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Jo Malone: I was terrified of presenting BBC show because I'm dyslexic

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Stage fright: Entrepreneur Jo Malone found the transition from business guru to TV presenter terrifying and nearly gave up

Fearless on the shop floor and in the boardroom, fragrance tycoon Jo Malone turned to jelly when making her new BBC series High street Dreams.

The 47-year-old entrepreneur found the transition from business guru to TV presenter terrifying and nearly gave up.

The reason? 'It was my dyslexia,' admits Jo. 'I was terrified that I would make a huge mistake.'

The night before filming began Jo says she was 'sick all night long'.

The next morning she went to Alison Kirkham, the commissioning editor, and said: 'I can't do this. I can't read the script.'

Alison ripped up the script and said: 'Just be you.' even then watching herself on screen was uncomfortable.

'Luckily I was with my husband Gary. He cried as he was so moved by the show,' she says.

Jo, who rarely talks about her surveyor husband and nine-year-old son, Josh, formed a close bond with the families in the series.

Indeed, her husband's tears were triggered by the Singh family, who got their spicy sauce, made at home in a shed, approved by Asda.

It's not a far cry from the council estate in Bexleyheath, Kent, where 30 years ago Jo began mixing fragrances.

She left school at 15 to look after her mother, a beautician who had suffered a stroke, and ten-year-old sister, without any financial backing.



Nerves: The night before filming began Jo, pictured on the show, says she was 'sick all night long'

'I taught myself how to make face cream in a council estate kitchen. I'd go up to London on the train, sell the product to my mum's clients and come back with money for food.'

Her breakthrough came after she gave bath oil to favoured clients. One asked for 100 bottles to give to dinner guests - 86 of whom ordered more.

In 1994, she opened her first shop in Knightsbridge and five years later made undisclosed millions when she sold the business to Estee Lauder.

Then six years ago Jo was diagnosed with an aggressive breast cancer, resulting in a double mastectomy.

'Hard things happen and you find out the person you really are,' she says. 'I feel there are another two chapters in me.'

'I don't know what they are, but I need to do something else.'

High Street Dreams concludes on Monday, June 7, at 9pm on BBC1.

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Now Estee Lauder own the company, I hope they don't mess with the original fragrances. Prefer Jo Malone's natural scents. I love the packaging.

- Barbara Doll, Bonnie Dundee, 28/5/2010 13:58

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I was so pleased I stumbled across this series and hope the BBC commissions more...it was really good. Jo was great in it too...can't believe she has dyslexia...I have even more respect for her after reading this. It goes to show you can overcome handicaps with determination.

- Great show!, London, 28/5/2010 13:22

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I love her perfumes - A bit pricey, but good quality - you get what you pay for. She's done very well and should be proud.

- Lottie, UK, 28/5/2010 13:14

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She is an inspirational woman and is terrific on the tele. Warm, kind and successful - a real role model for businesspeople everywhere!

- Linda, London, 28/5/2010 12:56

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Jo Malone is a wonderful inspiration for women at all levels: She is attractive, intelligent, vibrant, successful, sincere and straightforward! I think the show's success is very much due to her input. She talks a lot of sense (from her own business experience) and is able to put that information across in an accessible way, without being dogmatic, bullying or smug. I really enjoy the show and hope there will be a further series.

- kimh, Bath, Somerset, 28/5/2010 12:11

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I went for a facial to Jo Malone's salon after seeing a great write up about it. It took ages to save up for, and also used some birthday money, as it was very expensive. The staff were really unpleasant, rude and arrogant. The facial was nothing special either.

- jazzy, essex, 28/5/2010 11:54

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