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BEAR'S BIGGEST SPLASH!

He's got three new TV shows, but in his frankest interview yet Bear Grylls tells how he regrets being an absent father – and why raising his sons is now his biggest challenge

Watching one man pit himself against the elements gets boring quite fast, a clever TV director once told Bear Grylls. 'We'd started to film Man Vs Wild and he said to me, "You'll never do more than one season of this because you're one man on his own and you'll either be dead, or people will be bored with just seeing one person." As it was, we managed to do seven seasons, but essentially he was right,' explains Bear.

The key to not getting bored with Bear Grylls and his incessant survival trials, then? Give him a celebrity sidekick. As soon as he started inviting folk more famous than himself on his outdoorsy japes in the series *Running Wild* back in 2014, he realised the genius of the move. Not only was there a fascination with seeing the likes of Julia Roberts, Kate Winslet and – his ultimate survival buddy – President Obama (while he was in office, no less) scrambling about in tents and kayaks, but Bear saw his own fanbase expand too. 'The trick is that with every episode you bring in a new demographic of fans, whether it's Channing Tatum's, Zac Efron's or Obama's,' he says.

Bear has done dozens of these celebrity survival shows now, and hasn't yet lost a famous person over a cliff. What's crucial is introducing

'Holding on to each other for dear life, you bond'

your talks.' So I spent a week charging around the mountains in Canada, jumping off cliffs, chasing snakes.'

Yet it's the celebrity associations that have turned Bear into a global phenomenon. Why do they trust him, not when their lives but with something more precious – their reputations? He admits it's because even the less gung-ho celebs end up looking like heroes, just for having had a go. 'Whatever their ability – and we do tailor the experience to what we think they're capable of – they'll have a few moments where they'll have to overcome some fears. That's the hero moment. I think one of the reasons we keep getting great guests is they always look heroic. It's genuine.'

It's no surprise that politicians, in particular, are clamouring to go out in a canoe with Bear. Has every MP in Britain been asking to come on since Obama? 'Er, yes, we've had quite a lot of them lining up, but I don't think we'd do that. We try to



Bear after climbing Everest in 1998, aged 23

going to have an amazing connection if we get through it.'

This is very Bear Grylls. Perhaps we can blame the SAS military training. We're meeting today in a soulless conference centre in Rotterdam where Bear, 44, will later be giving one of his motivational chats. He now advises CEOs of companies like Apple, but tells me he honed his skills speaking to Women's Institute groups in Britain. 'That was my way of finding sponsors, earning money between adventures. I'd climbed Everest and written a book. The TV stuff came after that. I didn't think it was just

bag, but I'd just left the military and got married. We were living on a houseboat, pretty broke, and an offer came up to do a TV thing and my wife

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Bear's necessities? GUNG-HO CELEBS!

From Barack Obama to Kate Winslet, why are the stars clamouring to run wild with Bear Grylls? Simple, he tells Jenny Johnston, they all come out looking like heroes – even the real scaredy-cats

keep it focused on entertainment. The Obama encounter was also surreal. The biggest shock was that – in a complete reversal of the usual TV tradition – it was Obama's people who approached Bear's team, asking to be involved. 'It was funny

because at the time I was at our hideaway in North Wales with the family.' He owns the little island of St Tudwal's, off the Llyn Peninsula. 'That's our sacred time. My number two rule is always to put family first [his number one rule, he says sternly, is to "stay alive"], so I don't take



President Obama having an Alaskan adventure with Bear in 2015

on work during the school holidays. Then the call came from the White House, saying he was going to Alaska and was a fan of the show, and could I possibly take him on a little journey and show him some climate-change stuff.

'But my family time really is non-negotiable, to the point where, when I told my wife, saying, "Wow, this is a cool one to do, I've really got to do it", she said, "Oh, can't he come to Wales?" I had to say, "Honey, no, he can't. He's the president."'

