

London Mums

FREE – Issue 48 • Summer-Autumn 2026

STAR EXPERT!

Global parenting expert **Jo Frost** spills the tea on your family questions

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Dear London Mums,

The sun is out, the kids are loud,
You're hiding from the weekend crowd.

One shoe is missing, tempers short,

You've answered "why?" 'til you feel fraught.

But look: we've packed this issue full
Of wisdom that is practical.

Jo Frost is here to save your day,
She'll gently take your phone away.

"Mean what you say, don't say it mean,"

The wisest words you've ever seen.

No fancy promises, just true,

Real advice that works for you.

Then Kike Agoro: missed Harvard, yes,
But built a future nonetheless.

She helps your kids with AI trends

While you just pray the school run ends.

Katherine Ryan, comedian, bold,

Wrote labour, poo, a story told.

She wishes her dear husband knew

That some things should just stay with you.

Karen Hauer, Strictly's queen,

Has swapped her sequins for a new scene.

Tap shoes now, and live stage light,

Reinvention feels so right.

A mum took three kids off to India's heat.

A psychosis memoir – raw and complete.

A coloured lens test for reading ease.

No more words that jump or squeeze.

Plus dinosaur stomps and a Tudor teen –

This magazine's got your in-between.

My Diego's nineteen: sends a text

When he remembers, I'm perplexed.

No wine, no biscuits, just the truth:

You're tired and trying, that's the proof.

So read and laugh, then close the door.

You've earned this break.

Now read some more.



Monica Costa

Editor in chief, Founder of *London Mums*

& mum of 19-year-old Diego

Monica@londonmums.org.uk @londonmums

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Jo Frost

Editorial

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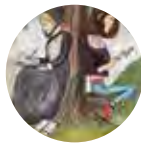
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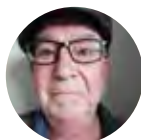
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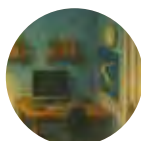
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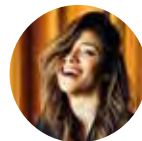
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STAR EXPERT!

Jo Frost spilling the tea on your family questions

The global parenting expert (aka the woman who fixed hundreds of families before teatime) answers your burning questions

By Monica Costa

A few weeks ago, we put out a quiet call at London Mums HQ. We asked you, our readers, to send in the parenting dilemmas that keep you up at night: the battles you are too exhausted to explain to your partner, the tiny tyrants who argue about everything, and the secret wrappers hidden under beds.

The response was overwhelming. Hundreds of questions poured in. Some made us nod in solidarity. Others made us reach for a biscuit.

So we did what any self-respecting parenting magazine would do. We called in someone who has spent nearly four decades fixing exactly these problems. Jo Frost, global parenting expert, *New York Times* bestselling author, and the trusted face behind the international award winning show *Supernanny*, has recently begun a collaboration with *London Mums Magazine*. And as her first act of kindness, she agreed to personally answer a selection of your most urgent questions.

No camera crew. No living room makeover. Just Jo, a cup of tea, and her signature blend of firmness, empathy, and the occasional well placed eyebrow raise.

Here is what she wants every parent to remember: *“Mean what you say, say what you mean, but don’t say it mean.”*

Now, let her loose on your families.



ETHAN, 5 YEARS OLD

He comes up with a hundred excuses after lights out: he’s thirsty, he needs a wee, he heard a noise. Is this a delay tactic or genuine anxiety?

JF: It can be either, and sometimes it’s a bit of both. If Ethan only develops urgent needs after lights out, it’s likely he’s discovered that bedtime requests buy him more time with you. If he worries throughout the day or struggles with separation, anxiety may also be contributing.

The solution is to meet reasonable needs before bed. Making sure he has quality time with you before the bedtime routine begins. Last drink. Last wee. Last cuddle. Then lights out.

If he calls out again, keep your response brief and calm wait for him to come to you then say, “You’re safe. It’s bedtime.”

Avoid lengthy conversations or repeated trips into his room. Children quickly learn which behaviours keep parents engaged.

Be consistent and Ethan will learn bedtime has to eventually happen and all is sound for slumber.

JACOB, 8 YEARS OLD

He sneaks his tablet into bed after we've said goodnight. We've confiscated it before, but he finds a way. How do we enforce this without a nightly police state?

JF: This isn't really a screen problem. It's a boundary problem.

Jacob understands the rule; he's testing whether it will be consistently enforced. Create a family charging station outside all bedrooms and have every device handed in at the same time each evening, and have password on tablets.

If he sneaks a tablet into bed, the consequence should be immediate and predictable.

"You chose not to follow the screen rule tonight, so there'll be no tablet tomorrow." No lectures. No arguments. Just follow through.

Children don't need parents who police every

move. They need parents whose boundaries remain steady.

Jacob should only use tablet if need be for a movie on a weekday, school should hold president and healthy sleep and connection with family. He will learn from your actions, Rules have meaning when they're consistently enforced.

As I always quote "Mean what you say, say what you mean but don't say it mean".

RUBY, 4 YEARS OLD

She refuses to hold my hand crossing the street. She thinks it's a game to run ahead. I'm terrified. How do I make this a non-negotiable safety rule?

JF: This is one area where there is absolutely room for choice.

At four years old, Ruby doesn't fully understand car danger. What feels playful to her can become life threatening in seconds. Be calm, firm, clear, and consistent.

"Roads are not a place for choices. You either hold my hand, or I your hand will be on the stroller." [that's if you have other children]





Then follow through every single time. Don't negotiate. Don't chase. Don't turn it into a game.

Children feel safest when adults take responsibility and take charge for safety decisions they are not yet capable of making themselves.

Ruby will learn what my parents tell me to keep me safe, even when I don't like the rule. Is final.

THEO, 6 YEARS OLD

He argues about every single instruction. Everything is a negotiation. I am worn out. How do I shut down the debate without a power struggle?

JF: Some children are natural negotiators. They question everything and love a verbal ping pong game. For some it gives them dopamine high.

The problem begins when parents feel obliged to keep explaining every decision. Give the instruction once.

"Theo, put your shoes on." If he argues, calmly say, "I've already answered."

If he continues, "The conversation is over." Then redirect him back to the task.

You don't need to win an argument. You simply need to stop participating in one. Children thrive when expectations are clear and adults stay confident in their role.

Theo will learn not every decision is open for discussion.

