



# FAMOUS & SHAMELESS

## HOW THIS WOMAN'S LIFE AND DEATH CHANGED REALITY TV FOREVER

She was crude, ignorant and talentless – but that didn't stop Britain's Jade Goody from becoming the reality TV star of the decade. In the wake of her death from cervical cancer, Andrea Thompson asks if we'll ever see anyone like her again



Sitting naked on a red sofa, the pudgy 21-year-old dental nurse displays her bulbous breasts and flabby tummy for millions of viewers, mesmerised as they tuck into their dinner. It's July 2002, and *Big Brother's* most luridly incandescent star is being born in Britain's living rooms. Her blonde hair hanging limp around her face and her eyes increasingly glassy, she hiccups her way through a drinking game before declaring: "I'm showing my kebab!"

Jade Goody's performance that night was enough to make viewers choke on their fish and chips, but she was ballsy and outspoken, and possessed a childlike ignorance that was somehow endearing. "East Angular – ain't that abroad?" she asked of the English county East Anglia, on one occasion. "Rio de Janeiro – ain't

that a person?" she wondered on another. There was vulnerability to Goody, and a strength that would be tested in the triumphs and tragedy to come.

Goody didn't win the show – she came fourth – but what no-one imagined when she emerged grinning from the *BB* house, in a tight, pink strapless dress, was that this inarticulate woman would cleverly use her nascent fame to become one of the UK's biggest stars.

Over the next few years, she reached giddy heights: Goody hosted her own TV show, released two autobiographies, produced fitness DVDs, opened a beauty salon and launched a perfume that nearly outsold Kylie Minogue's – all under the glare of the paparazzi. She became *Big Brother's* first millionaire and arguably the most famous "instant celebrity" in television history. "It's not [been] five ►



From left: Goody and fellow reality TV star Jeff Brazier, expecting their first child, in June 2003; Goody's mother, Jackie Budden, takes her grandsons to visit their mum in hospital last February; Goody and Shilpa Shetty reunite for India's *Bigg Boss*; Goody learns she has cancer live on air.



minutes of fame," Goody pointed out last year – misquoting Andy Warhol by 10 minutes. "It's been seven years!"

At the peak of her success, it seemed this working-class heroine had achieved the financial security she craved, enabling her to provide a happy home life for her young sons, Bobby and Freddie. But tragically, her happiness was short-lived.

While appearing in *Bigg Boss* – the Indian version of *Big Brother* – Goody took a call from her doctor on live TV. She had cervical cancer, and the prognosis wasn't good. The footage is still almost too heartbreaking to watch. Gulping huge sobs and wiping tears from her face with the back of her hand, Goody asks whether someone is lying to her, or if it is all a joke. Her face is a portrait of desolation. "I'm devastated that I won't see my boys grow into men and get married," she cried later. "That's what all mums dream of, isn't it?"

Many of us would have slipped away to prepare for death in private – but that wasn't Goody's style. When she passed away on March 22, it was at the centre of a media maelstrom. Living TV paid \$200,000 to film her final months, and the public grief was so great that British Prime Minister Gordon Brown was moved to say that he, too, was "deeply saddened" when Goody died, aged 27.

But her death wasn't just personally tragic. Even as the hundreds of bouquets mounted up outside her home, there was a sense her passing marked the end of an era, too. It was the age of instant celebrity, conspicuous consumption – a time when nothing was too brash, too bling or too public. "Jade was our best and our worst, exposed utterly in the raw, on national television," explains TV commentator Gigi Eligoloff, a producer who first met

Goody when she auditioned for series three of *Big Brother*. "More than many of the so-called 'stars of reality television', Jade really did encapsulate the only acceptable aim of reality television, which was to hold a mirror up to society."

Now that she's gone, some wonder if society still wants to gaze into that mirror. "People had begun to tire of the talentless, warts-and-all approach to reality TV," says UK *Daily Telegraph* critic James Walton, who has observed changes over the past 10 years. "The *Big Brother* format was becoming trite and tired, and viewers were dwindling. Producers were looking for a new approach."

**In a poll of 1000 girls, 89 per cent nominated "being a celebrity" as their ambition**

Channel Ten this year dumped the Australian version of *Big Brother* after eight seasons, and while reality TV remains a staple of the pop-culture diet, the format is increasingly about talent, as well as brash confidence. *Fame Academy* and *Britain's Got Talent* (whose contestant Susan Boyle achieved worldwide fame via YouTube in April) have gained popularity. So, too, have competitive shows like *Dancing With The Stars*. "These are shows," says Walton, "where contestants have to have some sort of talent to make it."