So, alas for Mrs Grylls, they ended up in Alaska. During filming, to Bear's bemusement, there were 60 Secret Service snipers in the woods, and no fewer than four helicopters circling overhead. Obama was in good shape, but were there things his people refused to sanction? 'Yes, totally. We showed them the route and I wanted him to descend a 100ft slope down the mountain and they said, "No way". We came back in the morning and they'd got the US



David Walliams braces himself for a terrifying abseil in the latest show

National Park Service to build a staircase. A full staircase! They'd banged in stakes and everything. I thought, "Wow, that's what happens when you're the president."

What a waste, though, given that President Obama refused to use it. 'He said, "Why the steps?" and I said, "They thought it was too dangerous." He said, "Rubbish, pal. I'll do whatever you want me to do." That was typically him. He loved it. Afterwards he said, "Best day of my presidency. I'm outside, out of a

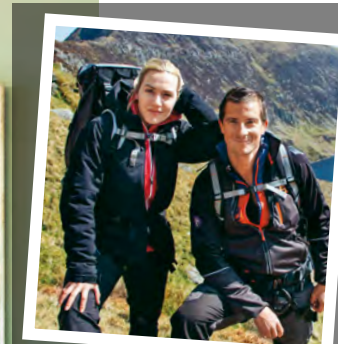
suit and talking about normal stuff rather than politics."

So, will his next celeb survivor be the current president? He doesn't exactly laugh but, well, no. He does not foresee President Trump calling to ask for his turn in the tent. 'I think he's a bit older than Obama and I'm not sure it's his bag. Generally we try to take non-divisive people, people who are universally

loved – that's a good benchmark. And I think politics is a dangerous one to get into.'

He says the celebs who've surprised him most have been the 'tiny Hollywood actresses who look like they're going to break' who turn out to have more grit than the brick-built men. 'The girls are always great, 99.9 per cent of the time they're impressive.' Which actresses in particular? 'Kate Winslet. Kate Hudson. I mean, gosh, there are so many. They're committed, quiet, determined. They just get on with it.'

Then there are some who surprise him. Ex-basketball player Shaquille



With actress Kate Winslet in Snowdonia in 2015

O'Neal was, at 7ft 11in tall, 'a huge unit, but in a wonderful way, a great scaredy-cat'. Then there was Roger Federer. 'You immediately think "so fearless", but the first thing he said was that he was more nervous than he'd been in any Grand Slam final. But with someone like that, you love him all the more for his honesty.'

So where does he go next with his celebs? Tantalisingly, he reveals that he's already filmed a programme with a famous face 'who is on a par with Obama'. Really? Short of getting the Queen or Sir David Attenborough abseiling. Is it hard to think who he can mean. 'I can't possibly reveal it yet,' he says, loving the teasing.

In the flesh, Bear is smaller than you'd imagine, and more gently spoken. He's been Chief Scout since the summer of 2009 and his mantra – 'never give up' – is something he knows about. He famously broke his back in three places just months before he became, in 1998, one of the youngest people ever to climb Everest at the age of 23. Yet he's not the gung-ho, adrenaline addict he was in his youth, he insists. Having children (he has three boys, Jesse, 16, Marmaduke, 13, and Huckleberry, ten) has made him more mindful of the need to balance his adventuring zeal with the desire to be at home with his kids.

The subject of whether men like him who take off on expeditions, leaving their wives at home, are just selfish, rather than superheroes, is a timely one. His old mate James Cracknell's marriage did not survive the strain, and the rower and endurance athlete's wife Beverley Turner has written with eye-watering candour about the reality of being married to such a driven soul. While he won't get into the specifics of that marriage ('I love James. He's a good friend'), he does recognise the phenomenon.

It was only about ten years ago, he says, that he resolved to shape his projects around his family. Does that mean he got the balance wrong before? 'Definitely in the early days, but these things are a case of learning from my mistakes. I was away a lot, and when the boys were young Shara carried a lot of the burden. When Jesse was born in 2003 I was up in the Arctic stuck in a boat for weeks on end when she really needed help.'