Remember there's a difference between kindly telling and asking, one is a choice the other is not.

JESSICA, 7 YEARS OLD

She has started hiding food wrappers in her bedroom. She eats treats secretly. Is this a sign of something serious or normal experimentation?

JF: For many children, this is more about secrecy than food. They discover the thrill of getting away with something and experiment with hiding evidence.

Stay curious rather than alarmed, it will help her not shut down.

"I found some wrappers in your room. Can you help me understand what's going on?"

Avoid shaming or making food the enemy. However, pay closer attention if the behaviour becomes frequent, involves large amounts of food, or seems connected to anxiety, guilt, or emotional distress.

Most importantly, keep that communication open and pay close attention.

Jessica will learn that honesty is safer than secrecy and maybe it's a case of giving her a choice in a candy jar she can pick just once a week.

FLORENCE, 5 YEARS OLD

She still uses a dummy for sleep. She loses it at night and wakes us up to find it. Is it time to go cold turkey or gradual?

JF: At five years old, I would encourage saying goodbye to the dummy for good! Right now, Florence isn't learning to self-soothe without it. She's relying on it to fall back asleep.

Prepare her in advance and explain that she's grown up and won't need it anymore. Then make a clean break.

Expect a few unsettled nights. That's normal. Offer the normal bedtime comfort, ritual, books, cuddles, but don't reintroduce the dummy once you've removed it. Consistency is what helps children adapt.

The longer the transition drags on, the harder it often becomes for everyone.

Florence will in 3 days learn she can settle herself without depending on a dummy and trust me you will all sleep much better.

BEN, 8 YEARS OLD, AND SAM, 6 YEARS OLD

The older one teases the younger one relentlessly. He knows it winds him up. Where is the line between normal brotherly teasing and bullying?

JF: A simple question helps here, Who's laughing?

If both boys are laughing, it's usually play. If one child is repeatedly upset, embarrassed, or distressed while the other continues, it's no longer harmless teasing.

Teach Ben that once his brother says, "Stop," the game is over.

"Your brother has told you he doesn't like it. Your job is to stop." Let him that not doing so is unacceptable behaviour and bullying behaviour.

At the same time, help Sam use a calm, confident voice rather than reacting dramatically. Teach him "STOP".

Your goal isn't to toughen one child up or blame the other. It's to teach empathy, respect, and self-control.

What both boys learn is that being funny should never come at someone else's expense and you must show that you will not tolerate as such so they never grow up to tolerate either.

Parents seeking private consultation services and group sessions, please go to JoFrost.com for more information.



Raising Greats: Missed Harvard, built a community

By **Monica Costa**



Kike Agoro is the kind of woman who makes you feel a little bit tired just reading her CV. Represented Great Britain in javelin. AAA at A Level. Economics at Nottingham. Fully funded scholarship to Florida. Internships at Goldman Sachs, Barclays and Citibank. Forbes 30 Under 30. Built a 200,000 strong professional network from her bedroom.

But none of that is why she started Raising Greats.

She started Raising Greats because she lost her mother unexpectedly in 2021 while pregnant with her daughter. Her mother raised her and her two brothers in East London with a lot of determination. Kike watched her hold the family together through a crisis when she was just 16. Then she opened her GCSE results. Eight A stars and three As at a school where only 30 percent of students passed with A* - C. She did it for her mum.

Later she was scouted by Harvard. But she found out about the opportunity two years too late to prepare. She says the greatest threat to success is the information you do not have. And that is where Raising Greats comes in.

Raising Greats is a membership community for parents who believe their child's connections matter just as much as what they know. It costs between £39 and £169 a month. Inside you get live opportunities for scholarships, bursaries and competitions. You get expert webinars, an online community with real world playdates, and a framework of 22 skills and values designed to raise a great child.

Kike is a mum of two. Her daughter Yetunde is named after her own mother. Her son Rio is still small. She knows the world is uncertain. The leaders are questionable. The future of work is shifting. And AI is changing everything. She says parenting in the age of AI means raising innovators, not just students. Children with global connections, not just local ones. Kids who use technology rather than being replaced by it.

She is not selling a quick fix. She is selling a community for parents who refuse to leave their child's future to chance. That is a different kind of promise.



Raisinggreats.com is now live, designed for parents and guardians of all backgrounds. Join us today!

If you are the kind of parent who reads parenting magazines on a Tuesday evening while wondering if you are doing enough, this one is for you. Kike Agoro built this for her mother. She built it for her own children. And she built it for you.

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STAR MUM!

Katherine Ryan: 'I wish my husband was less empowered by my poo'

The comedian, mum of four and master of self-deprecating honesty on labour, love and Kurt Cobain aged three

By Monica Costa

A few years ago, I found myself at the Dominion Theatre for the premiere of the *Elf* musical. The place was buzzing with showbiz energy, but one person stood out. Katherine Ryan, heavily pregnant, was effortlessly funny, kind to everyone who approached her, and somehow managed to recognise me, a frazzled magazine editor clutching a press pass, and make me feel like an old friend.

That is the thing about Katherine. The Canadian-Irish comedian is a powerhouse of the comedy world, having won awards for her sharp, unflinching stand-up and starring as the creator and lead of her own Netflix sitcom, *The Duchess*. She is a regular team captain on *8 Out of 10 Cats*, a familiar face on *Live at the Apollo*, and the author of the Sunday Times bestseller *The Audacity*. But for all her professional armour, off stage she is genuinely lovely. Self-deprecating. Self-ironic. The kind of woman who will make you laugh about the most mortifying moments of motherhood because she has lived them too and she is not afraid to say so out loud.

So when she recently partnered with Andrex for the #MyLabourPoo campaign, a brilliantly bold mission to break the last great childbirth taboo, I knew I had to sit down with her, as she is a woman I deeply admire, who happens to be very funny about poo.

Here is Katherine Ryan, unfiltered and unforgettable.

You have got four children. What is the single most useless piece of parenting advice you have ever received?

It goes by so quickly. I find that genuinely useless. All time goes by at the same speed. People say "enjoy them, enjoy them, it goes so quickly", but the last five years has not gone by quickly. I will concede that once it is gone, it is gone, but that is not the same thing.

Do you think it feels slower at the beginning?

I think it can be quite boring and isolating being at home with a newborn, but I also believe in *matrescence*. There is a study suggesting that when a woman gives birth, she is temporarily just a little bit less sharp for a while, and I suspect that is nature's way of stopping you from getting too bored. If you are at full intellectual capacity, you might not cope with the pace of a baby. So in some ways I think it is nature being quite kind.

