

TV INTERVIEW



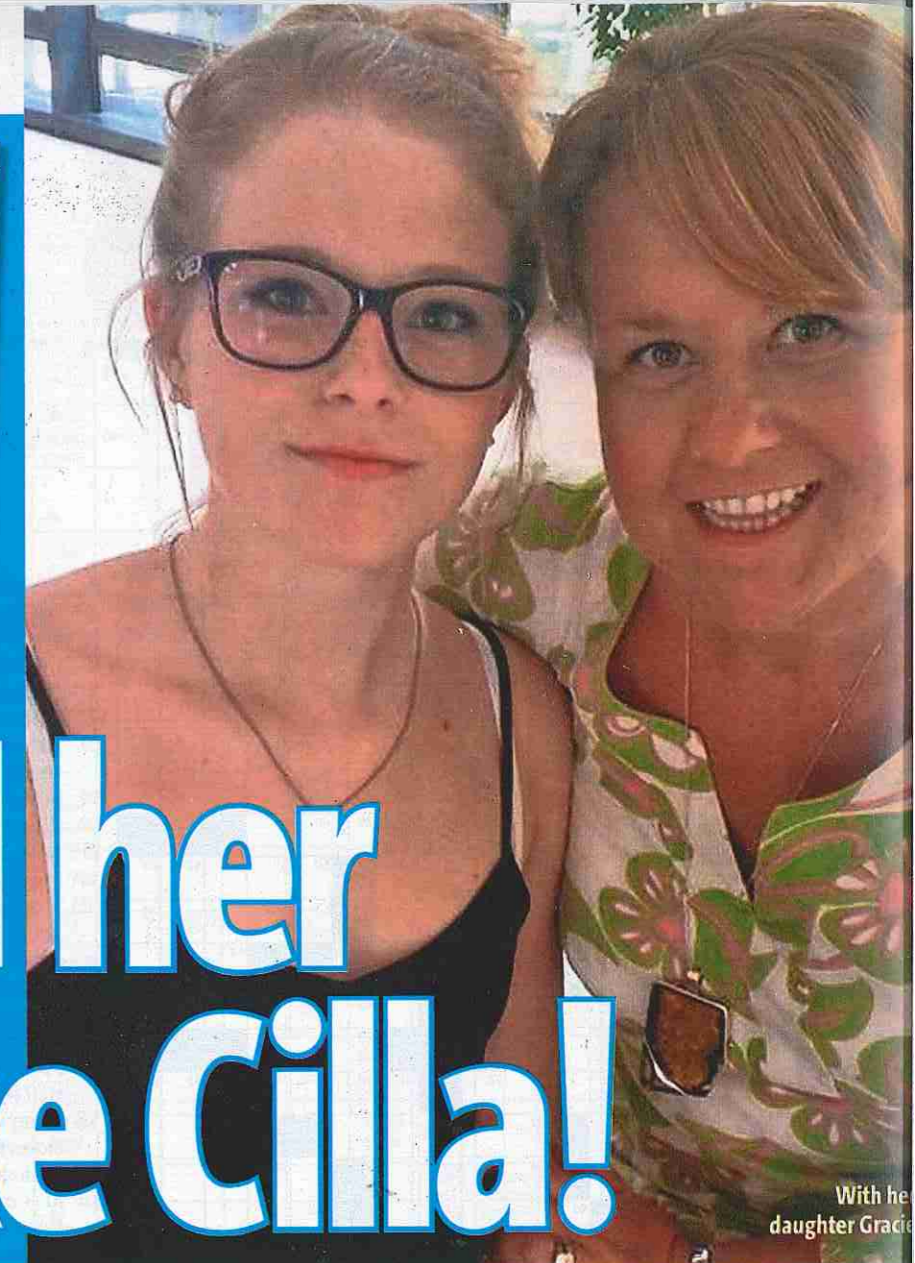
On screen in 2003 with Chesney and Fiz



The battleaxe is back! Right: Cilla with her husband Les and Father Abraham



Wendi with her screen son, played by Sam Aston



With her daughter Gracie

My daughter's worried her friends will think I'm like Cilla!

Wendi Peters tells *Bella* she's excited but nervous to be back on *Corrie*...

Cilla Battersby is one of *Coronation Street's* legendary feisty females – and after seven years away, she returns this week with a secret illness she's struggling to discuss with her family.

