

Meera is playing Shirley Valentine on stage

'I was a feral child!'

Actress, writer and comedian Meera Syal, 48, talks about running wild, her experience with the new Doctor Who, the power of a good cuppa and why she prefers Starsky to Hutch...



Starsky and Hutch were Meera's pin-ups

What's the best advice you've been given over the years?

My mother used to say to me, "This too will pass" in my teenage years when I thought everything was dreadful, as teenagers do. It's stood me in good stead.

What's your best advice for your own teenage daughter?

Chameli's 17 now and going through major exam stress. I'm trying to tell her that all you can do is try your best. There are plenty of people in the world who didn't get straight As, but are passionate about what they do.

What was the best part of being in the new series of Doctor Who?

I'm sworn to secrecy (Meera plays the leader of a drilling

team that finds something nasty at the Earth's core) but I can say Matt Smith is terrific. He has a keen intelligence, but there's a little bit of the mad Englishman about him.

What's your best TV?

I'm a huge fan of a series called *In Treatment* with Gabriel Byrne. He's a psychoanalyst who of course has troubles of his own. As I'm doing the play of *Shirley Valentine* at the moment I'm having to rely on my Sky+ to keep up with my TV viewing.

Have you unfulfilled dreams of your own like Shirley Valentine?

One of the things that Shirley hasn't done is travel and I feel

What's the best book you've read recently?

I've just started *One Day* by David Nicholls. It would make a terrific feel-good movie. It follows two people who leave college in the Eighties. They meet on the night of their graduation, then it follows what happens to them on the same day for the next 20 years. It takes me back to my college years when I used to have posters on my wall. All the usual ones – CND, Martin Luther King, and Starsky and Hutch. I was into Starsky. Hutch was a bit too pretty!

a bit like that. I haven't done the big trip to India yet. I've got plenty of travelling still to do.

Who's your best friend?

Katy Mills is my oldest friend. We've been friends since we were 11. We bonded as our parents didn't allow us to wear platform shoes!

★ Meera is speaking on behalf of the PG Tips 'How do you describe the taste of a cup of PG?' campaign. For further information or to submit your description, visit www.pgtips.co.uk

What's the best thing about tea?

Indians drink industrial-sized amounts – virtually on the hour, every hour. I have very relaxing associations with tea. It's a time I can chill. I'm happy to be part of the PG Tips challenge – I know my tea!



With Shaan and husband Sanjeev Bhaskar

What are your best memories of growing up in Essington?

It was amazing. I was a feral child – we'd be out playing the whole time. I broke my leg when I was four – running for the outside toilet! I was in hospital for six weeks, and visiting times were one hour a day. I can't imagine how it'd be if that happened to my youngest, Shaan, who's four.

FEATURE: PAUL SIMPER. PHOTOS: PA. SPORTSPHOTO/ALLSTAR