



Brief Encounters

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Penelope Wilton, Sophie Rundle, Angela Griffin and Sharon Rooney star in *Brief Encounters*

Penelope Wilton, Sophie Rundle, Angela Griffin and Sharon Rooney star as four women striving to find happiness and fulfillment in new ITV drama *Brief Encounters*.

The frank, fresh and funny six-part drama from CPL Productions is set in the early '80s and also stars Peter Wight, Don Gilet, Karl Davies, Will Merrick and Ben Bailey Smith.

Sophie Rundle (*Peaky Blinders*, *Dickensian*, *Happy Valley*, *Episodes*) plays Steph who feels invisible until Ann Summers party planning comes into her life. It ignites the ambition she didn't know she had and grows her confidence. Married to Terry, played by Karl Davies (*Emmerdale*, *Happy Valley*) and with a young son, Steph strives to make something more of her life via new friendships and the excitement of her newfound career.

Penelope Wilton (*Downton Abbey*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*) plays Pauline. Pauline jumps in at the deep end when Steph, her cleaner, introduces her to the parties as a way to salve her loneliness. Pauline's sunny disposition hides a secret sadness. She and her husband, local butcher Brian, played by Peter Wight (*Our Zoo*, *The Paradise*) deeply love each other but their relationship has suffered whilst he's concentrated on building his business. Through her relationship with the Ann Summers girls, Pauline steps out from the shadows.

Angela Griffin (*Lewis*, *Mount Pleasant*, *Waterloo Road*) plays Nita. A chance meeting between Nita and Steph in the school playground kick starts a sequence of events that will change both their lives. Nita is a mix of grit and warmth, struggling to run a household with a husband, Kieren, played by Don Gilet (*EastEnders*, *Holby City*, *55 Degrees North*) whom she adores but who frequently strays onto the wrong side of the law, despite his devotion to his family.

Sharon Rooney (*My Mad Fat Diary*, *Hector*) stars as young hairdresser, Dawn who has a lust for life. Although bubbly and outgoing, since her mother died she has been trapped into looking after her father and three brothers who take her for granted. The buzz of earning serious cash with the other women gives Dawn the incentive to finally realise her dreams with fiancé, Russell, the butcher's apprentice played by Will Merrick (*The Rack Pack*, *Skins*).

Produced by BAFTA award winning indie CPL Productions, *Brief Encounters* is created and written by Fay Rusling and Oriane Messina (*Green Wing*, *Me & Mrs Jones*), and executive produced by CPL's Arabella McGuigan and Danielle Lux alongside the writer-creators.

The producer is Jo Willett (*Making of a Lady, Birds of a Feather*) and the directors are Jill Robertson (*Grantchester, Last Tango in Halifax*), Marek Losey (*Vera, Beowulf*) and Joss Agnew (*Mr Selfridge, Jekyll & Hyde*).

Brief Encounters was commissioned for ITV by former Director of Drama Steve November and Head of Drama Series Jane Hudson.

To a soundtrack of music from the era, *Brief Encounters* was filmed during January through to April 2016 in Sheffield.

About CPL Productions

CPL is one of the most successful independent TV and radio production companies in the UK. The company's output spans primetime entertainment, comedy and factual entertainment; and now *Brief Encounters* is the company's first drama commission. CPL's impressive roster of hit shows includes Sky One's BAFTA-winning *A League Of Their Own*, ITV's *Off Their Rockers*, Channel 4's *Married At First Sight*, and BBC One's *Decimate*.

CPL Productions is part of Red Arrow Entertainment Group (a ProSiebenSat. 1 Group company).

Foreword

Fay Rusling and Oriane Messina, writers and creators

We are both fans of ensemble dramas going all the way back to *Fat Friends* and *Playing the Field*, through to *Cutting It* and *Grey's Anatomy*. It was important to us that *Brief Encounters*' humour came from the characters, even in their darkest moments. When terrible things happen in life you either crumble or pick yourself up, laugh at life and get on with it. With Steph, we wanted to explore someone whose ambition, independence and strength had not yet been awakened. Pauline is a woman who on paper has everything but is in fact lonely, believing that at her age that isn't going to change. With Nita we wanted a character who was fiercely loyal and "says it like it is" but is at times overwhelmed by her family. Finally, Dawn whose front hides a family that's at breaking point.

We wanted to write a character-driven feel-good drama filled with strong female protagonists that showed how diverse groups of women were all over the country. Ann Summers is famous for sexy underwear, sex toys and "those parties" but when it first started back in 1982 there was a belief that women weren't interested in sex and that the parties would never take off. Using the party plan business our aim was to create a series where four women of different ages and backgrounds become unlikely friends, step out of the shadows and discover they can be ambitious and successful.

It was important to us that the audience felt a connection to these characters, wanted to spend time with them. Our initial writing process involved a lot of time talking about people we knew and the unexpected things that had happened to them (or as it's more commonly known, gossiping). From that we created our characters and we would "improvise on the page" to generate their voices. This was a process our producer on *Green Wing* always encouraged us to do. It meant we could put all our characters in any situation and know how they would respond. We wanted each of our characters' journeys to resonate with viewers and we feel lucky to have such a wonderful cast who created funny, flawed, real people. We were so proud to have Sophie Rundle, Angela Griffin, Sharon Rooney and Penelope Wilton leading the way, with Chloe Pirrie, Felicity Montagu and Pippa Haywood adding to our female contingent. It was also important to us that men in the show have their own voices and journeys and we're equally proud to count Peter Wight, Karl Davies, Ben Bailey Smith, Don Gilet and Will Merrick amongst the cast.

The show is also a love letter to the early '80's – a prudish and conservative time where marital aids were seen as shocking by some, hysterical by others. We talked about our own terrible perms and love of Simon Le Bon. The music, the fashion, the makeup, it's such a wonderful time to re-create. It was always important to us that when watching *Brief Encounters* you felt you were in 1982 rather than looking from the outside back at it. We knew that design, costume and make-up were going to play key parts in creating that story for us and our amazing crew went above and beyond to achieve an incredible level of authenticity. It was also a time of economic instability and social change and we wanted the series to have a real sense of place. It was important to us that we root our

characters in the real world. Sheffield provided us with diverse and cinematic locations for our characters to inhabit. We had a wonderful time filming in Sheffield despite the snow in January, the wind tunnels and pouring rain.

