



# SPARKES WILL FLY

Presenter and model Hayley Sparkes is best known for her beauty segments on ITV's *This Morning*. Now newly settled in Essex, she tells Denise Marshall her emotional life story and her fight to overcome a life-threatening illness

When I meet Hayley Sparkes she is in her element, excitedly reeling off a raft of new presenting projects, including an online series she has filmed for tour operator Jet2 with her best pal, *Place in the Sun* presenter Laura Hamilton.

Her weekly feel good music show, Hayley Sparkes Happy Hour, goes out to millions of homes and there are plans in the pipeline for her to front further lifestyle series for Keep It Country since it became available on freeview in January, making it the third biggest music channel on Sky.

18 months ago she also began filming documentaries for Globetrotter TV, Taiwan being her first stop.

'My trip to Taiwan was the most intense job of my life – 16 hour days for two weeks,' reminisces Hayley, 'but I have memories I'll treasure for the rest of my life. I got thrown in the deep end and now travel is the way I really want to go.'

With her career at a peak, currently in discussions to design a fashion range and filming a travel pilot in Croatia this month, Hayley's bright megawatt smile hides a difficult history battling poor health.

At just seven years old she began suffering from ulcerative colitis, a little-known inflammatory bowel disease of the large intestine which sees sufferers experience debilitating symptoms including rushing for the toilet during flare ups.

With doctors at a loss as how best to treat her, Hayley became very weak and housebound, missing months of school until she had an emergency colostomy bag fitted at the age of 14.

'It was so touch and go,' explains Hayley. 'I'd got to the point where I couldn't get out of bed. The doctors were wrong to tell my parents to give me paracetamol. I remember saying to my mum, "That's it for me". I'd given up on life. I couldn't walk to the bathroom without collapsing.'

'My nan looked after me one evening when my parents had to go out and when they returned she said, "I can see it in her eyes, she's dying?". As soon as we got to



the hospital my bowel was about to rupture. They didn't know if they could get it out in time. It was terrifying.

'I was under a specialist and you try and stay positive as I'd got better from flare ups before, but they should have admitted me a lot sooner. As lovely as my family made everything for me, I was on really strict diets, no dairy or sugar amongst other things. Now I'm so appreciative of the life I have. I cry a lot thinking, how have I gone from not going to school to working in the most beautiful countries around the world doing a job I love?'

Hayley's sheer gratitude is beyond inspiring and she's keen to break the taboo of bowel conditions to help others.

'It's such a dire situation when you have an attack of colitis,' she stresses. 'You can't wait. People don't understand the urgency and expect you to rush to a communal toilet. We need to educate people.'

Hayley's perspective, resilience

and ability to bounce back is overwhelming, but the stories she regales feel surreal even to her and she credits her family for their rock solid support. Hayley opted for corrective surgery at 16, removing her stoma. The seven-hour operation was a gamble without the success rate it has today.

'After the op I had lots of bleeding, but no one would take it seriously. My mum phoned an ambulance and the hospital were shocked. I had to have a transfusion after losing ridiculous amounts of blood. I could have died again, but on the flipside I'm so incredibly grateful. They didn't speak to me in intensive care. I was in agony so I couldn't communicate and had a lot of nightmares. By blinking my mum helped them sort out my pain relief.'

Despite the complications, her operation was a success and Hayley harbours no bitterness for the difficult aspects of her care.

'As I got better I was living this amazing life. If it wasn't for all the amazing people in the NHS I wouldn't have a life. I could suddenly eat anything I wanted, everyone was buying me chocolate bars. I was five and a half stone so they were trying to fatten me up with cheese and bread. If you haven't had chocolate for seven years, when you taste it it's like nothing else, everything's heightened.'

With her GCSEs complete before surgery took place, Hayley began reaping the rewards for her bravery.

*'Don't get me wrong, my industry is not an easy one, but when I get dream jobs I cry. It means everything'*

'So many people go through life, but they don't actually live. Don't get me wrong, my industry is not an easy one, but when I get dream jobs I cry. It means everything to me. Last year I did lingerie modelling for Sainsburys, despite scars on my stomach. I'm 36, and getting these type of jobs.'

Hayley is now single following a long-term relationship, but motherhood is yet another goal for the future.

'I would love a family one day, yes. Lots of women have children later now. You know yourself better in your 30s. When you're young you're not thinking about how compatible you will be with a partner as parents.'

Moving to a rented cottage in Epping with a good friend last year has helped the country girl from Suffolk feel settled but close to the capital for work. She rents out her former four-bedroom home in Manningtree and is a brand ambassador for Your Overseas Home, who run UK events to help people





find their dream property abroad.

'I had a horse for ten years growing up and just love the open space of Epping Forest. Stansted is 20 minutes down the road, and all the beautiful Essex villages and country pubs are a joy. Everyone's so nice. It's definitely where I will stay when I sell my rental home to reinvest here.'

An academic student, her school encouraged her to study law with her strong debating skills, but early on at university she experienced a light bulb moment, switching to a fashion degree. Her qualifications as a make-up artist and stylist provide security and suit current trends for wellbeing.

'Some think makeovers are really shallow, but you can really help people's confidence,' explains Hayley. 'I've done charity events with Katie Piper (author and presenter), who is a friend now and helped amazing people with beauty tips who are

*'Some think makeovers are really shallow, but you can really help people's confidence'*

suffering from cancer or helping the homeless.'

Hayley's outlook is not just inspirational, it's extremely moving.

'Feeling sorry for yourself is an insult to people going through more. If relationships break down you have to focus on

the positives. I'm lucky to be alive. What's the point in being angry? Those kind of things can make you ill.

'The tools in my kit are from what I've been through. How incredible that they developed pioneering surgery; that I can have my whole large intestine thrown away and still live a normal life, my body adapting. How amazing is that? I've got the life I always dreamed about. ♦

**Find out more**  
**For more information on Hayley and her condition, visit [www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk](http://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk) or [www.ittakesguts.org.uk](http://www.ittakesguts.org.uk)**