Your husband Bobby is clearly comfortable with the unglamorous realities of family life. What is the funniest thing he has ever said about parenting that made you laugh and cringe at the same time?


Bobby is funny all the time. I do think there is something important about having a partner you can slag your children off with harmlessly, behind their backs. It keeps you united. Right now, our daughter Fenna Grace has this long white blonde hair and she won't cut it, won't wear it in a headband, won't wear a hair tie. Bobby has started calling her Kurt Cobain behind her back. She is three, perpetually topless, with all this shaggy white hair. It is exactly what she looks like. Deeply inappropriate. Makes me laugh every time.

Your career is built on saying things other people are too polite to say. How does that play out at the school gates? Are you the mum everyone whispers about, or the one everyone secretly wants to stand next to?

Both, I think. I will be honest, I do not do the school run very regularly. I am usually at home with the baby while Bobby does it. And he just stays in the car for as long as he can, then sprints to get the kids and sprints back. As a man at school gates where most of the parents are mums, he does feel a bit like



“I will be honest, I do not do the school run very regularly.”

A photograph of two women smiling and taking a selfie together. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a blue and white floral patterned top. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a yellow and white patterned top. They are standing in front of a trade show booth with a corkboard wall. A sign in the background says "Get Comfortable" and "drex".

“When you are pregnant it is all a bit abstract and you think “I will just hire someone to do the hard bits.” And then you meet [the baby] and you really, genuinely love them.”

an outsider. On the occasions I do go, I am clearly not in uniform. You know the look: the clean gym wear, the blowout, the baseball cap, the big trainers. I do not look like that. So it is probably obvious I am not a regular.

Something about motherhood that genuinely surprised you, something nobody warned you about that was not poo related.

How much I actually love my children and want to spend time with them. I used to think I would just get a babysitter whenever I wanted to do something. People still say that to me: “just get a babysitter, come out.” The truth is: I could get a babysitter. I just do not want to. I want to be the one looking after them. That surprised me enormously, especially with the babies. When you are pregnant it is all a bit abstract and you think “I will just hire someone to do the hard bits.” And then you meet them and you really, genuinely love them.

What was the most unexpected thing your body did after having a baby that you wish someone had told you about?

Breastfeeding. With my first, my boobs got so big they were almost square; hot, incredibly painful, and she was born in the summer. I wish someone had really prepared me for how relentless and painful breastfeeding can be. Sometimes it feels like vinegar going through your nipple. You can sustain an injury at literally any point. Just the other day on a job I was pumping without paying attention

and tore half my nipple. The baby is seven months old. It is not for the faint of heart. I still did it with all of them because I believe in it, but it is genuinely hard.

If you could go back and give your first time pregnant self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Stay at home near your own toilet for as long as you possibly can. Especially first timers, because the first labour does not usually come fast. It starts feeling like the worst food poisoning you have ever had, and if you stay home through that, your body clears itself out very naturally. If you go to hospital too early and you are strapped to a bed, you are much more likely to end up with a more Andrex campaign relevant situation. Stay home. Trust the process. That is my one piece of advice. And incidentally, the first time I followed it, the labour poo did not even happen.



THE LABOUR POO

New research shows that:

Nearly 2 in 5 mothers poo during labour.

Andrex research found that 75% of women fear pooling during childbirth - yet only 8% openly discuss it, and 16% say they would never talk about it with anyone.

However, during or after childbirth, 53% said they didn't care about the labour poo.

Only 7% felt completely prepared for the physical realities of labour, including the labour poo (and just 22% felt 'very' or 'completely' prepared).

95% were happy with how their medical team handled it. Half said it was so discreet they barely clocked it.

Just 8% talk about it on a regular basis and 16% say they would never discuss the labour poo with anyone.

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Share your story #MyLabourPoo

To find out more about Katherine Ryan's work with Andrex and the #MyLabourPoo campaign, visit www.andrex.co.uk or @andrexuk on social.

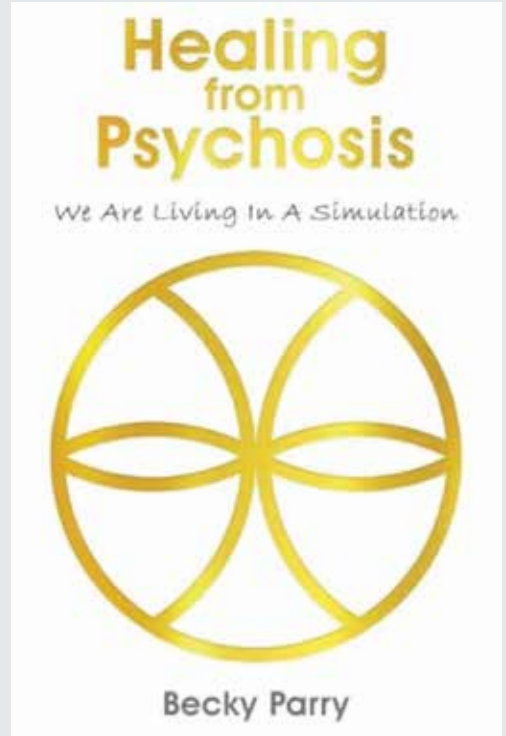
A journey through psychosis: one woman's story of healing, hope and the simulation theory

When Becky Parry was sectioned for the fourth time, she could not have imagined that her darkest days would lead her to write a book. But that is exactly what happened. *Healing from Psychosis - We are Living in a Simulation* is her extraordinary account of living through psychosis, challenging everything we think we know about the condition.

Becky is a coach, alternative therapist and mentor from Cheltenham. She is also a mother. After being diagnosed with psychosis, she found herself trapped in a system that labelled her experiences as symptoms of illness. But Becky began to see things differently. What if the voices, visions and spiritual encounters were not signs of a broken mind? What if they were glimpses of something deeper?

In her book, Becky argues that we are living in a simulation. This is not a new idea: modern scientists have explored simulation theory for years. What is new is hearing it from someone who has been sectioned, medicated and told she was unwell. Becky writes from deep personal experience. She details conversations with a clairvoyant whose predictions have come true. She describes realities that exist alongside our own, invisible to most people but vivid to her. She explains that the average person sees less than 5 per cent of what is actually out there. Becky believes she can access the other 95 per cent. Her message is bold and unapologetic: "I'm not crazy, we are living in a simulation."