The comedy shows we've worked on have always revolved around ensembles, how peoples' lives overlap and making the move into drama has enabled us to move our characters on, see them develop and grow. It's been an exciting and challenging journey for us. We were lucky to have the support of CPL and Jane Hudson at ITV who pushed us to make the scripts the best they could be.

We hope the audience will enjoy meeting the warm characters in *Brief Encounters* so when the drama hits they'll go on that journey with them.

The background to *Brief Encounters*

Danielle Lux and Arabella McGuigan, executive producers

As producers and as people we have a passion for stories about surprising, emotionally engaging, funny women, particularly those who find themselves with opportunities they'd never foreseen. So when Fay and Oriane (who we'd first met a scarily long time ago on *Smack the Pony* and *Green Wing*) brought us the germ of an idea about a legendary, ladies only party business we knew it would take us somewhere exciting. We're delighted ITV agreed and here we are, three years later.

All *Brief Encounters'* characters and their personal stories are the entirely fictional creations of Fay and Oriane, but they were inspired by the real, original Ann Summers saleswomen we met (many of whom are still doing it now, in their sixties) during a big period of research.

From the early '80s onwards ordinary women all over the country, aged from their 20s to their 50s, from a wide range of social backgrounds really did grab the opportunity to sell saucy knickers and 'marital aids' to their friends in the comfort of each other's living rooms and in their own ways they were pioneers. To us (and to most of the audience, we suspect) 1982 feels like yesterday but attitudes to women and work, their husbands, families and particularly sex were shockingly different from what they are now. Now we take that equality and range of choice for granted, but that was a time when as women we'd have had much less chance of running a business, couldn't buy lovely, lacy lingerie in M&S and would certainly never have seen a scantily clad model (of either sex) draped across the side of a bus!

So when Ann Summers started up in homes and communities it set off ripples; couples' relationships changed, women who'd previously not had a career became main breadwinners and via buying the contents of the party plan catalogue spiced things up in the bedroom. It became a catalyst for change – social, economic as well as personal. That makes, we hope, for great drama and drama that's funny - what goes on at the parties is inherently funny, laughter is what it's all about - but it's been brought alive by Fay and Oriane's extraordinary ability to create warm, relatable characters whose depth of feeling suddenly catches you in the chest in the same breath as it makes you laugh.

Of course a show set in 1982 opens the door to a feast of nostalgia - yes, we get flashbacks of shocking pink blusher, geometric knits, and Lady Di high-necked blouses - but also a slice of our social history. Before the typical '80s image of red-braced, Ferrari-driving bankers took hold, these women were a different sort of entrepreneur, working for themselves on hours that fitted around their families, often initially spurred on by the need for quick cash. And some of them made a lot of money. It's another side of Thatcher's Britain that we were all excited to explore...to the soundtrack of Duran Duran, (Sheffield's own) Human League, Yazoo and many other personal favourites we've managed to sneak in.

When the party plan business combined with relationships this became a drama about discovering ambition and empowerment through friendship. What was emerging felt so

real, we found ourselves wanting (some bits of) these stories to be happening to us: we wanted a best mate like Nita, the guts of Dawn, the determination of Steph and the ability to face our vulnerabilities like Pauline.

Of the women we spoke to many talked about husbands being laid off from traditional industries in times of great financial hardship. It's that which took us to Sheffield, the steel city, where the decline of one dominant industry upturned lives. It's often said that when men are on strike or lose their jobs the birth rate goes up! 'Time together' certainly drove sales via the parties – women buying baby doll nighties, nurses' outfits and Extending Hermits instead of paying their weekly rent. That combination of laughter in the face of troubles is completely in tune with the tone of *Brief Encounters*.

We've been blessed by an amazing crew, and a cast who've added dimensions to Fay and Oriane's writing which we'd never even imagined, embodying sympathetic, funny characters we hope the audience will take to heart.

So much has been achieved by the talent and dedication of the *Brief Encounters* team: producer, Jo Willett, our three directors, Jill Robertson, Marek Losey and Joss Agnew, and inspired production design, costume and make up that's brought the stories and the early '80s alive in vivid (but subtle) colour with vital support from production, locations and all the other crew who've made miracles happen.

Jacqueline Gold and the team at Ann Summers have given us access, research and inspiration without which the series could never have been so authentic. Also, we wouldn't be where we are at all without the support and creative input we've had from our commissioner at ITV, Jane Hudson, who has championed it throughout.

There's nothing quite like *Brief Encounters* on TV at the moment; it has more in common with great, uplifting British movies. We are immensely proud of this series, which, no matter how many times we've poured over scripts and seen it in the edit, still surprises us with a new laugh and makes us cry. It's everything we are in the business of telly to make. We hope the audience will love it as much as we do.

Character profiles

Steph played by Sophie Rundle

An unlikely entrepreneur, Steph comes across as shy and somewhat tongue-tied but inside her is a deep desire to achieve more. She has followed convention but discovers marriage and children are not necessarily the fulfillment of her every desire; her husband Terry is one of the boys and old fashioned. She is a quiet woman who has fitted into everyone else's expectation of her but she blossoms through the crisis and then seizes the opportunity to take control and work. The party planning job and her new friends ignite an ambition inside her that she didn't know she had.

Nita played by Angela Griffin

With her gutsy humour mixed with fierce loyalty, grit and warmth, Nita is the first woman to befriend Steph in our story. Nita is the down-to-earth, fun, energetic, confident mother of four whom you'd expect to become a party saleswoman and she gives Steph the confidence to take control of her life. She is a "den mother": her children know she will fight their corner but equally she is not afraid to let them know who is boss. Her Achilles' heel is her husband, loveable rogue, Kieren – they adore each other and she would do anything for him but he is a challenge.

Dawn played by Sharon Rooney

Dawn has a bubbly, outgoing disposition, a lust for life and is a bit of a flirt, but she is not always as confident or as brash as she appears. Her mother died when she was a young teenager and she has been trapped ever since looking after her father and three brothers who all take her for granted. She has a tendency to act with her heart rather than her head and is never concerned with doing things "exactly right". Dawn is engaged to the butcher's assistant, Russell, and planning a wedding bigger and better than Charles and Diana's. Her weak spot is her younger brother Stanley; she would literally lay down her life for him and in Pauline she finds a surprising surrogate Mum. Ann Summers' independent spirit and the bug of earning much-needed cash provide a potential escape from her life and a way of finally realising her dream of marrying her boyfriend, Russell.

