

Bindi follows in Dad's footsteps

ONCE upon a time, there was a little girl called Bindi Harris who was always being asked by her dad to keep still.

Dad, you see, is among other things a famous artist, and his small daughter made an ideal subject for painting and drawing.

But little girls grow up. Recently it has been the turn of Bindi, who celebrates her 21st birthday on Sunday to say "Dad, for goodness sake, will you please keep still."

Persuading a bundle of energy like Rolf Harris to keep still is no easy task, but she managed it, and both dad and mum (Alwen, a sculptress) are absolutely delighted with Bindi's portrait of dad in oils.

In fact it has started Bindi on a career as an artist. She has already received other commissions.

Talent

"We always knew that she had the talent," Rolf told from his home in Bray. "But we never thought that it was fair to push her in that direction."

"She did go to art school but that involved her in a lot of work which just didn't interest her. One day she

By Linton Mitchell

came to us and said quietly that she'd been going to school since she was five years old, and was sick of it. She wanted to go out and get a job.

"She wanted to earn some money on her own, and not be totally dependent on us. That was a perfectly natural wish, and we respected it. So the day after she left school, Bindi went out and found a job.

"She was selling dresses at first. Later she got another job, selling records in Windsor, and enjoyed it."

"Then one day, we noticed that she was painting again. She asked me to sit for her."

"I obviously said 'yes', though I was not the best of subjects. I kept wondering what colours she was using and why she was using them. She was constantly having to shout at me for fidgeting about and looking in the wrong direction."

"Then I saw the finished

work. It's not just a proud dad talking — though I'm that all right. It's a great, gutsy painting. Tremendously strong, with reds, oranges and yellows. I've painted a lot of portraits, but I don't have her grasp of colour."

Character

"She's working away upstairs now at another commission... a portrait of a well-known shoekeeper in Bray. A wonderful character. He was a bit startled — and apprehensive — at first. But now he's delighted."

The Harris family moved to Bray from their long-time home in Sydenham, Kent, about a year ago.

"Sydenham was fine," said Rolf, "but I have always wanted to live by the river. I finally made up my mind to move when we were visiting friends, Vince Hill and his wife Anne at their riverside home in Shiplake."

"I was frankly envious. So, we looked around and found the house in Bray."

Ironically, Rolf who will be seen on BBC1's Saturday Superstore tomorrow singing one of the songs from his new LP Coojeebar and The Monster which he recorded with the 85-piece Queensland Youth Orchestra — wasn't able to spend much time at his new home last year.

Tours

"I was home for just seven weeks of the year, which, now that I come to think of it was a little bit ridiculous. I intend to be home for a considerably longer period this year — though I'll still be doing a bit of travelling."

Last year's working tours included three in his native Australia, two each in New Zealand and the United States, and one in Canada. Though his 55th birthday is coming up at the end of this month, the last few years have actually seen the multi-talented Rolf step up his always pretty hectic work schedule.

"About three years ago, I made a conscious decision to do more work in Australia," he said.

"It is after all my native land, and there was a feeling that I wasn't performing often enough in front of Australian audiences. I think that I have managed to take care of that."

"Last year was exhausting but rewarding. I'm doing a lot of concerts now with symphony orchestras,

a new venture for me. The aim of these concerts is to introduce young people to the beautiful sounds of the orchestra."

"In Sydney I did a concert with a cast of 1,000. That must be a world record. We had a choir of 1,000 children, two cadet corps marching bands, an all-girl rock group, a Glenn Miller-type school big band, and a full symphony orchestra."

It was in 1962 that Rolf Harris — whose parents emigrated to Perth, Australia, from Roath, Cardiff — first arrived in England with the 1927 which constituted his life savings.

Since then, it can be truly said that he has never looked back.

To describe him as a versatile performer is something of an understatement. He is a combination of comedian, musician, singer, songwriter, broadcaster, artist and cartoonist.

He could have reached the top by concentrating solely on any one of those activities. Rolf made to the top all right. But he did the lot.

He has always used his talents to encourage children — and not just in the entertainments and arts fields.

The 1945 Junior Backstroke Champion of Australia, he once had a television programme aimed at putting over to children the importance of being at home in the water. He is also a strong and active conservationist.

He is currently doing a book for children showing them how to set about drawing cartoons.

"I had so many letters from children asking for some guidance that I realised a book would be the obvious answer," he said.

Still on the subject of cartoons, starting from Sunday, his BBC1 Cartoon Time series — which is now in its fifth year and has been attracting an audience of between eight and nine million viewers — moves to the peak-time 6pm slot.

Series

A new series is being planned for later this year. He continues to meet as many requests as possible for the cartoons he draws for the programme. One of his most recent has gone to the plastic surgery ward at London's Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children.

Later this month he is off to Australia again, and then Canada. After that, it's back to Britain. But not for long. He has a date in the Falklands, entertaining the troops.

Getting him to keep still long enough to have his portrait painted really WAS a major achievement on Bindi's part.



Bindi, Rolf Harris and the painting