. We have around six guests per episode, so I’m constantly looking at trends and hashtags and people. I screenshot everything to the point where my camera





Girl mum: with her daughters

Show off:
presenting her
ITV weekend
show



roll is just screenshots of all these other people, like I'm some kind of stalker.

It must be exciting to have your name on a show?

That will never, ever feel normal. It's been such a dream of mine and I never lose gratitude for it.

Who've been some of your favourite guests?

We just had Dannii Minogue on – who, to me, is an absolute icon – and she knew all about me and my story, which surprised me. She was on with Pete Wicks, who is just so much fun. I know he's got this Lothario reputation, but I love him, he's such a laugh and is really intelligent and kind. He was really flirty and fun with Dannii, so it made a good pairing on the sofa.

What has your previous experience as a TV guest taught you about hosting?

It's about making people feel like they're in good hands and relaxed. This is breakfast telly – we're not trying to catch them out or get headlines about them. I know that, when I'm a viewer at home, I want to see people having fun and see their real personalities.

What do your daughters think about the show?

It's probably one of the first

of my projects that they've really liked. They're not going to watch *Loose Women*, because they're at school and it's a bit too old for them, and some of my documentaries are maybe a bit hard-hitting. So, it's quite nice for them to be like, "Oh, this is what you do. We never understood if you had a job."

This show is pre-recorded, while *Loose Women* is live. Do you have a preference?

I really love the opportunity to get to do both. Some people only do one, and then the other one becomes a big deal where they get nervous about it. But literally every single week, I'm doing a mixture of live and pre-recorded, so I never get worried about one or the other. I think live's quite good fun because it's fast-paced,

of women, so no show's the same. I've actually really grown doing it, because it's one of the few shows that isn't ageist. It values older women, it values their stories, their life experience. In telly – there's very few places I get to work

'I'm definitely not an inspirational person'

but pre-record gives you the freedom to change it slightly and redo things. **You joined the *Loose Women* team in 2021 – what's your favourite thing about the show?**

It's such a big roster

with women on screen who are 60, even 70-plus.

You must have learned to stand your ground in the debates, too...

Well, they don't want everyone to have the same views, and as women, it's really nice that we aren't

asked to be quiet and not make a fuss. We're told, "Come with your opinions and talk about them."

I think that's empowering. Who are you closest to among the panellists?

I love Denise Welch. She's so authentic. She can laugh at herself, she has a good sense of humour. I really respect Janet Street-Porter, too. Nadia Sawalha is like the mum, where she looks after everyone. She's really maternal.

But you all party hard, too...

They have a good Christmas do! The last one started off really civil with a quiz and food, then it ended up with karaoke. There weren't enough mics, so we were singing into bottles.

There's clearly great balance in the team...

They've all got great qualities for different reasons – I would say hardly any of us are similar. You hear really funny stories about things that you grew up watching on telly and you get all the intel. You get good advice from them, too.

You offer great advice, as well – how do you feel about being an inspiration to people?

If my story inspires somebody to make positive changes, I think that's great, and I'm really flattered. But I'm definitely not an inspirational person every day of the week. I miss the alarm. I forget the school play. I mess up at work. Sometimes I get angry and

Hanging loose:
with Kaye Adams,
Nadia Sawalha
and Jane Moore



Katie and her
husband Richie

frustrated. I think we all look for inspiration in life and it looks different every day.

Who inspires you?

The women and men I meet through my charity. It's not always a fluffy, happy ending, but they've made their way in life and found a way to be happy and stable. That resilience and pure grit really helps me put some of my daily problems into perspective.

It's amazing how you use your platform to tell other women's stories...

There's no power in just hearing my story – let's pass the mic! In a selfish way, it helps us all as women.

You always seem so positive – is that not the case?

That's so funny, because I see myself as a chaotic scruffbag. I follow a lot of people who, like, organise their drawers and colour code their wardrobe and I'm like, "Oh, I'm never going to be like that!"

Do you feel you're able to have bad days?

There is such a thing as toxic positivity, where you demonise other emotions. But, actually, to become positive, you have to process and experience negative emotions, or you

can store them up and have mental health problems. You allow those things to visit, but don't let them overstay.

Do you find it easy to strike that work-life balance?

I would say that's my downfall. I don't always get the balance, and I get overwhelmed. It can make me snappy or tearful, and I have to just let go. I don't actually like pretending to other women that you can have it all, because I actually don't believe you can. I don't want to perpetuate that idea of making other people feel like they're a loser. You can try, but you will always be shattered. **It seems like you and husband have a very balanced relationship...** Credit to Richie, because he holds the house together. I don't want to say he's a really good dad – he is fulfilling his parental responsibility, as he should.

And your kids are getting older, too...

I know. I always wanted to have kids and I feel so lucky to have them. It's a fun journey having two girls, as well. I am such a girl mum.

You turned 40 at the end of last year. How did you celebrate?

I had a birthday week. It's a bit extra, a bit Kardashian, isn't it? It was a real celebration. I was so happy to be alive, to be 40, to be in such a good place, to still be working in an industry that I love, to have a family.

What has surprised you about turning 40?

I had to mature really quickly in my twenties. A lot of things changed overnight for me, so I've already lived that change. But the most surprising bit for me was how society views it and how it's such a big deal to society, a woman turning 40 and what it means to them. Why is there so much shame against the

inevitable? [Ageing] is a privilege.

You did *Strictly* back in 2018. Any more shows on your reality TV bucket list?

I don't think I could do things like the jungle, because I've got too many medical restrictions that would make me a very boring contestant. So, the only one left is *Big Brother* and I'm not sure I'd want to be locked in the house that long. I'm a real home bird.

What's the most important message you've tried to impart to your kids about life?

Just make the best of it, whatever that is. That's what I've tried to do with my life. I haven't tried to reclaim, rebuild or gain something that I lost or that someone else has got. I just try to look at my situation and think, "How can I better this?" **That's great advice...** My kids won't listen to me, but then I didn't listen to my mum and dad! ■