Pauline played by Penelope Wilton

Skilled in the art of 'keeping up appearances', Pauline is the prim, apparently uptight, social hostess wife to Brian, the much-respected local butcher. She lives as his other half, hosting dinners and playing Bridge. Their relationship has suffered whilst he's concentrated on building his business, leaving her sat at home planning meals for him. She is able to project a state of sunniness in public, even if things aren't perfect and finds herself confronting hollowness inside. Never one to suffer fools gladly, Pauline has the courage of her convictions and a big heart.

Terry played by Karl Davies

Terry is very traditional, he tries hard but finds that he has the inability to contain or even really understand his wife Steph. As she grows he fears he is being left behind and he doesn't know how to keep up with her, so he reacts in the only way he knows, by throwing his toys out of the pram.

Kieren played by Don Gilet

A devoted, flirtatious husband to Nita and a fun father but not a good provider. His heart's in the right place but he frequently makes the wrong decisions; the consequences often cause fractures in the family and leave Nita picking up the pieces. But when challenged to protect his family Kieren discovers his moral compass.

Russell played by Will Merrick

Russell is Dawn's under-the-thumb boyfriend. He is a hardworking young man who is the apprentice to the butcher, Brian Spake, Pauline's husband. He still lives with his very religious mother and he's totally besotted with Dawn. But appearances can be deceptive - Russell has the potential to be Dawn's rock.

Brian played by Peter Wight

Husband to Pauline and a proud, hardworking butcher respected by many. Brian wants to step up the social ladder and is delighted the local establishment wants to accept him, but his tunnel vision has stopped him seeing the needs of his loyal wife. Via the maelstrom of new people around him, Brian's own life opens up to new possibilities.

PC Johnny Daniels played by Ben Bailey Smith

Strong, kind and thoughtful is Johnny. He has a smile that can melt your heart, but with a naughty twinkle in his eye. The opposite of Terry, he strikes up a friendship with Steph and finds himself embroiled in numerous situations with our main characters.



Cast interviews

Sophie Rundle is Steph



What appealed to you about *Brief Encounters*?

You can't help but be intrigued by the idea. It grabs your interest immediately. And then when I realised it was about four women and their relationships with each other I thought that was so exciting because so rarely do you get a script with four female leads. It really interested me.

It was one of those things when I started reading the scripts and I kept reading. That has to be the first really good sign, that you don't put it down and go off and make a cup of tea. You zoom right through to the end. I just love Fay and Oriane's writing. They're so clever and funny. I was hooked.

Ann Summers is the reason these four women all get together but you can't make six episodes of funny gags about lingerie or marital aids. That's not what the story is about. It's simply the catalyst for everything that happens and sends their lives spiralling off. It's about their relationships and their friendships and how they develop as people. The characters are amazing women but they are also just ordinary women. They're the women in your lives - your sisters, your mothers or daughters. They're just women trying to find some sort of happiness and freedom.

Who is Steph?

Steph lives a very normal life. She works as a cleaner for Pauline, is married to Terry and they have a young son called Dean. They don't have much money but Steph has never

been expected to have a career. She got married straight out of school and then had a child. It's the kind of marriage where the husband expects to be the breadwinner and the wife will stay at home.

When we first meet her, Steph is quite shy, retiring and sweet. But when they come up against money problems, she discovers the job as a party planner and another world is opened up to her. Through the episodes you see her develop and blossom into this amazing woman. Her confidence changes and she becomes independent. Steph blossoms into another version of herself. So she starts off in one place and finishes somewhere very different.

Like a lot of women in the early '80s, Steph never had the opportunity to have a job and see what she could do because it was never expected of her. But she is very smart. She was probably brilliant at school. If she were around now in 2016 she would go to university and have a career. But at that time, in Sheffield, it just wasn't expected of her. A job is a totally new thing for her.

Can you tell us about your research for the role?

We went for a really lovely brunch with two of the original party planners and we asked them lots of questions about what it was like. It was amazing because the business model is extraordinary for the customer but also for the women who worked for Ann Summers. It revolutionised what you could do if you were a mother, married or you wanted to be educated. It gave those women the freedom to work and get financial independence.

It completely changed the life of one woman we spoke to. It meant she could leave a very unhappy marriage and start her life all over again. So it was really fascinating to talk to them. Party Planning enabled women to become independent and successful businesswomen.

Did anything really shock you working on *Brief Encounters*?

The art department recreated the original catalogue and it was actually quite shocking, the pictures of the different things. It was funny shocking. That was the feel of the new party planning business. Shocking but enjoyable, fun and silly and something to be shared and giggled over. When we first saw all of the props in the catalogue I was like, 'Oh my God, what does that do? How does that one work?'

In the first week they brought out this box of marital aids from the 1980s and they were hilarious. These days we're accustomed to seeing these terrifying looking things that come in all shapes and sizes. But the original ones were quite basic. I thought after about five minutes it wouldn't be funny anymore. But it just never stopped being funny, particularly when I'm sat in a room with Penelope Wilton who is one of my heroes. I pulled one out of the box and she said, 'And what does that one with the pump do, Sophie?' What do you say to that? I went very red in the face, mumbled something and ran away.

Did these women face opposition?

It's easy to forget how shocking it was. How risqué. Men felt quite isolated because, for once, they weren't included in something. This was for women only. It's normal these days for women to talk about sex and enjoy lingerie and things like that. But then it was so new and so shocking that a lot of traditional men didn't quite know what to make of it.

Steph's husband Terry is not happy about it at all. Steph has this one side of her life that is completely opening up to her and there's a whole new world waiting for her. And she's battling against the opinions of her husband, her mother and what's expected of her. Steph and Terry have been together since school and have never really discovered who they are. And she starts to change. That brings with it conflicts in her marriage.

As Steph blossoms does her appearance change?

She gets the classic Farrah Fawcett hairstyle makeover mid-way through the series. It was lovely because we wanted to start her off a little bit in the past, still lingering in the '70s style wise - very functional and then she starts to earn a bit of money and gain confidence. It's nice to show her different look as she blossoms into the '80s, style wise. That was lots of fun. I enjoyed doing all of the research about how all the different hairstyles looked back then and the clothes. I quite like the '80s' style in general. I think it's due for a comeback. I like a little shoulder pad. What can I say?