But after her previous behaviour, her children Fiz (Jennie McAlpine) and Chesney (Sam Aston) are less than impressed that she's trying to waltz back into their lives.

Here, Wendi Peters, 46, admits she was nervous about returning as the brash, loud Cilla but it felt right to catch up with her again...

Hi Wendi. Where has Cilla been?

She's been in Wolverhampton! I thought it was going to be somewhere exotic. She'd gone to Vegas and then she ended up in South Africa – because we did a one-off DVD there – but for the

six years after that, we had no idea where she'd been.

Cilla now has two grandchildren, Hope and Joseph, who she's never met. How will that be for her?

She's actually very pleased. She's thrilled with Joseph – she thinks he's very bonny and takes after his nana. I think Chesney was always her blue-eyed boy, and she sees Joseph as the new Chesney. So he's the apple of her eye.

Is it strange that little Chesney is now a grown-up?

He's certainly not little any more – he's huge! Sam's just as lovely as he always was, though. He's such a nice lad.

What was your reaction when they said: 'We want to bring you back?'

It was a bit of a shock really. I was

in the car and the phone went on the hands-free and it was my agent saying: 'Ooh, I've just had Granada on the phone...'

I'd put Cilla to bed and completely moved on, doing lots of lovely theatre and bits of TV and having more time at home with the family [husband Kenny Linden and daughter Gracie, 14] and it was something that I'd never really considered.

It's lovely just to come back for a short break to find out where she's been and what she's up to.

Did you ever regret leaving *Coronation Street*?

There really wasn't a time when I thought I'd quite like to come back. I *am* thrilled to be back, but I suppose I've been very lucky since I left. I've never been out of work for two or three months and

gone: 'Gosh, what am I going to do?' This just fitted in with other things – it was the perfect opportunity.

It's also lovely coming back to have the purpose of getting Jennie out for her maternity leave. The fact that my screen daughter's properly having a baby, I feel like I'm going to be a granny!

Does Cilla still have her own unique style?!

We had to get her some new clothes because not many people have the same wardrobe seven years on. She's gone a bit more upmarket. I don't want to say the stores we went to because they'll be a bit offended!

There's still lots of gold, still things that are a little bit too tight for her. And she's still got the gold jewellery, which I picked out of my loft. They didn't know I'd taken

it – no wonder they couldn't find it! I have a Cilla box – I put in a few scripts, photos, her jewellery and a little hat from the last scene. And it's just been up in the loft for the last six years, so it's come out again.

Were you nervous when you first came back?

So nervous. The first day I was like a little schoolgirl because

it's a whole new building as well. It's not just going back to something, it's going back with a whole new outlook.

I've seen some of the others over the past seven years, outside of work for lunch and stuff, so it's not like I hadn't seen anybody. But I really wasn't certain that I'd done the right thing for me and I was going to be okay.

Did you watch any old episodes?

I did and I shouldn't have done it. I watched Cilla's final episodes before she left for Vegas and I hated her. I was watching them with my husband and afterwards I said: 'What am I doing? Why am I going back to this?'

Which *Corrie* actors have you kept in touch with?

Jenny, Sam, Andy Whyment [Kirk] – Cilla's family. It's your

close family on set that you work with and get to know. You can be here three weeks, for instance, and they're the only people you really get to see.

Over the years, I've been up in Manchester doing plays and they've come to see me. Then when I've visited my mum we'll see each other. I also went to *Corrie's* 50th anniversary party, which was brilliant.

When you left, it was to spend more time with your daughter Gracie. Did you get to do that?

I said that and then people started offering me things! But the nice thing is that there have been stretches where I know I'm going away to film for eight weeks, then I'm going to be home for six weeks.

So even though I'm still going away to work, the time I do have at home is more quality time, it's more concentrated. I'm doing

things like the school run, the ballet runs, all those things I felt I'd missed out on when I was between three and seven. She's 14 now.

How does she feel about you being back in *Corrie*?

There's a mix with her because as a 14-year-old she's excited the prospect of me being back. I think she's also a bit worried because when she was seven friends didn't watch *Corrie*. I had no idea what it was all so nobody really knew who I was just Gracie's mum.

Now they're all going to watch it and it's not like I'm a very person on screen. They'll all be going: 'Oh, there's Mrs Smith. She's just like that when she's Gracie off at the school gate.'

• *Coronation Street* is on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays on



Wendi with her husband Kenny