



“Take what you are good at and use it to involve other people. Work out what skill you have to just make a tiny change”

A doer as well as a dreamer, Caryn Franklin's career has changed perceptions as well as lives. And, as she tells Frances Ambler, she's only just getting started

Something clicked when she came across the style magazine *i-D*, which launched in 1980. It felt like her world so, after graduating, she rang up and “invited herself in”. Terry Jones, the magazine’s founder, left her minding the phones for a few hours, and she stayed, going on to be fashion editor and co-editor. “If I’d gone, ‘sorry, can’t do it’, it wouldn’t have happened.”

It was an exciting, inspiring time. Caryn had the King’s Road as her catwalk. She’d leave the magazine offices, looking for people to photograph for *i-D*’s signature ‘straight-up’ street fashion portraits, herself dressed in attention-grabbing style. In 1984, Channel 4 asked her to research upcoming designers for its programme *Swank* – she ended up on screen. The invitation for *The Clothes Show* followed.

Rather than wanting fame (she thought the show too mainstream), she eventually said yes to get *i-D*’s name onto TV but, more significantly, stayed because – six months into their relationship – her partner had been diagnosed with a severe form of MS, making Caryn both his carer and the main breadwinner. It was a situation that reached crisis point after the birth of their daughter. Caryn took just two weeks of maternity leave in the middle of a series, returning to set as a single mother with her newborn, along with her own mother for support. She later married filmmaker Ian Denyer, with whom she has a second daughter. While she’s still processing the complexities of that earlier relationship, she knows it taught her, in comparison to many women, “complete respect for my body – I don’t think I’ve ever been in a changing room with a woman who *doesn’t* apologise for her body,” she says. Although an extremely hard way to learn it, “I now have nothing »

“**I**n my day, I’m pleased to say – although it sounds really old school – we didn’t say ‘I want to be famous when I grow up’, or ‘I want to be a celebrity’, we said what we wanted to *do*.” Broadcaster, commentator and Kingston

University’s professor of fashion diversity, Caryn Franklin is talking about the early 1980s, when she really fell in love with fashion. The twist is Caryn *did* become famous, best known for presenting the BBC’s long-running *The Clothes Show*. But it’s that ‘do’ that’s been crucial. Caryn’s used her position (to quote her

website) to “activate, commentate and motivate”, or (to quote her directly) to “be gobby” on topics ranging from fashion’s lack of diversity to sustainability. Even in the kitchen of her London home where we’re sitting, the fridge is accessorised with cut-out articles on issues ranging from air pollution to pressures on young Hollywood stars.

Over a pot of Earl Grey, served in vintage china cups, and a homemade spelt loaf, Caryn shares some of her motivations, which have been informed, she believes, by two values instilled by her parents: honesty and service. Early on, she developed the habit of calling

things out when they didn’t seem right. Aged 17, she wrote to a commentator, complaining he’d patronised the Grand National’s first female rider. When he replied to justify himself, “it kind of encouraged me”. Even now, her business partner sometimes has to nudge her under the table to shut her up. Things may have been different if, as initially planned, Caryn had joined the army. Given the pride she took in being sent home from her London comprehensive school for flouting the uniform rules, her dad suggested she may not fit in with military life. So she went to art school, at Kingston University and then Central Saint Martins.