What else did you enjoy about going back to the 1980s?

I was born in 1988 so I was there in the '80s for two years! The music was amazing. Fay and Oriane wrote in the script the music they wanted in the scenes. So I pulled it all out and made a playlist. The music is fantastic - Human League, Ultravox, Blondie and so on. It was brilliant. I loved the fact we feature such a great soundtrack in the series.

Was it important to both film and set this series in Sheffield with northern women in a northern town?

I think so, partly because of when it's set. Attitudes are always slightly different in London compared to other areas so, yes, that's part of it. Particularly in the early '80s, Sheffield was going through a really turbulent time; a lot of people were losing their jobs, industries were under threat. It's important to tell that story and have it set and filmed in Sheffield where it is feels very much a part of the story.

Generally speaking, do women talk more frankly and openly than men?

I think that's true. What I love about this story is that female relationships are extraordinary. Women naturally, throughout history, bond together. They're stronger when they're together. That's why we talk a lot more. We get support from each other.

Men aren't as open. They just aren't. When they get together in the pub and chat about football or whatever, women within five minutes will be talking about their emotions and what's going on in their relationships. Those female friendships are so fascinating in the

way they change and change you. It's so interesting to do something like this that discusses and investigates that.

How do these women bond together as a team?

Steph, Nita, Dawn and Pauline are four very different women, unlikely women who come together and turn out to have huge similarities and they bond together. When Pauline has a crisis it shows people's true colours. You realise who is there for you and sometimes it's surprising. Pauline is so defensive initially and then the girls are just there for her.

What was it like working with Penelope, Angela and Sharon?

Penelope is amazing. She is one of my heroes and always has been. She is one of the country's best actresses and it's wonderful to work with her, she's just brilliant and so clever. She's such a joy to work with.

Equally, Angela and Sharon are also amazing women. Like the characters, we're all very different women but there is something very similar about all of us. We all feel very similarly as people. They're strong, funny and a real pleasure to be around. They're real women's women and are so brilliant, so easy to work with. They made it so much fun.

Do you think there's been a shift in the number of female-led TV dramas being produced?

I think there's a change. We've had enough of women being in the background and just having supporting parts. It doesn't feel like a phase. It feels like something driven by audiences. Due to the way we watch television, how that has changed and continues to change, the viewers' feedback is so much more important now and so much more easily available. You don't have to get a focus group together. You just log on to Twitter and you can see what people are thinking.

I think people want to see dramas about women. Or at least with women having just as many main parts as men. There's been a huge change and I think it will continue. Those stories are just waiting to be told. And thank God we're telling them.

Has playing Steph given you any particular insights?

You do this job because you're curious about people and stories. That's the joy of it for me. It's thinking, 'that person has done that. Why? What's made them do that?' You're curious about the way people behave. You're constantly trying to understand people more. Actors are very naturally that way inclined. It's my favourite part of the job.

Cast interviews

Angela Griffin is Nita



What was your initial reaction to *Brief Encounters*?

I was so excited about a project landing on my table with four female lead characters followed by lots of amazing female supporting characters. It was written by two women and produced by a woman from a female production company.

Then, after reading it, I saw how complex, interesting, entertaining and moving the story was. I saw how three-dimensional these women were; they are characters in their own right. They're not just wives, mothers and lovers. They're working, thinking women. It was genuinely exciting. You get tricked into thinking it's about Ann Summers and it's not. These women are really well-drawn characters who all go on their own separate journeys that intertwine. It's a lovely piece. Ann Summers is simply the initial hook to tell these women's stories. It gave a lot of women economic independence. The early 1980s feels like such an important time in terms of a sexual revolution for women. They were no longer expected to give up their careers, stay at home and cook.

Can you explain who Nita is?

Nita is a feisty family woman with four kids. She started going out with her husband Kieren when they were 15 but they've known each other since they were 10. It's a true deep love and something Nita defines herself by, or has done up until the point the party planning comes along. She's really committed her life to her family and her husband.

Then Ann Summers arrives and she needs the money. They really haven't got two pennies to rub together. And she's been fine with that. But the time has come where she needs a little bit of extra help because she's pregnant again and her husband doesn't always stay on the right side of the law - and she'd rather he did. So if she can do anything to help. Nita is a tiger. She will do anything for her family. She'll fight their corner and wants to protect them. And all of those things get tested.

How would you describe the relationship between Nita, Steph, Dawn and Pauline?

Ordinarily, under any other circumstance, these four characters would never have been friends. This is the joy of their friendship, they found each other through this common interest in making money and starting a business and once they met, they realised they have more in common than they think.

I think friendships for women are as important as marriages – we really need them. I'm still best friends with Lisa Faulkner and Nicola Stephenson from years ago when we filmed *Holby City*. Those friendships are as important as my marriage. You can never underestimate the power of a female friendship. I try and imprint it on my daughters.

Did you do any research before you started filming?

We met two women who started doing the parties in the 1980s. It was so interesting listening to them. We all take it for granted today but in 1982 there was nothing like that about. So when these women, no matter how open minded they were, went to these initial meetings, they were just so shocked. And it wasn't out of prudishness; they just didn't know things like this existed.

One of the ladies talked about what it did to her relationship. One of the relationships survived and one of the other ladies' didn't - because she gained her independence it changed the dynamic. It was really interesting listening to their stories and what their reactions were.

Was 1982 such a different time to today?

There were no big hen parties in the early '80s. Men had stag parties and women didn't. It's bizarre. The whole filming process has just been one big nostalgia trip. It's aged me because there are a lot of people on set who don't remember some of the references. But I remember all of them.

There's a picture on Pauline's dining room wall that we had in the living room of our house. When viewers watch it, especially if they're my age, they're going to have to watch it twice. It's a case of, 'Oh my God, I remember that!' You could watch it just for the nostalgia. The props department's eye for detail is just incredible. Plus the music is amazing - A-Ha, Depeche Mode, Spandau Ballet and so on.

How would you describe Nita's look?

Nita has short dark hair, which I haven't got so that was really interesting and a real difference. I've never been on television looking the way I do with Nita. She has no-make

up - with four kids the last thing she's got time for is sticking a full face on. But she's very much a woman, little skirt or high-waisted jeans and a pair of heeled boots. She's a woman who feels confident about herself.

