

# Finding the new me

This year, **Lorraine Kelly** celebrates 35 years in broadcasting – from a researcher at the BBC, hosting *GMTV*, *Daybreak* and, of course, her much-loved daytime show *Lorraine*. But in 2016, none of Lorraine’s 1.6 million viewers could have imagined her emotional struggle away from the cameras. Here, Lorraine reveals how the menopause affected her mental wellbeing, and how her recovery inspired her to get the nation talking about menopause

Writing | **Gemma Calvert**

**B**ackstage at Television Centre in north London, Lorraine Kelly is admiring two certificates on her dressing room wall, following an expedition to Antarctica in 2016. The trip wasn’t part of an environmental segment for her ITV daytime show *Lorraine*, but to celebrate 25 years of marriage to her beloved husband, retired cameraman Steve Smith.

“I like a challenge. Going to Antarctica was amazing. That’s me and my husband at the bottom with king penguins,” she says, pointing to a photograph of the beaming pair taken with her favourite animals. “I use Google Earth to see places I want to visit; I last keyed in Greenland. I want to go to Nuuk, the capital.”

For Lorraine, a die-hard fan of explorer Ernest Shackleton, the polar pilgrimage will forever be one of her

most memorable journeys. Now, another is imminent. Next month, the queen of daytime TV will enrol at astronaut training school in Florida, one of many challenges this year – her 35th anniversary in broadcasting. The surprise trip was unveiled on her birthday last November, prompting space fanatic Lorraine to burst into tears of happiness live on TV.

She was 10 years old when she watched the first moon landing with her father, and the prospect of experiencing weightlessness, just like her hero Buzz Aldrin and his comrades did in 1969, was overwhelming.

Yet Lorraine’s most profound voyage in recent years has not been physical, but mental.

In April 2016, during a holiday to Spain with Steve, she observed that the joy in her life was languishing. Activities that once sparked

happiness, now felt unexpectedly ‘flat’, and her job, which began in 1984 presenting Scottish news on TV-am and led to anchor roles on *GMTV*, *Daybreak* and *Lorraine*, suddenly felt like ‘effort’. Lorraine – mum to Rosie, 24 – also began experiencing anxiety.

With her 60th birthday approaching, Lorraine sits down with *Happiful* to explain how the hormonal transition of menopause triggered the lowest time of her life, but how medical help, fitness, and the support of loved ones helped her through...

**Lorraine, when did you first notice you weren’t feeling yourself?**

I was in Cordoba, one of the most beautiful cities in the south of Spain, with Steve, and I just felt flat. There was no enjoyment. It was like I’d lost myself. It was really strange.

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Lorraine on set of her daytime TV show

I said to Steve: “I don’t understand, I don’t feel any joy.”

He suggested having a word with Dr Hilary Jones [*Good Morning Britain*’s resident doctor] who put me in touch with menopause expert Dr Louise Newson. I’d been on hormone replacement therapy patches for about a year and a half, and she saw I needed more oestrogen. At the time, even making an appointment was a big deal, everything became difficult. It was like wading through glue. I was lucky it was hormonal. When I got the different patch, all of a sudden the world was in colour again.

**By speaking about menopause, was it your intention to break the taboo?** Not really. I just think nothing’s off limits. I started talking about it, and then all of a sudden Ulrika [Jonsson] did an interview with me, Carol Vorderman did an interview, Meg Mathews as well, and the reaction we got was unbelievable. Women were coming up to me in the street with tears in their eyes, saying thank you.



**If a woman is feeling down and of menopausal age, what would you recommend?** It doesn’t matter what age you are, because people can go through the menopause at any age. Make sure you’ve got a GP who is sympathetic, and get it checked out. Also ask for help. Talk to your pals. Don’t think it’s a failure. That phrase – it’s OK not to be OK – is true.