For any parent who has watched a loved one struggle with mental health, this book offers a radical new perspective. It does not dismiss psychosis as mere illness. Instead, it asks whether some experiences labelled as psychotic might actually be valid perceptions



of a stranger reality than we dare to admit.

Becky's goal is not to convince everyone. It is to shine a light on her healing journey and to encourage families to listen differently. She hopes that by sharing her truth, she can help others support their own relatives with more compassion and open mindedness.

This is not an easy read. It is raw, challenging and unflinching. But it is also hopeful. Becky has been to very difficult places and found her way back. Her book is a testament to the power of personal truth and the courage it takes to speak it.

***Healing from Psychosis - We are Living in a Simulation* is available now in ebook, paperback, hardback and audiobook from Amazon.**

If you are ready to question everything, this is the book for you.

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Zahara's Gift: When grief is love with nowhere to go

We do not talk about child loss properly. We whisper it. We look away. We offer platitudes that help no one. *Time heals. She's in a better place.* If you have ever sat opposite a mother who has buried her child, you will know that those words land like a slap.

SD Ray knows. She lost her daughter Zahara. And instead of hiding from that grief, she has written a book about it. Not to make you cry, though you probably will, but to show you that peace is possible on the other side.

The title *Zahara's Gift* sounds almost sweet. It is not. The gift is not a warm hug or a silver lining. It is the brutal, slow, hardwon understanding that love does not die just because a person does. Zahara's gift, as her mother describes it, is the permission to keep loving her daughter without that love destroying her. That is the raw truth of this book. Grief, SD Ray writes, is love with no place to go. And when that love has nowhere to land, it turns inward. It becomes heavy. It can break you.

What makes *Zahara's Gift* different from other grief memoirs is the author's honesty about her own past. She grew up with emotional neglect and childhood trauma. Those early wounds did not protect her from loss. They complicated it. She writes about Complicated Grief Disorder, a term many of us have never heard, but one that describes exactly what happens when grief does not follow a neat timeline. It gets tangled. It feeds on old pain. It refuses to loosen its grip.

Unexpectedly, each chapter is shaped by a Bob Marley song. For some readers, that might sound odd. A Rastafarian musician holding the hand of a grieving mother? But grief is not tidy. If a song gets you through the night, that song is sacred. SD Ray uses Marley's music not as an escape but as a rhythm, a steady, beating heart under her words.



If you have lost a child, this book will not fix you. But it will sit beside you in the dark and refuse to leave. If you have not lost a child, read it anyway. Read it so you know what not to say. Read it so you learn how to sit in silence with someone who is drowning. *Zahara's Gift* is not an easy read. It is not supposed to be. But it is an honest one and sometimes, honesty is the only gift worth giving.

***Zahara's Gift* by SD Ray is available now on Kindle. The author writes anonymously under a pen name, and her blog on childhood trauma and grief can be found alongside the book.**

Available on Amazon.

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STAR CHAT!

Karen Hauer on leaving *Strictly*, learning tap, and making me cry (happy tears)

By Monica Costa

I am a self-confessed super-fan. But this isn't just another interview for me. It is my *third* time chatting with the one and only Karen Hauer, the Venezuelan whirlwind who became the heart and soul of ***Strictly Come Dancing*** for an incredible 14 years. From the very first time we met, I have been completely under her spell. I have followed her every paso doble, jive, and show dance, religiously watching her compete, cheering her on from the sofas of Britain.

So, when we caught up for this exclusive, it felt less like an interview and more like a gossip between old friends. After a quick catch-up on her dreamy Instagram holiday (yes, I was following along every day!), we got down to business. Now that she's hung up her *Strictly* sequins for good, what does the future hold for the show's longest-serving female professional dancer?

As it turns out, Karen has swapped the BBC ballroom for a pair of tap shoes and some of the biggest live stages in the country, and she's absolutely buzzing about it.

Monica Costa: You were on *Strictly* for 14 years, which is a lifetime in showbiz. Now that you've left, what do you miss the most?

Karen Hauer: I seriously have the best memories of *Strictly*, and the people that I met. It's all feel good, you know? That is something that you don't get a lot of when you're on a job for that long. I'm going to miss a little bit of everything.

Monica: You're already involved into some brilliant new projects. First up, a stage show called *Stepping Out*. What can you tell us about it?

Karen: Yes! It's a comedy, and I play Mavis, the teacher of an amateur tap class full of



hapless dancers. The last time I tap danced I was 18 years old! It's one of those classical dance styles. It's Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire! That era of Hollywood was incredible and you'd see a lot of tap dancing. It's one of the toughest styles to learn. Everything has to be loose and rhythmical so I'm doing a crash course! It's good to be able to evolve and do different styles.