You end up wearing a French Maid outfit in the opening episode. How was that to film?

It wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be! It was specially made to make sure things weren't hanging out where they shouldn't be. I was definitely worried - I'm turning 40 this year so I built it up and built it up in my head - I exercised, put creams on my backside and all sorts to try and make sure that if anything did fall out it looked the best it could. It was actually a load of fun to play in the end. Not as much gets seen as you would expect.

Does Nita get easily embarrassed?

Not at all. She's one of the only women whose husband is supportive. He's quite secure in his manhood, with four kids, and he loves it all. Kieren loves her being involved in it because he gets a kick out of it too. He's a confident man. And she's not easily embarrassed at all. She's got no shame and no pride where that comes. If she's going to feed and clothe her family, what's wrong with it?

How do you feel about turning 40 in July?

I'm not happy about it really. I'll be fine once it comes. I'm going to celebrate in a big way. It will just come and go. I'm having a birth month. So every day of July will be a big celebration.

Nita tells Steph 'Pregnancy is making me doolally.' Did your own pregnancies do that to you?

To a certain extent they did. It did change me. When I get pregnant I just think I'm the most incredible human being in the entire world because I'm making a human. I get very Zen and very much at one with nature when I'm pregnant, I do yoga and meditation and only put healthy things into my body. It all goes out the window the minute the baby arrives.

How would you sum up the appeal of the series?

I think these are characters you will want to let into your home and you will want to become friends with them. They are worthy friends for anybody to get involved with. I like to think of myself as a bit of a psychologist and can find a reason why everybody does something.

I like Nita, I love inhabiting her and I'd love to inhabit her for longer and see where she goes and what she can do. And I'd love to carry on working with those lovely girls. Hopefully the viewers will love the series; I definitely think *Brief Encounters* has got legs. If there's an appetite for it, if people want to see it, then hopefully Fay and Oriane will carry on writing it.

Cast interviews

Sharon Rooney is Dawn



Can you tell us why you wanted to play Dawn?

When the script came through I thought, 'I'll read this in bed.' and I couldn't put it down. When they said they wanted me to come in and read for Dawn I was so excited. It's one of those parts where you try not to want it too much. But it was hard because I really wanted to play her.

Brief Encounters is about women, their lives, the men in their lives and their relationships with each other, not just sex toys and Ann Summers, although that does feature occasionally. It's so special because all the characters are so different. We're four women who would normally never have a brief encounter.

Can you describe who Dawn is?

Dawn is loud and wants to make people laugh but on the inside she is struggling. Her mum passed away when she was a young teenager, she has three brothers and her dad is depressed and is an alcoholic. Dawn has basically been running the house, raising her youngest brother Stanley but also having her own life. She's got a job, a wonderful boyfriend but she's had quite a hard time.

When you see Dawn you see colour and life. And then you see her when she goes home and you see she's actually just a scared little girl. Pauline's husband Brian is the only one who sees straight through the make-up, the hair and the clothes to the girl that just wants a family. Scratch the surface is what I'd say and just see what's under there. She

has all this emotion and so much vulnerability. I'm aware she's quite full on but please stick with her.

There's nothing posh about Dawn. At one point she says to Pauline, 'You know I do love it here and it's not just because you can cook things from their beginnings.' The fact that Pauline can cook a meal from scratch amazes Dawn, she thinks, 'Wow. I am going to be like you when I grow up.' No Findus frozen pancakes and chips.

How would you describe her look?

Dawn wears what she wants, when she wants, how she wants. Leg warmers are a must. Every outfit has a pair of matching leg warmers. She's also going for a new look. Hugely crimped hair with blue eyeliner. Understated! I want to release my own range of crimpers!

Tell us about her husband-to-be Russell?

Without her Russell I don't know what would happen to Dawn. They adore each other. People will probably feel a bit sorry for Russell because as the story develops you get to see how he feels and what he's thinking. He's just scared because Dawn wants a perfect house and he's worried he can't give her that life. He doesn't care if the bedside lamps don't match the bedspread. But for her it's important because she's never had it.

Dawn and her 'Russy' get intimate on a Chinese rug. How was that to film?

The first day of this shoot, I had to have a big fight with my dad on the doorstep in the morning. And then in the evening I had to open the door in sexy lingerie and seduce Russell. Now bear in mind I'd only met these people once. It was like complete extremes. Poor Will. He spends a lot of this job naked. But we also spend a lot of it laughing.

I kept laughing because Will is so funny. Penelope Wilton as Pauline arrives home early and discovers them on her rug. Will was just standing completely naked with a portrait protecting his modesty. I couldn't look at Penelope because I would laugh and I couldn't look at Will because I would laugh. It was so funny.

How does Dawn approach her wedding?

Dawn is a complete Bridezilla. She's terrifying. But actually, when you take all that away, it's just complete and utter love. It's all these firsts. Her hen party was the first party she had ever had. I feel like Dawn is the pioneer of hen parties because they didn't exist in the early '80s like they do now.

I don't think I'll ever get married because a fake wedding was enough stress for me. I couldn't sleep the night before. I was in tears in make-up. The girls kept saying to me, 'Why are you crying?' And all I could say was, 'I don't know but I'm really feeling a bit overwhelmed.'

What research did you do before filming began?

We were lucky enough to meet some ladies who had worked for Ann Summers in the 1980s and they told us lots about the parties. I had heard about them but never been to one. My mum and my aunts would go for a girls' night. So it was really interesting to hear.

It's hard work. At first I thought, 'It's just a party.' But you've got to remember a lot of things; you've got to make sure you've got fresh batteries. And you've also got to keep track of your stock. People are trying things on and you've got to make sure it all comes back. It turned these women into independent businesswomen. This was a big thing in the 1980s, making your own money. Some of these women never had their own money before.

I might hold an Ann Summers party after this. I definitely think I could do it now. With my friends and family. I feel like I've got a good knowledge. The eighties' products were quite lethal though!

What reaction did the women in the 1980s get?

The ladies we met said it was very interesting. At first the women would be quite resistant but as soon as word got about, everyone wanted a party. Especially because no men were allowed, it was just for the women. 'Men - get to the pub, I'm having the girls around.' Get out the pineapple with the cheese; we're having a party.

