

## THE **INSIDE** STORY

### **AMANDA MEALING** **HOLBY STAR'S TRIP IS A FAMILY AFFAIR**



As a mother, *Holby City* star Amanda Mealing knew that visiting a place where one in four children dies before their fifth birthday would be an emotional experience. But her journey to Kroo Bay, a disease-riddled slum on the edge of Freetown in Sierra Leone, has affected her more than she imagined.

"It's been life-changing, life-affirming, humbling and an experience I'll never forget," says Amanda, who with her husband, writer Richard Sainsbury, has two sons, Milo, eight, and Otis, five. "The horrors of what these children and their families live with haunts you, but what will stay with me most is their dignity and how, despite appalling conditions, they are able to keep a real sense of humour."

The trip was a labour of love – ten years ago Amanda discovered she was adopted and that her biological father was from Sierra Leone. "I'd thought this would be a big part of it for me," says Amanda, 39. "But any personal mission was overtaken by my feelings for the people I met. They captured my heart."

Amanda, who travelled to the impoverished West African nation for Save The Children's new Kroo Bay web project, isn't the only family member moved by her journey. She explains: "Milo now puts aside half his pocket money, saying, 'That's for the children in Sierra Leone.'"

*To find out more about the Kroo Bay web project visit [savethechildren.org.uk](http://savethechildren.org.uk)*

### **BEN COHEN** **RUGBY STAR TACKLES FATHERHOOD**



When rugby legend Ben Cohen chose to recreate the famous *L'Enfant Athena* poster image from the 1980s (below), he had a choice of two baby models: his five-month-old twin daughters Harriette and Isabelle. He had his hands full, however, as he tried to get the wriggling little girls to smile on cue – it took a full three hours to come up with the final shot of him and Isabelle (left).

The original sepia poster adorned five

million walls and the model baby, Stelios Havatzias – now a 21-year-old law student – received just £32 for the job.

Ben, who was a member of the 2003 World Cup-winning England team, was more than happy to pose for the new poster as the face of the A Problem Shared campaign, which supports new parents. "I can't believe how much I love fatherhood," says Ben, 29, who is the nephew of 1966 World Cup footballer George Cohen. "I genuinely really enjoy it but nothing quite prepares you for it."

"One of the hardest things when it comes to looking after a crying baby is knowing what cry is for what, which takes time and patience. I found there really wasn't enough support and information for dads – particularly when it comes to having twins."

Ben, who plays for French club CA Brive and lives in Limousin with wife Abby and their daughters, says he'd love to play for England again. "I want the kids to see me do it," he says. "Even if they're asleep in front of the telly."

*For information and parenting tips, visit [problemshared.info](http://problemshared.info)*

