

Liza's creature

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comforts

CAROLINE PHILLIPS meets the actress and star of *Woof!* who has more than a passing love for her furry friends

LIZA GODDARD lives with five dogs, two horses, two cats, mice, an animal-loving husband and two hamster-collecting adolescent children.

She works hard to pay for school fees and horse feed, but not necessarily in that order, and ditched plans for an expensive 40th birthday party because of the demands of her monthly £300 vet's bills.

Liza, 46, who played Victoria in the hit Seventies comedy series *Take Three Girls*, now stars in the award-winning children's show *Woof!*

Her co-star is a mongrel called Punch and Liza admits that now, as throughout most of her life, animals have been the constant on which she has relied. "I've always had an empathy with them. They're comforting and give you unconditional love," she says.

Three years ago she lived in a cottage next door to her mother Clare, a former agony aunt, and word was that she had given up men and settled for a life with her animals.

But then she confounded the rumour-mongers gave her dachshund, Frederique, to her mum and moved in with *Woof!* producer David Cobham, a bear of a man at 6ft 7in tall.

Now she lives in a Norfolk farmhouse, which was sold to her two years ago with a sick golden retriever included in the price.

But today we meet at the Carlton television studio, where she sits adoringly beneath a photo of her co-star, Punch, a curly-coated mongrel rescued by the RSPCA.

Liza looks a bit like a golden retriever with a hangover — slightly tired and drawn but with big eyes and long, blonde hair — but she's funny and clever, too.

She's wearing trousers suitable for mucking out horses — a change from the days when she used to clean her stables at midnight, wearing an evening dress after a night out, so that she could sleep late in the morning.

"I figured the horses wouldn't know the difference," she says with a giggle.

These days Liza is rarely seen without a smile on her face, but in the past had a dramatic and, at times, traumatic life.

She grew up lacking self-esteem "always feeling fat and insecure" and being "whacked ferociously" by Catholic nuns and priests if she failed to go to church on Sunday.

AGED 24 and pregnant by a violent drunk, she had an abortion which left her feeling suicidal. Her marriages to Dr Who actor Colin Baker and then to leather-clad rocker Alvin Stardust also hit the rocks.

In addition, she was five months pregnant with Colin's son Thom before she realised she was expecting a baby.

And at three months old, Sophie, her daughter by Alvin, was dropped by the nanny and her head shattered like an egg — but she miraculously recovered.

In her mid-thirties, Liza had a crisis



of confidence as her career went down the route of sitcoms and quiz shows. Her father, the former head of drama at ABC television in Australia, died of a heart attack in 1992, then Liza had two laser operations for endometriosis, had to have a dog and a horse put down and underwent psychotherapy.

Not surprisingly, for a woman who prefers four-legged friends, some of Liza's happiest memories involve animals. Her most magical day was when she and Sophie, now 13, went swimming with dolphins in Monkey Mia, Western Australia, in 1988. "At one stage I was sitting next to a granny dolphin, tickling her tummy while she was looking after her plain granddaughter and the pretty one was out playing with the boys," she recalls.

Liza's animal mania started as a child when she acquired a gosling called Sydney as he came out of his egg. "He used to walk me to the bus stop, a mile from our house," she says, fondly. "After seeing me on to the school

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bus, he'd stop off to have cake with a couple of old lady friends. If I were late back, he'd be waiting furiously and peck me on the leg and chase me home."

Later, she started to learn the violin but it made her poodle Susie howl so badly that her father insisted she give it up. "That poodle ruined my musical career," she says tersely.

BUT she was rewarded for passing her 11-plus exam with the choice of either going on holiday or having a pony. Naturally, she acquired a Conemara called Mousy. "Since then, I've been kicked, crushed a knee and broken ribs and collar bones. But nothing serious. In riding terms, those

things are there to be broken." At 17, Liza starred for two years in *Skippy*, the famous series about the kangaroo.

"The emu in *Skippy* was so mean that we used to have to give it half a bottle of whisky," she reveals. "Then it became mellow. The next day it would have a hangover and be even worse. But if you gave it a whole bottle, it collapsed."

Her love of animals has often come between her and her men although she has no four-legged stories to explain the collapse of her first marriage to Colin Baker. It ended in divorce in 1979 after only one year and she describes it as a passing phase.

In 1981, she married Alvin. She was vulnerable after her first marriage and

he swept her off her feet. But she had mother-in-law trouble.

"I went away filming and my pet goose Claude disappeared. Alvin's mother had wrung her neck and cooked her. Aggggggh," says Liza, her face crumpling with horror. "My pet goose."

OTHER tensions soon surfaced, such as the time Liza delivered a miniature Shetland foal and wanted to call him Jesus. "But Alvin," she says theatrically, "said: 'You can't call a foal that.'"

Things became even worse for her when Alvin became a born-again Christian.

"Born-again Christians don't think animals go to heaven. But there'd be no

point in going otherwise." They divorced in 1987. Afterwards, Liza was linked with Bergerac star John Nettles. She has always denied an off-screen romance but admits that she did find him a mongrel.

In 1995, she married David Cobham. She had worked with him on two animal stories — first in 1979 when they made the children's programme *Brendon's Chase* — and theirs was a friendship spanning 20 years.

Their love grew slowly, particularly since Liza carried fish in her pockets for a while. "During the TV programme *Seal Morning* I had to have bits of fish about my person at all times so that the seals would follow me."

Then, five years ago, during the

filming of *Woof!* friendship turned into love. "You find romance when you're not looking for it," she says.

Liza has put on a stone-and-a-half recently and claims this is the result of being contented.

HER figure, it must be said, was better when she kept her own chickens. This was because she could rarely find their eggs, particularly in the winter.

"I also used to go on starvation diets and have doctors inject terrible things through my tights," she adds. "But I don't worry now."

So what animal would she most like to be?

"A retriever. Because they like cake."



ANIMAL FARM: Liza's family share their Norfolk home with a menagerie, while her television career has seen her in bed with a seal, below left and appearing in *Skippy*, below right

Main photograph by Bryn Cotton