It allowed women to spread their wings, get out of the house, and have a job. They could do as much or as little as they wanted to do and they're in charge of it. Some men thought it must be dirty and seedy. But there was nothing bad about it at all. No harm.

The women were telling us that as well as making their own money you could also win things. There were really good incentives. Dawn eventually sells enough to win most of the Rose Cottage Bedroom Set: the bedside lamps, bedspread and not forgetting the bedroom bin.

How would you describe the relationship between Dawn, Pauline, Steph and Nita?

They become a complete team. Pauline is how Dawn would like to be. And with Steph and Nita it's new friends she might never have made. They become so close that if you hurt one of them you hurt them all.

Dawn and Pauline become like mother and daughter. Dawn lost her mum at a pivotal point and she was left with so much responsibility at a young age. I don't think she ever got a chance to really mourn her mum. Because as soon as her mum was gone her dad was out doing his own thing and there was a little kid to look after. So she didn't have time to notice what she was missing. When she stays with Pauline - they have breakfast at the table and they have tea at night together and they talk about their day. I think Dawn realises what she has missed.

These women support each other – can you tell us about that?

I got really upset in a scene where Pauline breaks down. It was so emotional to see her so vulnerable. But then to be able to swoop in with the girls and say, 'Look. We'll fix it. We're here because we care,' that's really nice. I don't think there is enough of that in the world nowadays. Because you just text in a WhatsApp group, 'I'm having a bad day.' And get 50 emoji love hearts back. It's not the same as someone actually being there and going, 'Let's fix it.'

That was a really nice scene to film. To have a horrible moment and then cut to a beautiful shot of us all lined up, sitting looking at our work. Looking at what we have created. Laughing.

What was it like working with Penelope Wilton?

At first I was a little bit scared... it's Penelope Wilton. I really look up to her. And then you've got Sophie and Angela. I felt like I was playing with the big fish now. Penelope is the most wonderful woman. She scooped me up under her wing and we laugh constantly. We like to write songs together. We just have the best time.

And I feel a bit silly for feeling scared initially but it's just that admiration thing. I have learnt so much from her. It's really special. She is an absolute joy.

Dawn has a moped. How was that for you?

Ahhh, the moped. It's not the newest of mopeds so every so often it just dies. There is one shot of Penelope and I getting off it. Every time we tried to talk to each other we're hitting each other with the helmets. I couldn't hear what she was saying. Then I had to ride off down the hill that goes on to a road. How I'm still sitting here, I don't know.

I did say very early on, 'I'm not driving this moped with Penelope Wilton actually on the back. It's Penelope Wilton. If I kill her I'll have to go and live on a desert island. I'm not doing it.' I think she would have trusted me. But I wouldn't have trusted myself.

You weren't born in 1982. What do you make of that decade?

The music was my way into that period. We have a really good soundman. If there's music in a scene he will play it. That really helps me because music is how I get into character and the zone. We're lucky that he'll play it in and then cut it just before the scene starts. It really helps to get the feel going. Dawn has a Duran Duran nightie that I think I might steal. In fact I'm pretty certain I'm going to steal it.

I love doing jobs that aren't set in this current time period because there are no mobile phones. You actually have to physically go round to people's houses to speak to them. You can't just text them. You have to meet people. There are no computers and there are three channels on the television. You speak more. You actually talk. Remember those days of talking?

How would you sum up the appeal of the show?

I love the fact this is a drama with four female leads but also because the men have really good parts too. It doesn't have to be one or the other. It can be both and it can be great. That was one of the other reasons that drew me to this. It's a complete team. It never feels like there are four of us doing our thing. It feels like our own community and everyone is involved - female and male. Everyone has a good part.

This is one of the first jobs that I haven't just read my lines, I read everyone's. I am so invested in these relationships. I don't know what guys get up to when they're alone together. But girls, we chat about everything. Every little secret comes out. Especially if there's wine involved. And that's reflected in this. We would love to carry these stories on in future series. I don't want to say goodbye to this lot for too long. A brief encounter is not enough. We need more.

Cast interviews

Penelope Wilton is Pauline



What were your first impressions of Brief Encounters?

I thought it was very wittily written. Comedy that makes me laugh now is difficult to find. So I found the situation very charming. It had a naivety and freshness about it that I liked. I also liked the fact it covered all these different, disparate women brought together. That's what I liked best.

The Ann Summers' connection is used at the beginning and it has quite a lot of humour, but essentially the series is about the ladies' friendships and the complex relationships that happen.

Who is Pauline?

Pauline is a middle class woman who has married the butcher Brian. I wouldn't say she is a social climber but her husband has aspirations to be someone in the Rotary Club. Pauline is a rather quiet unassuming person who doesn't have a family. So she looks after her husband and has had a rather quiet life. And then her life changes when she is drawn into this world with these other women.

She has been the stay-at-home wife without seemingly much going on in her life. She's quite a solitary person who seems to have a sadness about her. She meets other friends; they have coffee and attend the odd Rotary Club dinner or play Bridge. She feels there is nothing remarkable about her as a person. She has simply fitted in.

Pauline lives this solitary life, but she comes to realise with the friends she has made through the parties that she has a support, which she is very grateful for.

How would you describe her marriage?

Pauline used to do Brian's accounts and he was the steady option to choose as a husband. But they really do love each other. She depends on him and loves him.

Pauline is described as 'prim' with tangerine orange nails and wears a Joan Collins-style outfit when out at a Berni Inn. Did you like her 1980s' style?

It's 1982 and she has enough money to spend on clothes. So she keeps up with the times. It was a very interesting time fashion-wise for women because we started to get the big shoulders. Dynasty was a big influence fashion-wise and Pauline would have watched all of those programmes. Actually the clothes were quite attractive, although it did get out of hand with the shoulder pads. But early on it wasn't an unattractive period.

Did you meet any party planners from that time?

I met two of them who were about my age. The party planning changed their lives. The thing about Ann Summers for these women and what our story goes into is that by doing these parties they became financially independent. If you'd always been a stay-at-home wife, on the breadline, your husband loses his job in the steel works, then you start making money, it changes the whole dynamic in the home. Suddenly women found they were in charge of their own destinies. They didn't have to play the second role, as it were.

These women I met very much saw it as their independent business. One of them was in a very unhappy relationship and felt very put down and belittled by her husband. She had three children and there seemed to be no way out for her. Then she started giving these parties and was able to leave him. Her children went to university, she married again and a whole new life started for her.

