SHILPA SHETTY TALKS ABOUT HER PAINFUL YEAR AND FUTURE PLANS

DIANA ROSS PERFORMS AT DUBAI AIRSHOW GALA

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DUBAI-BASED CHARITY DYNAMO
MATTHEW MORGAN-JONES TALKS ADOPTION AND MEETING ANGELINA JOLIE AS HE INTRODUCES HELLO! TO HIS FOUR BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN PRIOR TO AN EVENING FOR AFRICA CHARITY EVENT WITH BOB GELDOF
'You can imagine with four kids five and under there are no dull moments in our household! They all have very individual and strong personalities'
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Orphanage as he was Dauda’s best friend so I returned to adopt him in November 2006, and at the same time met Magnus who was severely ill and under weight after being born with a cleft lip and palate. I returned to adopt her in May 2007 and I’ve never looked back.

And how is your life now that you have three four little people in it? "It’s crazy, but in a good way. You can imagine with four kids free and under there are no dull moments in our household! They all have very individual and strong personalities – you know when the Morgan-Jones triplets are in the room! I’m so proud that they are so full of life. I also truly believe that being born in a country in which one in four children die before the age of five, they really wouldn’t be here today if they were meek and mild."

Tell us about their personalities. "David is my philosopher and likes to reflect and make astute comments, usually at the breakfast table when you are trying to get everyone fed and off to school! Dauda is the charmer and has an infectious laugh that makes him very popular with the ladies. Magnus is our leader, she knows her own mind and I’m sure will be running the country by the time she is 30. Little Mariama is a heart stealer; when she smiles her whole face lights up and one look from those eyes and she has you under her spell."

It sounds like it’s been a non-stop few years, how have you found the experience? "I can’t tell you what focus and reward parenting my children has brought to my life. Each day brings with it so many challenges and delights. I’ve really forgotten what it was like to be a kid. They are so individual and have different needs. I really try and spend time with them individually, although it is sometimes difficult juggling my full-time consultancy job, my family and my volunteer work for All As One."

I’ve learned the hard way that it’s important to prioritise when you tend to overload myself then the balance becomes all wrong and the quality time with the kids suffers. I have had to learn to say no. The children have enriched my life in so many ways that I hope that I can do the same for theirs."

I understand you met Angelina Jolie in Sierra Leone when you were adopting Dauda and Magda, how did this come about? "I was invited on one of her many charity missions and I saw her in a hotel. It took me ages to pluck up the courage to approach her but when I did, and she found out I was in town to adopt, she was so..."
interested and we talked about our experiences. I really like her greatest.

I think it’s wonderful that she is creating her family through adoption and has highlighted the plight of Africa by delivering her birth child in Africa. She has also adopted slightly older children, again a big positive in my eyes, as these are the children usually left behind. Adoption is not about being fashionable, it’s about wanting to be a parent and knowing that you can provide a loving home to a child who desperately needs it.

How do you feel about the backlash against celebrities who adopt, like Angelina and Madonna, they have been quite heavily criticised in the media recently haven’t they?

“I hate the fact that people like Angelina and Madonna are criticised for adopting children from different countries. We seem to have forgotten that without people like them, these kids would not have families of their own. Obviously, in an ideal world, every child would be cared for by their birth parents, but that is not always possible. In the case of these two celebrities who have adopted, they have both done so much more. Madonna donated a considerable sum of money to the charity in Malawi that put her in touch with her son David, to make sure that the lives of the children who lived there were improved, while Angelina has donated more of her own time and money than any of us could imagine. They should be applauded, not abused, for what they are doing.”

You are clearly making a difference to your children’s lives (the kids obviously adore their father). What difference have donations from Dubai made to the lives of the children still in Sierra Leone?

“Ah, a huge difference. Through the generosity of Dubai residents the All As One Centre has opened and taken in more kids. It has found permanent homes for some, extended the school to include a nursery and provided a school uniform that gives the kids a sense of pride. Even just the basic things that we take for granted, like ensuring the centre has electricity and water, have become possible when in the past they weren’t. The centre also provides medical care, not only for the children in its care, but also for the local community. It also allows the children the chance to enjoy their childhoods and just be kids. This is important. I understand that there are lots of future plans for the centre and the charity as a whole.”

“We are now at a critical stage, as our vision is to build a new All As One village that would not only double the children we currently have in our care, but more importantly deal with the underlying issues that cause Sierra Leone to have an estimated 356,000 abandoned and orphaned children. The new village will have three children’s homes allowing us to have over 100 children in our direct care. The reasoning is that we have so many babies in our care that is one in seven mothers die in childbirth. This has to change.”

What are the plans for the village?

“We want to make sure that we can provide maternal care and ensure that women can give birth under medical supervision to keep them alive. We can only do our bit and hope that this will encourage others to do theirs.”

You’re having a fund raising event this week, on 11st November at the Habibco Grand, we know that Sir Bob Geldof is coming along to lend his support, what else is planned for the evening?

“It’s really going to be an evening to remember! We can’t thank Sir Miles and Transguard the sponsors of the event enough, they have kindly pledged the proceeds from the event to All As One. It’s amazing to think that Sir Bob Geldof, the international campaigner for African Development and obviously a great singer too, will be in Dubai helping us to spread the word to help More. The party will start with pre-dinner cocktails and African sounds from Dubai Drums – they are excellent and really raised the roof at our African Ball last year, so it’s great to have them back. We will then kick off with welcome and I’ll be giving an overview of AAO work, followed by dinner and music and then Sir Bob will be taking the floor and talking about his trips to Africa, and we are hoping he will finish off with a few songs! I’m still pinching myself at how lucky we are to have his support, he’s a really great guy and an asset to our cause!”

Reader can help by sponsoring a child at a cost of £120 per month.

To find out more about the work of All As One please go to www.allasonline.com or photocopy this article and give it to the Habibco Grand, Dubai.”

TEXT EMILY MCCAIRN
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