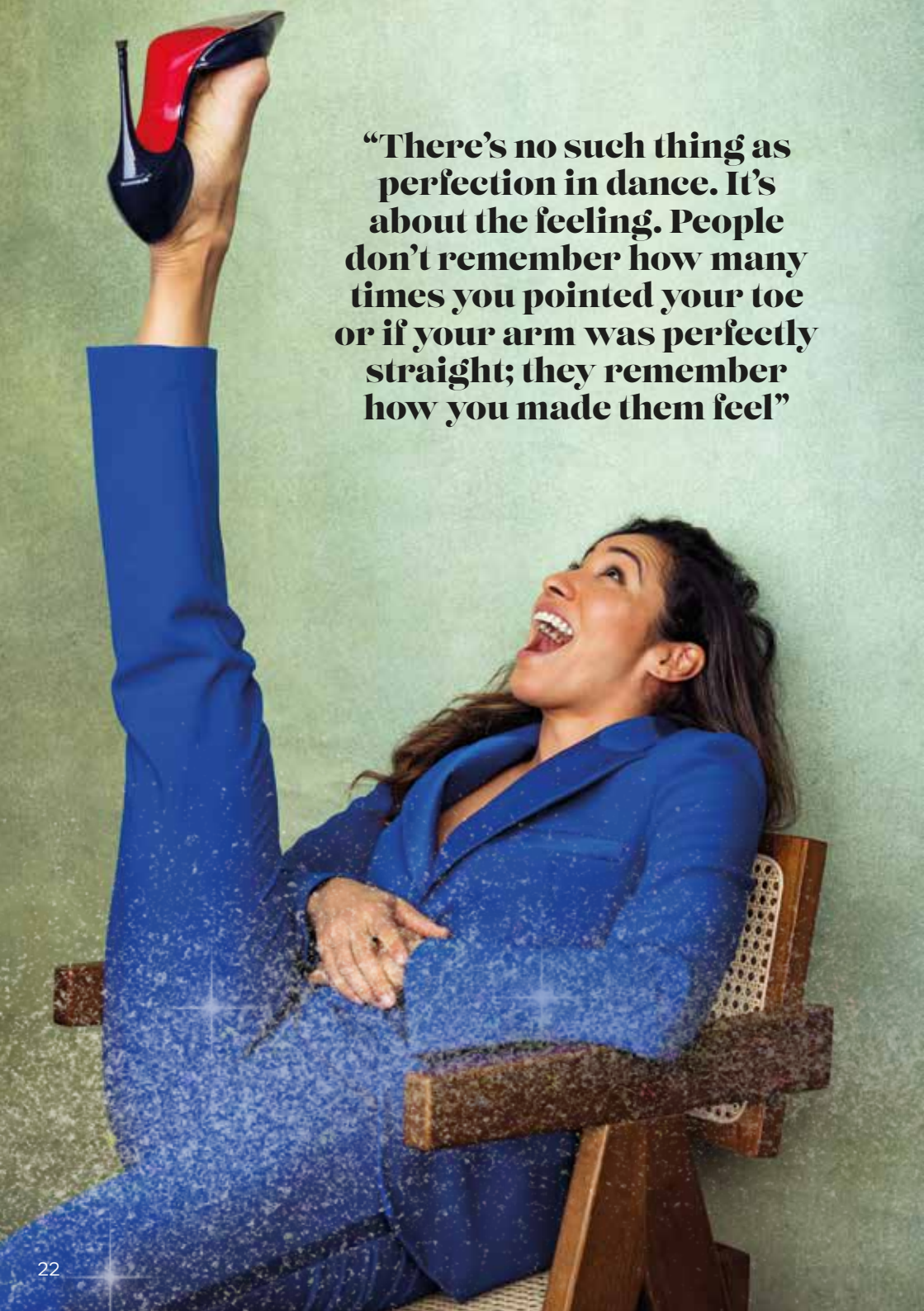
Monica: I have a confession, I'm also a huge fan of *Burn the Floor*. And you're going back to your roots with their new show, *Supernova*.

Karen: Yes, and it's going to be on stage with my boy Nikita Kuzmin! I never saw that coming. I was a principal dancer with them on Broadway and in the West End, so it feels like coming home to my original dance family. To be asked back as a guest artist is amazing. I thought I was going to have a little more chill time, but I am everywhere now!

Monica: And while you were on *Strictly*, you danced with a lot of celebrities. Who still makes you laugh?



**“I seriously
have the best
memories of
Strictly”**

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a vibrant blue suit, is seated in a wooden chair with a cane backrest. She is laughing heartily, her head tilted back and eyes closed. Her right arm is raised high, holding a black high-heeled shoe with a bright red sole. The background is a textured, light green wall. The overall mood is joyful and celebratory.

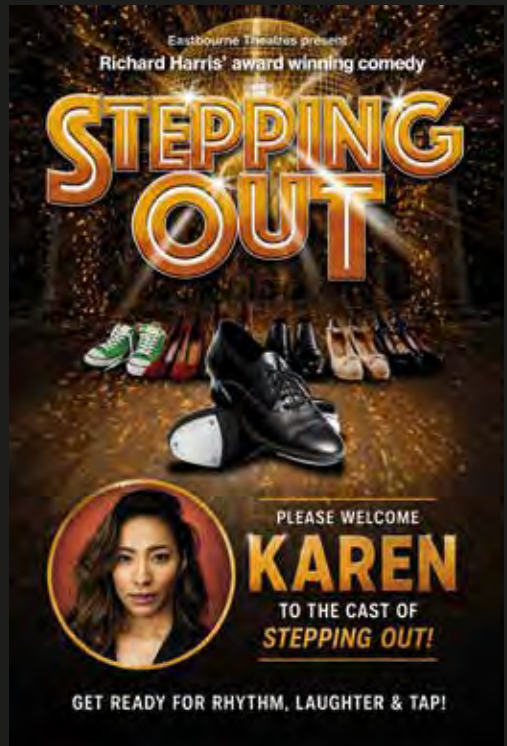
“There’s no such thing as perfection in dance. It’s about the feeling. People don’t remember how many times you pointed your toe or if your arm was perfectly straight; they remember how you made them feel”

Karen: Oh, definitely my second year, when I danced with the Hairy Biker, Dave Myers. That was the moment I discovered I could be funny. I'm very serious about my dancing, but he opened up this new world of comedy and fun for me. He showed me how to not take myself so seriously, and I kept that with me throughout my whole career.

Monica: So, what's the best advice you could give to a beginner who is terrified of looking silly, maybe trying tap dancing for the first time?

Karen: Don't be afraid to look like anything specific! There's no such thing as perfection in dance. It's about the feeling. People don't remember how many times you pointed your toe or if your arm was perfectly straight; they remember how you made them feel. Enjoy yourself. It's okay to feel funny and not know what you're doing. You'll eventually learn how to do it. Give yourself time.

It was a genuine pleasure to chat with Karen again. I've seen her in the *Speakeasy* and *Fire Dance* live shows, and I cannot wait to see her on stage in these new roles. If you want to catch her, you'd better get booking!



How to see Karen live this summer:

Supernova with Nikita Kuzmin

Presented by *Burn the Floor*, this explosive new dance spectacular is touring the UK. The incredible Karen Hauer joins *Strictly* finalist Nikita Kuzmin as a very special guest. It's a homecoming for Karen, who was a principal dancer with the show.

Stepping Out

Karen stars as Mavis, the dance teacher, in this joyful comedy about a group of hapless amateur tap dancers preparing for a gala performance. It's touring to four locations this summer and autumn.

Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne

Thu 13 – Sat 29 Aug 2026

Palace Theatre, Southend

Tue 1 – Sat 5 Sep 2026

Fareham Live, Fareham

Tue 15 – Sat 19 Sep 2026

Churchill Theatre, Bromley

Tue 22 – Sat 26 Sep 2026

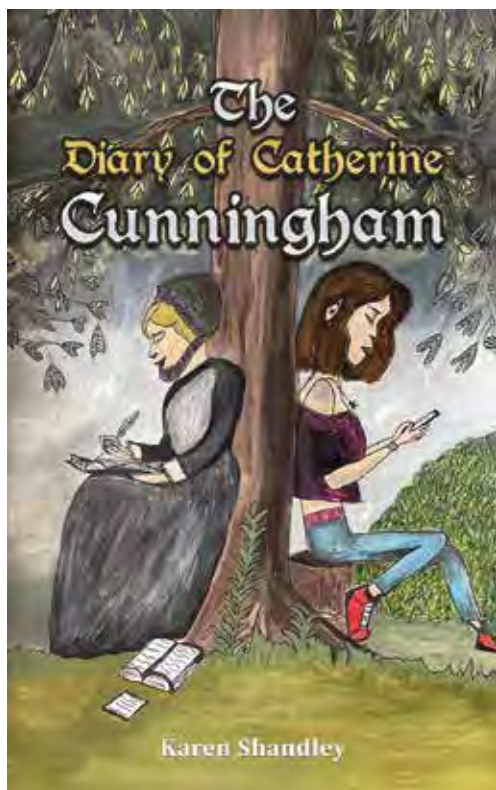
Teenager + Tudor diary = printperfect pageturner

Getting a teenager to read is tough. But *The Diary of Catherine Cunningham* does the job, and you will probably read it first. Leona is a teenager from the busy city of Birmingham who has been drifting down the wrong path, making poor choices and growing increasingly distant from her parents. In a bold attempt to turn things around, her parents make a lifechanging decision: they leave the city behind and move to a quiet rural village. Furious about the move, Leona falls out with her parents completely. Feeling isolated and alone, she uncovers an old Tudor diary buried in the garden. On the night that she reads it, something extraordinary happens: Leona wakes up in Tudor England.

Lost, confused and frightened, she has no idea how to get home. That is, until she meets the girl who wrote the diary. Together, they embark on a thrilling adventure filled with danger, fear and adrenaline. As their bond deepens, so does their determination to survive and find a way back. Against all odds, Leona eventually returns to her own time, and to her family, forever changed by the journey. Her time in Tudor London teaches her the most valuable lesson of all: how lucky she truly is.

Author Karen Shandley is a teaching assistant, a mum, an author and an artist – so she knows exactly what fires a young imagination. She has spent years in the classroom, and that experience has gone into creating a story that is educational without ever feeling like homework. She says, “The story I have created is full of adventure, adrenaline and emotion. When Leona finally makes her way back home, she realises what she has with her family and gets back on the right track. There is a touch of magic, love and friendship in *The Diary of Catherine Cunningham*. Early readers have fed back that it is a very good book to read. I am really excited for it to be out in the world and finding its audience.”

The best bit? Families love it together. Karen says parents have enjoyed it as much as their children, adding that the book works so well



in schools, whether for individual reading or in the school library. So you can pretend you are “checking it’s appropriate” while devouring the whole thing in one evening. We won’t tell. And if that was not enough, Karen is also producing a large oil painting dedicated to the book, which she will be happy to promote and share. Talented or what?

The verdict is simple: this is a timeslip novel with heart, humour and just the right amount of danger. Perfect for reluctant readers, history fans, and any mum who wants to see their child’s nose in a book instead of a screen.

***The Diary of Catherine Cunningham* is available now on Amazon in Kindle, paperback and hardcover.**

Rating: five stars. Perfect for ages eleven to sixteen and for you.

Stomp, chomp and cheer: *Dino School* is here to turn oopsie moments into adventures



Every parent knows the feeling. You have just mopped the floor. Then someone spills juice everywhere. Or a well-aimed muddy boot leaves its mark on the clean sofa. In those moments, it is hard to remember that mistakes can be wonderful

learning opportunities. But that is exactly the message at the heart of *Dino School*, the latest Giggly Furbottom Adventure.

Deep in the emerald Great Fern Forest, a bouncing, legendary monster named Giggly Furbottom runs a very unusual classroom. His students are not children. They are five little dinosaurs with big personalities and even bigger capacity for getting things gloriously wrong.

Meet the gang. Speedy the Velociraptor is a tiny whirlwind who learns that racing through mud can lead to a very squelchy bellyflop. Rexy the T-Rex is a big hearted roarer who discovers that shouting with a mouthful of food might send your burger flying across the forest. Munch the Brachiosaurus takes a nibble of something called a Bubble Berry and floats off on a dizzying sky high adventure. Trish the Triceratops bravely explores a dark rumby cave and realises it is much better with a wise friend beside her. And Steggy the Stegosaurus finds out that while the tide might wash away a treasure, a friend's hand is the greatest prize of all.



Written by Goose In Gold and beautifully illustrated by Kris Lillyman, *Dino School* is aimed at children aged roughly 5 to 9. It is the fourth book in the Adventures Collection, following earlier titles like *Bedtime for Ella* and *Ella and the Undersea World*. Two more books are coming soon in the Beginnings Collection for younger readers aged 3 to 6.



What makes this story so special is how it turns classic childhood mishaps into giggles. Rainbow bubbles, muddy tumbles, floating berries – every oopsie becomes a chance to learn about friendship, teamwork, bravery and kindness. The message is simple: being a dinosaur is about more than just stomping. It is about having the courage to try, even when you might fall flat on your snout.

The Giggly Furbottom world already has a YouTube channel (search Giggly Furbottom) where you can find more adventures. And if you are wondering who Goose In Gold really is, the author has been gently persuaded that maybe, just maybe, it is time to step out from behind the goose. But that is a story for another day.

For now, let the school bell ring. Are you ready to stomp, chomp and cheer? *Dino School* is available at Waterstones and Foyles. Grab a copy, curl up with your little dinosaur, and remember: the best lessons often start with a very silly oopsie.

***Dino School* and all Giggly Furbottom books are available at gigglyfurbottom.com and Amazon.**

Giggly Furbottom also has a wonderful dedicated YouTube Channel www.youtube.com/@GigglyFurbottom/ videos which contains suitable entertainment for children of all ages.

Discover the Fens with Hettie: quirky, clever, and perfect book for curious kids (and their parents)

If you've ever wished for a book that makes your child actually *want* to read, without wizards, dystopian worlds, or yet another screen, then meet Hettie. She's a smart, funny girl growing up in the Lincolnshire Fens, and her adventures are exactly the kind of storytelling families have been missing.



