

MOTHER'S DAY

Dame, Designer, Daughter, Mother

Words: Jamie Christian Desplaces

With Mother's Day fast approaching, Dame Trelise Cooper was only too happy to share some treasured childhood memories and discuss her role as mum. "My mother is the sweetest, kindest person I know," says Cooper. "She grew up in a good Christian household, the family were Salvation Army people and she retained those values. They're reflected in everything she does. I grew up in an environment of kindness and forgiveness."

Her mother's advice to "always turn the other cheek and rise above it" is the one that most sticks in the designer's mind. I ask if she adheres to it. "I try to!" Trelise laughs. "My husband and I actually both made new year's resolutions along those lines. When you're running a business, especially in my industry, 'rising above it' can be quite challenging, but I do believe it's a wonderful way to live your life. Whatever grains of gentleness are left in me, after being in fashion for so long, are definitely from my mother."

Cooper's chosen career path could not have meandered any further from that of her traditional, stay-at-home mum, who didn't even learn to drive until into her 40s, and, giggles Trelise, it terrified her so much she stopped after a couple of years. "It's interesting because she is quite shy and timid, she doesn't like to take the lead," says the designer. "I've had such a different life. I'm often asked about role models, but in regard to my work, mum wasn't one. She was purely there for her husband, and her children. We're still very close and she comes to stay with us regularly. She's amazing. Mum was still a teenager when she had me, and had four of us very close together. Fortunately my dad earned good money. He liked us to have bought-biscuits and canned food.



01 — Trelise and her mum

02 — Trelise and step-son Jacob at the Taj Mahal, Agra, India

He thought only poor people had cereal for breakfast too, so we always had bacon and eggs. All the kids liked to come round our house because we were seen as very modern with our bought-biscuits!"

Cooking was an integral part of the Cooper household, each meal "a celebration". It is a baton that has been passed to the next generation. "My son, Jasper, is an amazing cook," says Cooper. "We always used to cook together, sharing that creativity and camaraderie in the kitchen." When discussing him, Trelise can barely suppress her pride. Cooking aside, he's a fine painter too. Still hanging in her bedroom is a picture he did for Mother's Day a decade ago. "Jasper has the most incredible values," she tells me. "He is a thoughtful human being, whose whole life is about making the world a better place, and championing the poor." A political scientist, Jasper is currently studying a double doctorate ("most people only usually attempt one at a time!") at New York's Columbia University. Philanthropy courses through the Cooper blood. The fashion label is known for its work with the likes of Habitat for Humanity, the Breast Cancer Research Trust and Shine. Jasper recently gave an address at a United Nations meeting on his mother's behalf.

"My son has lived overseas at various universities since he was 17," continues Cooper. "Growing up, we had a loving relationship and when he left I grieved for many years. I really did mourn the

loss of his presence in my life. I also have two step-children with whom I'm very close. They were adopted 40 years ago by my husband and his former wife and we've been a big part of each other's lives for the past 35 years. I have a great relationship with them. It's been a different kind of mothering, from a different perspective." Trelise still communicates regularly with Jasper. She says it's life's small details "like Sunday roasts" that she misses most: "We get together whenever we can. When he was in Paris for six years, my husband and I bought a house in France to be closer to him."

And grandchildren?

"Yes, my step-son, Jacob, has a beautiful daughter called Isabella. She's seventeen and an absolute delight. Jasper has no plans for children just yet, but we hope it won't be too long!"

Trelise is involved with India's Tomorrow's Foundation, a charity which supports the development of the nation's underprivileged children. She makes regular visits to the country, and was due to leave days after the interview. It's a trip that promised to be even more meaningful than usual. "My step-children are Indian by birth," she tells me. "I'll be taking Jacob with me this time. He's never been before, never experienced his culture. As a mother, I'm so excited. It will be incredible to explore the country with him."