

GROWING **UP** WITH **Kim Fields**

Kim Fields recently posted on her social media a cereal commercial she did as a child actor in the late 1970s, co-starring with none other than Tony the Tiger. Most recently, she's had a different class of co-lead, starring alongside Mike Epps and Wanda Sykes in "The Upshaws," a Netflix top 10 series, which just wrapped filming on its fifth and final season.

It's a decades-spanning career that allows Fields the luxury of occasionally sharing a laugh with her fans about how she got here, without worrying that her success at a tender age represents any kind of amber she got trapped in. A significant part of the TV-viewing audience can say it grew up with her—and is *still* growing up with her—from the nine seasons she spent on "The Facts of Life" (from 1979-88) to the five she clocked playing a twenty-something on "Living Single" (1993-97) to, most recently, the role of sexy suburban matriarch.

Her career is almost like a television version of an Eras Tour, for a fan base that has related to her each step of the way.

But that is hardly the sum of her work. Fields has used those platforms to become an entrepreneur as well as activist, with her own coffee/tea brand, Signature Blends by KF, and a health and wellness brand, Refresh by KF.

Then there is her charitable work, from being an ambassador for the Red Cross to her history of advocacy for Children's Hospital.

It is for all these many accomplishments that Fields tonight is receiving the Los Angeles Press Club's Bill Rosendahl Public Service Award for Contributions to Civic Life.

The career is dynamic and diverse, but it all came about from just landing one lucky break after another, right (we ask a bit facetiously)?

Fields laughs at the notion.

"In the words of anybody's great old uncle: 'S—, no, it didn't!'" she exclaims. "When I wrote my autobiography in 2017, I opened it with a quote from a Langston Hughes poem, where he

said, 'Well, son, I'll tell you, life for me ain't been no crystal stair.' And I started it that way because you are 100% right: People have a tendency to look at my life and career and, because they've known of me since I was seven, there's a tendency to think, 'Wow, we ain't ever heard anything negative about her. She's not been through anything. She's the golden girl.'

"You know, I'm grateful for the speed bumps in the life I've lived," she continues, "and the total derailments sometimes, and the work that I've had to do to make sure depression didn't find its way and take root. How grateful I am to my village for being there to catch my tears and encourage me, when I've often thought, 'How are you gonna call me an icon, when sometimes I feel so invisible?'"

It is fitting that Fields is being recognized in a room full of journalists, because there is a path not taken where she might have become one herself. In the collegiate years after "Facts of Life" but before "Living Single," she was mostly work-

Expanding into directing seems a natural progression from acting, (opposite page), but giving back to the community has been an important part of Fields's life. Below, she helps hand out Safe & Healthy Home Kits at a Spectrum Community Impact event.



THE ACTRESS, ENTREPRENEUR AND ACTIVIST RECEIVES THE
BILL ROSENDAHL PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD BY CHRIS WILLMAN



PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD KIM FIELDS



Top: Participating in a MLK50 community event; Above right: Fields was a child actor in “Facts of Life”; Right: Fields celebrates after receiving her degree in telecommunications from Pepperdine University in Malibu.

ing toward a double major in broadcast journalism and TV production at Pepperdine. She had an eye toward possibly moving into news, even doing an internship at KCOP channel 13. Ultimately things went in a different direction, but the interest and experience informed what she does to this day.

“I have such an enormous amount of respect and empathy for people in the journalism field,” says Fields. “From field reporters to the camera crews, it is such a stress-inducing world, and, at the same time, there is such a level of service at the foundation, in wanting to serve the people with truth. I have been very inspired by journalists, from Max Robinson back to learning about Edward R. Murrow on up to people like, locally speaking, Bree Walker.

“And the passion I have for storytelling and even for editing really goes back to my days putting my stories together on those massive three-quarter-inch tapes. Understanding how you have to grab your reader or viewers with the five W’s and H made me so much better as a director and as an actor.”

There is another personal angle. Fields marched with renowned activist Danny Bakewell. She said she is excited tonight to see Danny J. Bakewell, Jr., the new president of the Press Club’s board of directors.

Fields has moved toward the wellness space in recent years. Like many people, during the pandemic she thought a lot about health and mortality.

“I went into these conversations on my Instagram, because nothing in that space was resonating with me, and not so much me as a woman of



Ron Hall

color,” she says, “but just me as a human being. I realized there’s millions of people in that same kind of boat, knowing our values or beliefs need to be tweaked with new information and new perspectives.”

Her growing following, with everything from weekly live online sessions to retreats, showed her “how much we all want different elements of community and well-being and how to intersect these—but also not feel judged. If you can’t eat 12 helpings of kale and detox every other hour and put your ankle behind your head, there’s gotta be more to wellness than that, and something that’s fun and makes you feel alive. Because we *are*.”



Fields is looking to explore more opportunities on both sides of the camera, remembering times when she was rewarded for following her mantras, “Seek uncharted waters” and “Expect the unexpected.” Those adages served her well, whether she was working up the courage to compete on “Dancing With the Stars” or produce the TV movie “Adventures in Christmasing.”

Of course, she hardly has taken the series that’s winding down for granted.

“When we were filming ‘The Upshaws,’ we would always say, ‘We’re breathing rare air,’ because we knew how rare, literally, it was and still is to be doing this number of episodes for a multi-cam comedy.”



Left: Fields with sons Sebastian and Quincy and starring with Wanda Sykes in “The Upshaws,” above.

She recognizes that her career carries both nostalgic moments and unfamiliar elements. But today, she is looking forward.

“I’m about to be catapulted into the next set of things as an actor, as a director, as a producer, and as a wellness curator,” she says. “I was saying to someone the other day, ‘I’ve always been grateful to be me, but now I’m excited to be me.’” 🙌

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