Local author and retired teacher Mick Price has written two delightful children's books: ***Hettie and Friends in the Fens*** (for ages 8-11) and ***Hettie in the Fens: Some Further Stories*** (for ages 11-14). They follow Hettie through everyday life, holidays on

the Norfolk Broads, ghost sightings in creepy hotels, UFO hunts near American airbases, converting her house into an ecohome, and moneysaving plan that ends up with a letter from Nigel Garage (yes, really). Each short chapter is perfect for a 15minute bedtime read, and the stories build on each other, so characters and jokes develop as you go.

What makes Hettie different?

Sprinkled through every chapter are little green boxes called "**Thought Facts**". They explain things like how the Fens were formed (hint: they used to be under the sea), why Brussels sprouts grow on stalks, what Pythagoras' theorem is, how climate change works, and even what "Net Zero" actually means. Children absorb real knowledge without feeling like they're in a lesson. As a retired teacher, Mick Price knows exactly how to make learning fun.

Parents will love the satire

Hettie's dad, Boris, works at a supermarket called Poundsqueezer. The family watches



GBNews, argues about Reform UK and a certain "Nigel Garage", and worries about energy bills. There are jokes about politicians who never answer a straight question, and a brilliant running gag about square potatoes being exported to Donald Trump. None of it is heavyhanded: it's just clever, warm, and often laughoutloud funny. The books are refreshingly free of preachiness, but they don't shy away from realworld issues.

Meet the characters

There's Uncle Rex, a family friend who can't boil an egg (and once blew up a poacher). There's Libby, Hettie's best mate, and Alfie, her business partner in the potato scheme. There are grandparents Carol and Bob, who manage to flood the kitchen, trip the electrics, and leave bloody footprints on a new carpet, all in one evening. Children will recognise their own chaotic families in these pages.

Perfect for Fenland families – and anyone who loves a good adventure

The books are set firmly in Holbeach, Wisbech, King's Lynn, and the surrounding countryside, but any child who enjoys technology, science, ghosts, politics, or simply asking "why?" will fall for Hettie. Ideal for Year 6 up to secondary Year 9/10.

Both books are available on Amazon (just search "*Hettie in the Fens*") and in most libraries. So go on, treat your kids (or yourself) to a good oldfashioned read. Put down the phones, curl up, and get lost in the Fens with Hettie.

You'll love it. We promise.

The Secret Adventure Machine – The Big Apple: The Book That’ll Make Your Child Look Up from Their Screen



You know that moment when your child is so glued to a tablet they don't notice anything else? What if that very tablet could become the most thrilling, imaginationfiring adventure they've ever had? That's exactly what debut author Sandra Jackson-Trench has created in *The Secret Adventure Machine – The Big Apple*.

One reviewer put it perfectly:

“In the end *The Secret Adventure Machine* is not just an adventure story. It's a gentle manifesto for creative courage in a world addicted to convenience. It asks children, and adults, to look up from their screens, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and to keep their curiosity alive even when the world tells them to upgrade instead.”

So, what's the story?

Eight year old Tyrese Thompson receives a birthday gift that looks like any other tablet: a Mad Tab 2.0. But hidden inside is a secret upgrade that transforms it into the **Secret Adventure Machine (SAM)**. Every night around 10pm, SAM opens portals that whisk Tyrese across the world from Paris at sunrise

to the Amazon jungle, and in this book, to New York City. SAM also unlocks superpowers like flight, invisibility and telekinesis, just in case things get a bit too exciting.

In *The Big Apple*, Tyrese teams up with a new friend, Chad, for a highstakes adventure through New York. But there's a twist: hidden inside SAM is a topsecret microchip that its inventor, the nasty Mr Mad, is desperate to get back. Suddenly every adventure becomes a race against time, and a test of courage, quick thinking and staying true to what makes being a kid so brilliant.

Why parents and kids will love it

Sandra Jackson-Trench knows her audience. With a background in education and a BA in Drama and English, she's written a story that's fastpaced, funny and perfect for readers aged 5–12. It's the kind of book that makes bedtime feel like the start of a movie.

Early readers agree:

“An exciting and imaginative children's story... blends humour, mystery, and youthful curiosity.” – Elizabeth

“Brilliant book for children, fantastic, highly recommend.” – Matthew

Meet the author

Sandra loves travel, adventure and making new friends and that joy spills onto every page. When she's not dreaming up new escapades for Tyrese, she's working in education, always looking for new ways to spark creativity.

***The Secret Adventure Machine – The Big Apple* is available now in paperback and Kindle. Perfect for a birthday gift, a holiday treat, or simply a way to remind your child that the most extraordinary adventures start with a little imagination.**

So go on, let them look up from their screen. They might just find a portal.

Get your copy from Amazon.



Escape the school run: one man's hilarious journey on the Trans-Siberian Railway



Most of us have barely made it to the end of the M25 without a back seat meltdown. So the idea of taking a month long train journey across Russia, Siberia and Mongolia might sound either thrilling or completely mad. But **Martin Kyrle**, a seasoned traveller with seven decades of

globe-trotting under his belt, has done exactly that, and he has written a book about it that will make you laugh out loud.

Jottings from the Trans-Siberian Railway is not your average travelogue. Yes, it covers one of the world's most legendary rail journeys, from Moscow to Beijing via Lake Baikal and the steppes of Mongolia. But what makes it special is Martin's voice: warm, witty, wonderfully self-deprecating, and packed with the kind of detail only a Russian Studies graduate could provide.

He also wants to bust a few myths. "When I told friends I was planning to go to Siberia their invariable reaction was: 'Innit cold?'" he writes. "I'm going in September. It'll be mid-twenties!" He explains that most of Siberia is not a frozen



wasteland of huts – the railway crosses the fertile south, where cities like Novosibirsk and Ulan Ude have opera houses. Most of Siberia is covered in forest with hardly any people and then as you get farther north the trees disappear and all you have is empty tundra with just a few hundred indigenous tribespeople who are basically nomadic reindeer herders and in the winter minus 60c," the author told us.

The book is filled with marvellous mishaps (a menu offering "hot shak with bird" turned out to be something else entirely) and genuine wonder (spending days on an island in Lake Baikal, the deepest lake in the world). Accompanied by his friend Michael Roberts, whose stunning photographs punctuate the text, Martin takes us from Tobolsk's stone kremlin to the grassy expanses of Mongolia, all with a twinkle in his eye.