Being famous simply for being famous no longer holds the same appeal. Even once-vacuous socialite Nicole Richie has a new seriousness (thanks to her baby), while her ex-mate Paris Hilton has faded from the scene, along with other heirs like Kim Kardashian and Kelly Osbourne. Today's celebrities are expected to inhabit a more relevant

place in the world, in the way Angelina Jolie and Kate Winslet appear to. But part of Goody's appeal was the fact she had no right to be on the A-list in the first place.

She suffered a gut-wrenchingly difficult childhood. Born on an inner-London housing estate to Jackie Budden, an abusive mother, and Andrew Goody, a convicted robber, Jade was four when she first saw her father shoot up heroin (he died of an overdose in 2005). At five, she toked on her first joint (later selling the pictures to the media) and, at 20, she



A terminally ill Goody marries Jack Tweed before sons Bobby, five, and Freddie, four – and one million TV viewers – on March 12. Below: the many faces of the reality TV star.

smoked cocaine in front of her mother in an attempt to show the crack-addicted woman how destructive it was. The only way to survive was to develop a tough exterior. “I’d never talked about my feelings towards my dad,” Goody said after he died. “I’d barely acknowledged his existence.”

Tellingly, TV producer Philip Edgar Jones, who works for Endemol – makers of a slew of reality shows, including *Big Brother* – says Goody was typical of the women who auditioned, and were duly ushered on to the small screen. He describes many as insecure young women who had “troubled” relationships with their fathers, and who saw *Big Brother* as a passport to a

better life. “Celebrity is a substitute community for people from such broken or difficult homes,” he comments.

Leading UK psychologist and broadcaster Corinne Sweet agrees that reality TV offered an escape for disadvantaged women. “The past decade has seen a further breakdown of the traditional family unit,” she says. “The media was obsessed with ‘triumph over tragedy’ and ‘real-life to celebrity’ stories. Reality TV and the world of celebrity became an acceptable escape from the misery of real life.”

In a 2005 poll of nearly 1000 British girls, 89 per cent nominated “being a celebrity” as their ambition. Pin-up Abi Titmuss was seen as a role model by nearly 50 per cent. *Harry Potter* creator JK Rowling, whose talent took her from impoverished single mum to richest woman in Britain, registered just nine per cent.

If Rowling remains Britain’s wealthiest woman, Goody set about being its most omnipresent. “Jade was unique,” claims her agent, Max Clifford. “She had a special star quality and combined determination with a good heart. People warm to this.”

And from the moment she first tasted fame, Goody worked tirelessly to perpetuate it. In the four years after leaving the *Big Brother* house, she launched her own fitness video, *Jade’s Dance Workout*; a perfume called Shh; and hosted TV shows, including *Just Jade*.

By no means a classic beauty, Goody strived to make the most of what she had. She dropped two dress sizes and began wearing sleek hair extensions and Gucci dresses. Her Cinderella-like transformation

was complete. “Gone was the needy, fat moaner and in her place was a whole new Jade,” Goody wrote in 2006’s *Jade: My Autobiography*. The public’s appetite for her was insatiable. When she graced the cover of *Heat* magazine in 2002, it sold a record 640,000 copies in a month.

Her home life, however, was more fraught. Goody had two children with fellow reality TV star Jeff Brazier, and although they had money to burn, the relationship was short-lived. So was Goody’s run of great publicity.

In January 2007, when she re-entered the *BB* house to boost ratings of *Celebrity Big Brother*, an increasingly reality-weary public began to turn on Goody, and she unleashed a torrent of outrage when she bullied a fellow housemate, Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty. Over several episodes, a belligerent Goody lampooned her as “Shilpa Poppadom” and told her, among other things, that “you need a day in the slums”. Almost overnight, Goody’s name was mud. “It’s pure racism and she must not be allowed to get away with it,” thundered the *Daily Mirror*.

It was a PR disaster. Goody was promptly dumped as patron of an anti-bullying charity, and not even a tearful apology could stop her fall from grace. Her perfume was withdrawn from shops, while effigies of Goody were burnt on the streets of India. Within a fortnight, her media career – which included magazine columns and an offer to star in a new reality TV show – dried up.

The humiliation took its toll. Goody became bulimic and depressed, and she entered the Priory rehab clinic. A new relationship with trainee football agent Jack Tweed seemed like a light at the end of the tunnel – particularly when they announced Goody was expecting their first child. But there was tragedy to follow when she miscarried 12 weeks into the pregnancy. Goody felt she was being punished for her bad treatment of Shetty. “I did ask, ‘Why is all this happening to me?’” she admitted. “I thought it was God’s punishment for something I’d done.”