Did men understand what these parties involved?

The parties were just for women. No men. At the beginning of our story they're called prostitutes. Men didn't understand what it was all about. This sort of thing was very freeing for a lot of women. Because it said that sex was not something that just men enjoyed.

Pauline's first party includes displaying a large sex aid. How was that to film?

The Hermit Extender with remote control. It was extraordinary. All the men in the crew went very quiet.

In 1982 you were on stage in Major Barbara at the National Theatre in London? Was it a more innocent time compared to today?

Major Barbara was directed by Peter Gill and was a wonderful play by Shaw. I was at the National for a long time.

I wouldn't say it was more innocent. We didn't have social media but there were a lot of other things going on. No one was innocent after the war. I think it was a more informed time. I'm not entirely sure that more availability has made anyone any more informed - in fact, quite the contrary.

Is it important that *Brief Encounters* is filmed and set in Sheffield?

I do think that's important. It sets it in a context. In Sheffield in 1982 the steel works were closing down so it was a time where there was a lot of upheaval in the workplace because of lay offs. Mrs Thatcher had been in power since 1979 and she was taking on the unions. It was a very difficult time.

Tell us about Pauline's relationship with Dawn?

Pauline doesn't have any children and that's created sadness between her and Brian. Her relationship with Dawn, who she meets in the hairdresser's, becomes very important. Dawn needs a temporary home so Pauline takes her in and finds she really enjoys having these younger people in the house. It's like a surrogate family she suddenly adopts.

It doesn't go down very well with her husband Brian who is used to having things in order and an ordered lifestyle. Then this new situation disrupts his world. But, of course, it gives Pauline a role to play and she finds that very invigorating and satisfying.

It's been lovely working with this cast. They are wonderful young actors and actresses. I've enjoyed working with this company very much. I learn things all the time. I learn from younger actors - their quickness and vitality. I find young actors and actresses now fantastically clever, very astute, sharp and extremely generous.

Dawn thinks Pauline grew up in an era of candlelight. Is it difficult for the young to realise older people were once much like them?

Everyone lives the age they live. Young people couldn't be expected to know what my life is and I wouldn't be expected to know what their life is now. When you're young you're too busy living. You don't have much time to take any notice of what's going on.

As a teenager you used to watch your mother putting her make up on. What are your memories of that?

My mother was extremely glamorous and my father was keen on fly-fishing. So they were seemingly a mismatched pair. They had books by the side of the bed and as I looked along this row of books I suddenly saw this book, 'Sex And The Older Woman,' among the fishing books. I was 14 and I couldn't believe that book was there.

So I said to my mother, 'Mum, look, that book.' And she said, 'Yes, it's no use at all. The older woman is 38.'

Pauline says her life is not an open book for people to pick up and read whenever they feel like it. You have not written an autobiography. Why?

I think that describes my life. I don't think I can turn into other people if everyone knows my inside leg measurement.

Synopsis

Episode one



Sheffield 1982. Married mum of one Stephanie sees an ad in the local paper '*Ann Summers Demonstrators required to run parties selling exotic lingerie. FOR LADIES ONLY. Earn £30-£40 for an evening's work*' – this could be what she's looking for. Whilst taking her son, Dean to his first day at school, Steph meets Nita – a no-nonsense mother of four, who's also struggling with her financial situation.

Lonely Pauline is considering adding a macrame owl to her craft folder whilst waiting for her cleaner, Steph to arrive. Her husband Brian is at his business, Spake's Butchers, reprimanding his apprentice Russell and fiancée Dawn for snogging each other's faces off when there's the scrag end to sort. Steph waits for her husband Terry to come home so she can tell him about the Ann Summers ad, but Terry has been laid off from his factory job. He's hostile even to the idea of her resorting to selling "sex stuff".

Steph arrives at her local Community Centre where the advertised Ann Summers recruitment event is due to start. Just as Steph is about to bottle it, she bumps into Nita who drags her into the hall where they find out its more than just exotic lingerie that will be sold – Steph feels that she doesn't have the confidence to run the parties – Nita says they should give it a go.

That evening at the pub, Steph and Terry are with their friends, Lisa and Barry. Steph sounds out Lisa about hosting a party, Lisa describes sales work as 'desperate'. Terry is tempted to invest in a cab business but it'll cost him fifty quid, money he doesn't have. Steph finds out that Terry is finalising his cab deal and is upset - where did he get the money from. Steph asks Pauline if she'd be willing to host a party at her house.

Pauline is mortified. That evening before dinner, as Pauline takes in her lonely surroundings and a social life that revolves around her husband she has a change of heart before heading to the kitchen where she's got "A bird to baste".

At the party, Pauline is on edge and to her shock, the councillor's conservative wife, Bunny and her daughter, Hellie, an old school friend of Steph's turn up. During the marital aids demonstration an appalled Bunny storms out at the sight of "The Stallion" but how does everyone else feel?

Terry's at the pub and loses at a game of darts where he was trying to win the money to invest in the cab. His best mate Barry's girlfriend Lisa tries to console him. Whilst at the bar, Russell lets slip to him that Dawn is at a party hosted by his boss, Brian's wife, and that their cleaner is selling sexy underwear and marital aids. Terry is furious when he realises Steph has gone behind his back.

PC Johnny Daniels and PC Rob arrive at the Spake's residence; they've had a call complaining about the activities at Pauline's. Just as Steph and the other women are talking to the policemen, Nita collapses and is rushed to hospital, but why? Back at Pauline's, Dawn is left in charge of the party and decides she's going to sign up as a demonstrator as well. Hellie is also considering it. Brian arrives home and is shocked at what he has walked into.

When Steph arrives home she finds an angry Terry waiting for her. Across town, Pauline is furious at Brian's objections to the party and Pauline explains that she feels utterly trapped in her world. He's taken aback, he had never realised she was unhappy. The morning after the night before: Steph lies with the bed empty next to her, meanwhile Nita is back at home contemplating her situation and Brian assumes Pauline has got all this party business out of her system.

Steph goes to Barry's house in the hopes of finding Terry, but little does she know that her whole life is about to be turned upside down...

Synopsis

Episode two



Two weeks later... Steph and her new found friends, Nita, Pauline, Hellie and Widowed Linda are catching up down the pub. They are joined by Dawn who is running late thanks to a technical issue with a demonstration vibrator at a party she's just held.

