

Living with a showbiz mum

Down To Earth star Denise Welch, 46, and her son, Matthew, 15, talk exclusively about how fame has affected their relationship...

Denise on Matthew

'My husband (Aul Wickeshehn, 46, star *Tim Mee!*) and I always wanted to have children. We never wanted to any particular time, but as it happened, I was four months pregnant with Matthew when I landed down the aisle 15 years ago. I wanted to do everything "right", so I opted for natural childbirth. But unfortunately I was in labour for 36 hours. Shortly after returning home with Matthew, I was hit with postnatal depression. I loved Matthew so much, but I felt like the worst mum in the world, unable to cope with anything. Thankfully, we moved back up north, so I was able to get through it with the help of my family and friends. I've always tried to be a good working mum. On Matthew's first birthday, I pulled out all the stops. I spent ages organising it and inviting his friends. Matthew's little face was a picture. Then my friend, Jimmy Nail's wife, Miriam, asked me, "Where's the birthday cake?" I'd forgotten it! I had to dash-out to the local Co-Op to buy one.

As early as three years old, Matthew showed signs of being a great performer. He was addicted to *Shogun*, Jackson and Lewis at his dance moves. But as much as I encourage his talents, apart from the odd day as an extra on some of my programmes, we've never been keen on him becoming a child actor. I've seen what fame can do to kids, and also how boring and soul-destroying it can be. We've always said he can make up his own mind when he's 15. He seems to understand. Besides, I think he's more interested in becoming a rock star. Matthew always makes me laugh - it can be like living with Chandler from *Friends* sometimes. He's a bit of a bit of a practical joker. I bought him rollerblades once, but then wouldn't stop nagging him about being careful. He was hitting me a lesson by falling an accident. He can be a real wind-up merchant. Matthew and I have a very tactile relationship. As a child, he'd always rush to give me a kiss when I picked him up at school. It changed slightly when he

reached his teens - well, it isn't cool to kiss your mum, is it? Any attempt was met with, "Oh Mum, get off!" These days, when I have to go away, he texts me saying, "Miss you, love you Mum, can't wait to see you" when I'm at home, we do quite a lot together - catch a movie or go swimming - and we go on at least two family holidays a year. We've never really argued much, even during his teens. I caught him smoking once, which I went mad about, although I'm a hypocrite, as I smoke. Thankfully, it was just a phase. I've caught myself moaning about his dress sense too - he likes to wear his jeans hanging off his bum. But then I think about the skinhead

'I moan about Matthew's dress sense, but then I recall I was a skinhead at 15'

I had at 15, so I can't really say anything. Matthew has just started dating, but he doesn't really talk to me about it. No matter how trendy a mum you think you are, when a stunning young lady comes round to the house, you have to swallow hard and realise he's growing up. Let's just say, it feels strange to walk into your own living room to see a girl giving your son a head massage...



Denise with her Down To Earth co-star Micky Doland

Matthew wears: T-shirt, £14, Mace T Wines; combi, £48, Jungs; belt, £22, Topman
Denise wears: Jungs, £14, Mace Wines; jeans, Denise's own; ring, £22, Wilko



Left: Denise and Matthew as a toddler. Above, with her husband of 16 years, Tim Wickeshehn. Inset: Denise and Matthew as a toddler. Below: Denise and Matthew as a toddler.

Matthew on Denise

'My earliest childhood memory has to be going shopping for a toy with Mum when I was three. There was a trolley in the shop and some boys were knocked over. Mum let go of my hand to help pick up the pieces - and I was gone in a flash. I was out for about two minutes before a woman assistant found me and asked, "Have you lost your mum?" With tears in my eyes, I nodded, and she asked me what Mum looked like. I said she had yellow and black hair. Looking back, she obviously just needed her roots doing. My mum's a very glam figure, and people have always fussed over her. It didn't dawn on me until I was about six that my family was different. My mum's parents didn't go away for work, and they certainly didn't appear on *TV*. When Mum was in *Soldier Soldier*, kids at school started to come up and say "Your mum's on the telly."

It wasn't that difficult for me. Mum set me down once and explained to me that all the nice things and holidays we had were due to her and Dad's acting job. The downside was it sometimes meant they had to go away, but she loved me very much and she was always there for me. It didn't bother me much, as one of my parents always seemed to be at home, or one of my grandparents. The negative thing about having famous parents is I have to pick my friends carefully. I'm sure some people behind me just to meet my mum and dad. The upside is that I get to go on *TV* sets. I was in *Soldier* as baby Edward, and I've been an extra in *Soldier Soldier* and in *Down To*

'Mum used to drive me to school in her dressing gown - it was awful'

Earth. I was even in Mum's gap video for *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*, as the mystery "man" Mum was acting for. Her chauffeur took me to buy an Action Man during a break, and I thought, "This showbiz isn't all right!" I've always been proud of Mum, except when she went through a phase of driving me to school in her dressing gown. It was so embarrassing! I also didn't like her kissing me at the school gates, but that was only for about a year. My parents sent me to a private school for a while, which just wasn't for me. It was very academic and rugby-orientated and less driven towards the arts. I kept telling Mum "I hated it. I think she thought I was just being rebellious and told me to get on with it. But one night she heard me crying, took one look at me and said, "It's the school, isn't it?" There was no question - Mum and Dad knew they had to let me leave. Months later, my little brother Lewis was born. I didn't feel I was getting a brother, more that I was getting a mate who I couldn't wait to look after. Saddy Louis couldn't pass signs when he was born and was diagnosed as having Hirschsprung's disease. Mum explained it to me in her usual calm way and told me it was going to be OK. But I have to say I look one look at him in the incubator and tell my eyes water. If I had to sum my mum up, she is like a friend without stopping being a mum - and she always makes me proud." Down To Earth starts tonight at 8pm on BBC1