Anxious to counter claims she was a racist, Goody meekly entered the *Big Boss* house, in August 2008, and – almost as if it was scripted – the final chapter of her life was cued. After just a few days in the house, Goody was called to the diary room to take a call from her doctor. ►





Clockwise from far left: Goody's father, Andrew – a convicted robber – tries to cash in on his estranged daughter's fame in 2003; Tweed and Budden leave Goody's lavish funeral; floral tributes line the funeral route; her husband (rear, right) was a pallbearer.

Despite being given the option of privacy, Goody took the call on air. When she was told tests following a stomach complaint had revealed she had cervical cancer and was dying, she broke down. "Some will say it's about time I got my punishments," Goody said after having a hysterectomy. "But my whole life has been awful ... I need to think about me and my boys now."

Social commentator and columnist Celia Waldon was aghast: "Serious medical news concerning life-and-death decisions should never be broken to contestants live on camera, regardless of whether it makes good television."

But there was worse to come. As the gravity of Goody's illness became clear, her past transgressions were put aside as the media feeding frenzy went into overdrive. "Pale Jade fights on for her sons," *The Sun* newspaper declared when Goody announced she was now focused on providing for Bobby, five, and Freddie, four. She became international news, too, making *The New York Times*, while Clifford fielded calls from as far away as Argentina. Prime Minister Brown even took time out from dealing with the global financial crisis to note that Goody's "determination to help her family is something we have to applaud".

And as always, the cameras were rolling, documenting every moment for a TV show. Goody drew ire for allowing herself to be used in what some labelled "death porn", but she was unrepentant. "People will say I'm doing this for money," Goody remarked, when attacked for going public with her cancer fight. "And they're right, I am. But it's not to buy flash cars or big houses – it's for my sons' future, if I'm not here. I don't want my kids to have the same miserable, drug-blighted, poverty-stricken childhood I did."



But Waldon says going public was Goody's only choice. "Jade knew nothing else, and did not have a career or talent to rely on," she explains. "She has been criticised for playing out her death so publicly, but the real criticism should be saved for those who have used her naivety."

Criticism or not, one million viewers tuned in on March 12 to watch Living TV's documentary *Jade's Wedding* – a record for the channel. Her diagnosis had a more far-reaching consequence, too. UK clinics have seen a 30 per cent rise in enquiries from women under 25 for Pap tests since the beginning of the year, and nearly 120,000 people have signed an online petition to lower the age of cervical screening to 20. "That's the positive that has come out of this tragedy," says Robert Music, director of Jo's Trust, the UK's only dedicated cervical cancer charity.

But even as Goody became critically ill, media deals were still being done. Last February, Goody struggled down the aisle, in obvious pain, to marry 21-year-old Tweed, selling the rights to *OK!* magazine for \$2 million. Elton John offered her his home for the honeymoon, while Harrods boss Mohamed Al Fayed donated her \$7000 designer wedding dress. "Her life story," Clifford mused, always with an eye for a moneymaking opportunity, "would make a perfect Hollywood movie."

On April 4, thousands lined the route of Goody's funeral cortege. Mourners threw flowers as her coffin passed; a scene the British press compared to the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. Kirsty Brooks, 34, travelled 250 kilometres to pay her respects to a fellow battler. Goody, she said, "was a real woman who always put her kids first to the end". Inside St John the Baptist Church, in Buckhurst Hill, Essex, a film clip of Goody ended with her saying: "That's it from me. See you around maybe. Bye." But even in death, her detractors took aim. "It's not the passing of a martyr or a saint or, God help us, Princess Di," riled veteran broadcaster Michael Parkinson. Instead, he said Goody "came to represent all that's paltry and wretched about Britain today".

However history judges her, it's unlikely we'll witness a reality TV star like Goody again. "[*Big Brother's*] huge success came in a different, more instant fame-obsessed culture and the idea felt innovative and risky, but that's not the case now," says David Wise of UK reality TV company Betty. "There's been a shift towards more 'event TV' and elimination competitions over the last few years. TV is not about depicting reality anymore. Today's viewers want escapism."

Ultimately, if Goody hadn't endured such a dramatic and harrowing demise, says Walton, she would have faded into obscurity. "Had things not gone tragically wrong for Jade, I believe she would have disappeared from public consciousness by now," he asserts. But through the nature of her passing, Goody has bequeathed a legacy beyond the frivolity of instant fame. "She has had a big impact on women's health and has potentially saved lives," says Music. "I don't think there's any greater legacy than that." ■