Did she ever say, 'Enough!?' 'No, she didn't, but over time we learned to take action before it

was a problem. I've designed things so that I do short, sharp trips and then get home. It's really tough because as the business grows, you get more success and that intoxicating thing of, "Oh I can do X, Y and Z." But actually you have to stay strong and say, "No, we won't film when the boys are on holiday." I'm at home a lot more with the younger one than I was with the older two, and he finds it more difficult when I'm away, because he's not used to it.'

It helps that he's not an Olympic athlete constantly seeking gold, too. 'I don't want to go off and do big, record-breaking things and say, "Look at me." The shows I make now are celebrating other people. I think when I was younger it was different. I was hungrier to make a mark, but life has definitely humbled that. That thing of wanting to be the first, or the youngest, or the strongest or biggest, it's gone.'

His professional portfolio is scarily big, though. There are new projects left, right and centre. On the National Geographic channel his new series *Hostile Planet*, which has just started, examines the world's toughest environments and how animals have adapted to survive them. On Netflix, he's launched an interactive show, *You Vs Wild*, which puts viewers in charge of deciding his journey's fate. At several points throughout each episode they must choose Bear's next steps for him, with one of the options leading to success and the other to his mission's failure. Brand Bear will not be tied down to one channel or network, though.

'Netflix and Amazon are exciting platforms and we do shows for them, but I never want to get to a point where we sign to one place exclusively like Top Gear.' He's referring to Jeremy Clarkson and his pals, who launched the *Top Gear* replacement *The Grand Tour* on Amazon after their exit from the BBC. 'We had exactly the same offer as *The Grand Tour*, but we weren't going to do it exclusively so we took another deal, and that was just as good.' Will his boys take on his business

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HIGH-FLYER Jed Mercurio, the writer behind hit TV series *Line Of Duty* and *Bodyguard*, started his career as a

flying officer in the Royal Air Force Medical Branch (The South Bank Show, tomorrow, 10.30pm, Sky Arts)

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empire? Perhaps Jesse will. 'He's really interested in that side.' Marmaduke, meanwhile, wants to be a police officer and Huckleberry a 'cliff-jumping skier'.

On St Tudwal's where the family spend summer, 'getting a loaf of bread is a real mission'. This was appealing when the boys were younger, but he's finding it more of a battle to keep them outside now. 'There's a little bit of eye-rolling from the older one,' he says of Jesse. He's a bit more like, "Do we have to spend the summer in Wales in the rain? There are some festivals on..."

This is a whole new parenting survival phase. Presumably, like most parents, he's now worrying about things like drugs, I ask. 'Yeah,' he says. 'I tell my boys it's about developing their peer-pressure muscle, because it is a muscle. It's not about me saying, "Don't do this or that", it's about them being able to have the strength of character to say no.'

He comes from sturdy stock. His mother Sally still swims in the sea most days in her late 70s. His biggest regret, he says, is that his dad, Conservative politician Sir Michael, was not around to see his grandsons born. 'He died just after Shara and I got married. She lost her dad too, and that was a difficult



Bear with his wife Shara on St Tudwal's, the island they own in North Wales

time because we were just trying to get on our feet, and suddenly we were the ones looking after the mums. I still miss Dad every day. Not a day goes by where I don't wish I could ask him something.'

Was his dad the sort who was on the touchlines, yelling at him to run faster? Somehow you imagine he must have been. 'The opposite,' he says. 'My dad was there cheering me on when my role was to bring the orange halves on at half time, because I wasn't good enough to make the rugby team. He was never pushy. For him, the fact that I was taking part was the important bit. I don't want my boys to be feeling they have to be first. I want them to have kind hearts.'