#### **How did it affect you at work?**

It was the first time ever that I felt, not that I was putting a facade on, but it was an effort, whereas it’s not normally. I just go on and do what I do, but I was finding that I was really having to give myself a talking to. It was exhausting. When I got the different patch, it really was life changing.

**What do you do now when you feel overwhelmed?** I go for a really good walk with my dog, Angus. Just looking at that wee face, cheers me up. You can be away for two minutes or two years, and get the same enthusiastic welcome.

**Has your experience helped you to better understand guests who’ve been through depression?** Totally. I was lucky I got it sorted out quickly. My heart goes out to people who are struggling with mental health problems. It’s huge now, especially among young men.

The first person I ever spoke to about mental health – way back during the TV-am days, when people didn’t talk about it – was Rod Steiger, the actor. He was talking about how difficult it was for people like him to get work. He said: “I’m down a deep dark well and nobody knows what it’s like.” I remember thinking how brave he was,

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and how ahead of his time. After that, he went back to the US, spoke openly about it, and hardly worked again. People like that were pioneers.

#### **You got into fitness after a Comic Relief desert trek to Africa in 2011. Describe that turning point for your health.**

I came back and thought: “I need to do something healthy.” Health has to be a lifestyle. Exercise is not just about my body, it’s like having a spring clean in my head. Sometimes I drag myself to an exercise class, and it makes me feel so much better in all ways. It’s almost like the mental health benefits are better than the physical ones.

#### **Congratulations on your 35-year broadcasting anniversary.**

**What advice would you give to yourself at the start of your career?** Not to have worried as much. Obviously, as a parent, you always worry about your kids, but I think of all the time I’ve wasted worrying about stuff I can’t do anything about. As you get older, you don’t worry quite as much, but when TV-am stopped [in 1993] I didn’t know if I was being kept on, so I got my CV and went round all the TV stations in the UK, I went up to Scotland, I knocked on doors. Then, when I started on *GMTV*, I went [off] to have Rosie and then was replaced by Anthea Turner.

**How did you cope with that, especially so soon after becoming a new mum?** It was terrible. Awful. Rosie was born in the June, I was supposed to go back in the September. Then I was offered a mum and baby slot for two mornings a week, those shows did brilliantly, and in the January I got my own show [*Lorraine Live*]. Happy days!

**Did becoming a mum change your attitude to work?** For sure. It made work 'just a job', because the most important thing in the world becomes your child.

**What's been the hardest story to cover?** Doing the first interview with Madeleine McCann's parents shortly after she disappeared, and thinking, "I hope I'm not going to be talking to these poor people in 10 years time." Well, we're now more than 10 years on. I found that hard.

When I was covering the Dunblane Primary School massacre [in March 1996], I got a call from the police, saying: "A lady has lost her daughter, and she'd like to talk to you."

Pam Ross' daughter Joanna was five when she was murdered, and Pam also had a baby girl, Ali. A couple of years ago, 20 years after the atrocity, Ali was a guest on my show. The interview was astonishing. It was so moving, and I had to do that [Lorraine grips her hands in her lap] to not cry.

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► Watch 'Lorraine' weekdays on ITV, 8.30-9.25am



**When Rosie landed a PR job in Singapore two and a half years ago, was it harder to say goodbye because she's your only child?** It was in a way.

You bring up your children to be independent, then they go and be independent – how dare they? At the same time, I was really pleased for her. For about a year, she worked for a charity that helps single mums in jail, usually because of drugs and prostitution, because it's the only way they can raise money to support their children. Then she got a job with a PR company – it was very brave of her to go to a foreign country and do that at 21 years old.

**Do you worry about her?**

I've never really worried about her wellbeing, because she's an old soul. She's much more grown up than I will ever be, and she's very steady and sensible.

**You seem to have an amazing bond...**

We do, but I'm her mum, not her friend. I remember when the Duchess of York was going out dating with her daughters years ago, and she used to call them 'the tripod'. No, no, no! You're the mum! I would love to think my daughter tells me everything. But of course, she doesn't. She's got her pals for that! 🍷