What makes this a perfect read for mums? Because it reminds us that adventure doesn't have an age limit. Martin is knocking 80 when he made this trip. He has been blessed by a pope, a patriarch and a Siberian shaman (despite being a lifelong atheist), survived a near engine failure over the South China Sea, and once got locked in a church in Devon. His message is simple: say yes to the journey, even when it goes wrong, especially when it goes wrong.

So whether you are an armchair traveller hiding from the laundry, or a parent dreaming of the day your children are old enough to tackle the TransSiberian together, this book is a joy. It is funny, clever and deeply human.

***Jottings from the Trans-Siberian Railway* is available from Amazon. Give yourself the gift of an adventure you don't need to pack for.**

If it proves difficult to get copies via Amazon, feel free to contact the author via his email martinkyrletraveller@gmail.com

A mother's leap of faith: How one woman took her three children to India to rewrite their future with autism

It is rare for a memoir to make you believe in miracles again. *A Change of Karma: Half a Year Alone in India with my Three Children and Autism* by Dóra Lohonyai does exactly that.

This is not a clinical guide to autism. It is a raw, funny and hopeful account of a mother who refused to accept that her children's diagnoses were the end of the road.



Dóra is a mother of three. Her first two sons were diagnosed with autism, Tourette syndrome, intellectual disability and ADD. She heard the words no parent wants to hear: *There is no cure. This is how it will be.*

But Dóra is not someone who accepts a closed door. After years of

doctors and therapists, she felt weighed down by the limitations of the world around her. She began to wonder if the answer lay somewhere else entirely.

Somewhere like India.

Through a series of what some might call fate, Dóra heard of a renowned guru in South India. He had never worked with foreigners or children on the autism spectrum. Yet he promised to help her seek a change of karma for her children.

To most people this would sound like madness. To a mother who had exhausted every conventional option, it sounded like hope.

Alone, with her three young children, Dóra left her comfortable life in Hungary and boarded a plane to India. No nannies. No guarantees. Just a suitcase and a belief that love could bend the rules.

What follows is six months of unforgettable adventure. Dóra writes with honesty and



warmth dodging monkeys, bargaining with rickshaw drivers, explaining autism to bemused locals, and watching her children slowly begin to change. There is no sugarcoating. She shares her exhaustion and despair. But she also shares the magic: longer eye contact, unexpected kindness, the chaotic beauty of India holding her family tight.

This book is about what happens when you refuse to let fear make your decisions. Dóra writes: *“How can you accept the incurable state of your children as a mother and yet do everything to find a solution?”* She does not pretend to have “fixed” her children, autism is not something to be fixed. But she found a shift in perspective and a renewed sense of possibility.

The book has received glowing fivestar reviews. One reader said: *“An incredible journey of love and transformation... It's going to transform you.”*

Dóra is now an autism activist, TEDx speaker and founder of an autism support association. Her message is simple: *“My goal is to help as many people as possible understand and accept autism.”*

***A Change of Karma* is available now on Amazon. Sometimes, a change of karma starts with a single page. Let this book be that page for you.**

For more information about Dóra and her work, visit her website:
<https://lohonyaidora.hu/en/home/>

The hidden condition holding thousands of children back in school and the test that could be the answer

For years, ten year old Sophia struggled through three hour homework battles. She avoided books. Words seemed to blur and jump on the page. Her school suspected dyslexia, but said a formal diagnosis would be lengthy and costly. Without it, extra support such as extra time in exams would not be granted.

What nobody knew, including Sophia herself, was that she was living with a condition called visual stress. She had simply assumed that everyone read the same way.

Visual stress affects the way the brain processes visual information. Symptoms include words that move, blur or jump on the page, headaches or nausea when reading, fatigue, and sensitivity to bright light. These signs are often dismissed as laziness or confused with dyslexia. Crucially, a standard eye test will not detect it. And the specialist test that can identify the condition is currently available in less than 10 per cent of optical practices nationwide.

Sophia's mother Siu, who runs the MyGlassesAndMe blog, discovered the condition by chance at a work event. She met Kimberley Harrison, CEO of Cerium Visual Technologies, who explained that visual stress makes reading uncomfortable and exhausting. For Siu, it was a lightbulb moment.

Sophia underwent a two part specialist assessment using a device called the Intuitive Colorimeter. It tests thousands of colour combinations to find the exact tint that works for each individual patient. Precision is key, even small changes in hue or saturation can alter the therapeutic effect.

Sophia was prescribed a pair of precision tinted purple lenses. The difference was almost immediate. Homework that once took three hours was completed in 45 minutes. She read Roald Dahl's *Matilda* from cover to cover for the first time. And she is now on track to exceed expectations in her



Year 6 reading SATs, something her mother describes as unimaginable just twelve months ago.

"Her reading, her spelling, her confidence, everything has changed," says Siu. "And to think it all started with a conversation at a work event."

Kimberley Harrison says stories like Sophia's are a reminder of how many children are still waiting for answers. "These are bright, capable children who are being written off as reluctant readers or pushed towards diagnoses that may not be the full picture," she says. "A simple assessment could change everything for them."

For schools, the challenge is that the system is already stretched. Visual stress is not widely known in education and is not part of standard testing. Siu's advice to parents is simple: ask your child if the words jump around when they read. That one question could open a door that changes their life.

To find a Cerium specialist near you, visit ceriumvistech.com

SUMMER TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

Pack the sunnies, grab the hats,
Round up children, dogs and cats!

Funky luggage rolls with flair,
Floral cases everywhere.

Swimming costumes, bright and bold,
Ready for adventures untold.

Dad's in shorts with giant pockets,
Mum's in wedges, beachside rockets.
Goggles sparkle, bags are packed,
Holiday mode is fully unlocked!



From paddling pools to seaside piers,
We've tested summer's top-notch gear.
So zip, flip-flop and dash away,
London Mums has saved the day!

Great summer essentials by **Sprayground**
including swimwear and travel
accessories available from Amazon
and www.sprayground.com

Sun, Suitcases & Splashy Style!



LIFE IS **BETTER** ON THE WATER



Kids go **FREE** with a **24h River Pass**
20% OFF Sightseeing Cruises with code **LM20**

T&Cs: This offer only applies to sightseeing cruises.
Cannot be redeemed for cash, combined with any other offers
and may change or be withdrawn at any time without notice.
Void where prohibited. Additional terms & conditions may apply.

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