Perhaps he's mellowing. He's 44 now and says he's feeling his age. 'Oh yes, everything aches. I've been aching for decades. I'm not joking. At 25 I was getting out of bed like an old man. But you know what? That's OK. What's that quote about not wanting to arrive at the end of your life with a perfectly preserved body? That's me! I want to come skidding in sideways, covered in scars, screaming, "Yahoo!"'

Bear's Mission With David Walliams will air this month on ITV. Hostile Planet is on Sundays at 9pm on National Geographic. You Vs Wild is on Netflix now.

From Victoria to The Crown, we can't get enough of TV dramas about British royals. The latest to hit our screens is about another queen of England, albeit one who has often seemed like the side story in the bigger tale of her husband's murderous reign.

The Spanish Princess, a sequel to the hits The White Queen and The White Princess about the Wars of the Roses and the early days of the Tudor dynasty, centres on Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. It shows her before she was scorned in favour of a younger model who might be able to give Henry the male heir he so desperately wanted.

Catherine is typically portrayed as little more than the older, uglier, spurned wife whose refusal to go quietly led to Henry's break with the Catholic Church. But in this retelling, which like those previous series is based on books by Philippa Gregory, she is much more than that.

'Catherine is perceived as an older woman who was unwanted baggage for Henry VIII, when in fact she was the love of his life,' says the drama's co-writer Emma Frost. 'They were married for 17 years before he took up with Anne Boleyn, and we felt it necessary to dignify Catherine's place in history with a retelling of her story.'

This starts in Spain with Catherine, daughter of Queen Isabella of Castile, being brought up to believe it's her destiny to be queen of England because, as a direct descendant of John of Gaunt, the father of Henry IV, she's an heir to the English throne.

Played by British actress Charlotte Hope, Catherine arrives in England at the age of 15 to marry Arthur, the Prince of Wales. The princess's arrival in this dour, warring nation from what was then the most powerful country in Europe is a culture shock for her. She's surrounded by enemies, in particular Maggie Pole, played by Downton Abbey's Laura Carmichael – her brother Edward Plantagenet, a nephew of Richard III, had been killed to ensure there were no challengers to Arthur's – and so Catherine's – path to the throne.

'Most marriages come with a degree of pressure,' says Emma's co-writer Matthew Graham. 'But this one particularly so

because the security of Europe hinges on it being successful.'

When, less than five months after their wedding, Arthur dies of a disease known as 'the sweating sickness', Catherine is forced to take destiny into her own hands. 'From the age of four she'd been

told God was giving her the throne of England,' says Matthew. 'When circumstances changed and the throne seemed to be out of her grip, she refused to believe that was God's will. She had to fulfil the destiny God laid out for her.'

So we see Catherine spin the tale that will lead to her becoming queen of England – she claims her union with Arthur was never consummated, something that would allow her to marry his younger brother Henry (Ruairi O'Connor), now the king himself after the death of Henry VII.

'Catherine is such a fascinating character because she has this

Ruairi O'Connor and Charlotte Hope as Henry VIII and Catherine. Inset: a portrait of the real queen



The REAL love of Henry's life

History's portrayed Catherine of Aragon as an ugly spurned wife, but a new show reveals she was much more than that

absolute belief in what her destiny should be,' says Emma. 'She makes dangerous choices to get where she wants to be.'

Although her marriage to Henry, five years her junior, was convenient as it meant her valuable dowry stayed in England, it also turned out to be 'a real love match', Emma insists. But when Catherine failed to produce a male heir, Henry 'became obsessed with the idea that God was punishing him for marrying his brother's wife,' says Emma. 'It becomes a story about a lie. The series looks at the decisions she made and their consequences. It's a strong story of a woman trying to define her place in the world, and one modern audiences will be able to relate to.'

Nicole Lampert

The Spanish Princess will be on Starzplay (via Amazon Prime and Virgin) from tomorrow.



Catherine and her retinue arrive in England in the new drama

LANCE A LOT

Medieval-style jousting events begin across the UK this week, and will continue until August