Barry and Lisa enter the pub. Feeling upset at seeing Lisa, Steph makes an escape to the ladies toilets. Unseen, Lisa follows her and confronts her about Terry's departure, wanting to know if Steph is going to tell Barry about her 'indiscretion'. Steph tells a relieved Lisa she won't, for his sake. Nita overhears the conversation and is upset for her friend. Likewise, Steph is concerned Nita who has another baby on the way she doesn't want.

At the end of the evening an oblivious Barry asks Steph to hold an Ann Summers Party at Lisa's engagement do on Friday. Shocked, Steph balks at the idea. To save her friend, Nita volunteers instead. Dawn drives a tipsy Pauline back home on her moped. Pauline tells a stunned Brian that she's loved her first visit to a pub. Dawn returns to her family's flat where she finds a mess and her little brother, Stanley still up doing his homework. Dawn's father Len, a bullish man, tells Dawn to sort the house out. Dawn's home life is a battleground for her.

The next day Pauline and Steph are having a cup of tea as Steph tries to convince Pauline to start demonstrating. Pauline informs Steph that she has worked before doing Brian's accounts before they were married, telling Steph her love for steady Brian came after a previous romance.

Steph is at home and her landlord turns up for the rent money – she's no money and few options. She looks at her Ann Summers paying-in book on the counter and battles with a thought. She needs money now.

Back at Dawn's flat, the kitchen is still a war zone as her brother Simon comes down the stairs wearing the Kiss Kiss knickers from her Ann Summers kit. An argument ensues and Dawn bursts into tears. Dawn and Russell talk about her desperate living situation and how she can't even move in with him on account of his mum being religious. Brian and Pauline are doing the washing up, discussing the anniversary dinner he has booked for them at the Berni Inn when the doorbell goes. It's Dawn with her suitcases and a proposal for them.

Kieren is given the opportunity to earn some quick money by old mate, Dougie. With a new baby on the way Kieren is tempted.

Worried she might lose the baby she now feels she might want, Nita can't do Lisa's party. Steph steps in - she needs the money. Steph turns up at Lisa's party with Dean - she doesn't have a babysitter. Barry offers to take Dean to the cinema with him. Steph, ever the professional, sets up Lisa's party for her.

It's the night of Pauline and Brian's anniversary and Len arrives at the Spakes' house ordering Dawn to come home and threatening to stop her seeing Stanley if she refuses. With Pauline's help Dawn tells Len she's not coming home.

At the cinema, Barry leaves Dean sitting waiting for the film whilst going to buy popcorn; he returns and can't find Dean anywhere. Brian is waiting for a meat delivery at his butchers; he shows Russell the fancy engagement ring he has bought for Pauline – one he could never afford when they first got together; he's going to give it her at the Berni Inn.

At Lisa's house, an ashen faced Barry returns and Steph's panic rises as she realises Dean isn't with him. PC Johnny arrives to help find Dean. At the Spakes' house Dawn opens the door to Russell in a sexy baby doll nightgown. He is petrified they'll be seen and he'll be discovered at his boss' house.

An agitated Kieren is sitting in the car as he waits outside the bookmakers with Dougie and their friend Fat Mike.

At the Berni Inn Pauline is dressed to impress, sat at a table for two in the middle of the busy restaurant, as Councillor Donald Matlock, his wife Bunny and their daughter, Hellie walk in. Donald makes a pass at Pauline calling her a 'dark horse' following the party. Kieren is on edge waiting in the car when Dougie and Fat Mike appear breathlessly and tell him to move it. Desperately searching, Steph and Johnny arrive at the factory where Terry used to work – could Dean be here? Once back at home, there's a moment between Steph and Johnny.

Kieren is driving fast down the high street and suddenly hits something. Dougie tells a conflicted Kieren to keep on driving, leaving devastation in the road.

Cast and Production Credits

Steph.....	SOPHIE RUNDLE
Nita	ANGELA GRIFFIN
Dawn.....	SHARON ROONEY
Pauline	PENELOPE WILTON
Terry	KARL DAVIES
Kieren.....	DON GILET
Russell	WILL MERRICK
Brian	PETER WIGHT
Johnny.....	BEN BAILEY SMITH
Hellie	CHLOE PIRRIE
Joan.....	FELICITY MONTAGU
Bunny.....	PIPPA HAYWOOD
Donald	GEOFF MCGIVERN
Barry	KENT RILEY
Lisa.....	GINA BRAMHILL
Widowed Linda	SOUAD FARESS
Len	WAYNE FOSKETT
Dean.....	DANIEL SHARP
Stanley	FIN CAMPBELL
Richie	THEO GRAHAM
Nessa	CHLOE BOYLE
Dougie.....	SAMUEL EDWARD-COOK
Dull Karen	TANYA VITAL
Religious Rose	GAIL KEMP
Miss James.....	MARIE EKINS
Gordon.....	PABLO RAYBOULD
Maurice Cole.....	DANIEL POYSER
Pamela	SUZANNE PROCTER
Jim.....	PHIL ROWSON
Dr Henderson.....	SIMON LAWSON
Estelle	ELSIE KELLY

Cast and Production Credits

Executive Producer DANIELLE LUX
Executive Producer ARABELLA McGUIGAN
Executive Producer/Writer ORIANE MESSINA
Executive Producer/Writer FAY RUSLING
Producer JO WILLET
Director, episodes 1 & 2 JILL ROBERTSON
Director, episodes 3 & 4 MAREK LOSEY
Director, episodes 5 & 6 JOSS AGNEW
Director of Photography, episodes 1 & 2 OLLIE DOWNEY
Director of Photography, episodes 3 & 4 TIM PALMER BSC
Director of Photography, episodes 5 & 6 NICK DANCE BSC
Production Designer ANTHONY AINSWORTH
Costumer Designer JACKY LEVY
Make Up Designer MAGI VAUGHAN
Location Manager JAMES MUIRHEAD
Sound Recordist ALEX THOMPSON
Casting Director VICTOR JENKINS
Casting Director KELLY VALENTINE HENDRY
Casting Director VICKI THOMSON
Editor, episodes 1 & 2 BEN DRURY
Editor, episodes 3 & 4 COLIN SUMSION
Editor, episodes 5 & 6 TIM HODGES

