

My *Life* through a *lens*

Celebrities share the stories behind their favourite photos. This week it's Virgin tycoon Sir Richard Branson, 70

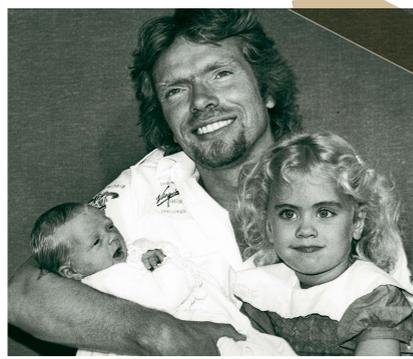


1951 My smile here, aged one, says it all. I was a happy child, if shy. I was fortunate to grow up with loving parents and two wonderful younger sisters – Lindy and Vanessa – in Shamley Green, Surrey. Dad was a barrister and Mum was a ballet dancer and an air hostess. They were energetic and provided me with opportunities to succeed. Dad died ten years ago and Mum in January this year. I miss them every day.

1960 I'm dyslexic and achieved more at games than in the classroom – when I was ten, I won all the races and was named Victor Ludorum, Latin for 'the winner of the games' [pictured]. But I came crashing down a year later when I was tackled in football and tore the cartilage in my knee. My parents taught us to laugh at pain, so I was carried off half-laughing, half-screaming.



1968 My first business venture was Student Magazine, which I launched after I left school when I was 16. A couple of years later, I brazenly knocked on Mick Jagger's door in Chelsea in the hope of an interview. My hands were shaking and my heart was racing as I carried my tape recorder. I think he took pity on me because I was young and enthusiastic, and he agreed to see me [pictured]. It was an awkward interview because we were both at a loss for words. It was a thrill to sign the Stones to Virgin Records in 1992 – I'm still friends with Mick and the band.



1985 I've had many adventures in my life, but my children are my greatest achievement. My son Sam (now 36) was born on 12 August while I was on the Virgin Atlantic Challenger attempting the fastest-ever crossing of the Atlantic from New York to England. On the 15th, we hit a ferocious storm 140 miles off the Isles of Scilly and sank. The first time I saw Sam was in a photo on the front page of the Evening Standard after I was rescued. As soon as I got to dry land, I rushed to be with my wife Joan and our daughter Holly (now 39). When I held Sam [pictured with Holly] for the first time, after that lucky escape, I felt truly blessed to be alive.



1993 I invited Princess Diana to name a Virgin plane, the Lady In Red. She was such a warm and fun spirit, I was fortunate to call her a friend. She holidayed on Necker Island with her boys in the 90s. She always had us in fits of laughter. After she died, Virgin Records released Elton John's Candle In The Wind to raise money for her charities.



1998 This is me playing a street stall seller in the London special episode of Friends, 'The One With Ross's Wedding'. It was great fun putting on my best cockney accent to sell Joey a garish Union Jack top hat. For years after I was stopped by young people saying 'Hey! You're that guy from Friends!' I have loved doing a few 'acting' roles over the years – including Casino Royale, Superman Returns and Only Fools And Horses.



2011 This was taken after fire destroyed the main house on Necker Island. A lightning storm with 90mph winds hit the house at 4am. Kate Winslet was on holiday with us and helped carry Mum to safety. The fire put everything into perspective for me – my family was safe and that was all that mattered. Kate ended up falling in love with my nephew Ned on that trip, and they now have a son together. Kate's an extraordinary actress. Every part she plays just gets better.



2017 After Barack Obama finished his second term as President of the United States, the family needed a complete break so they came to Necker Island [pictured]. He wanted to learn to kite-surf, and I'd never tried foil boarding, so we challenged ourselves to see who could learn fastest during the holiday. On the final day, we had a battle to see who could stay up the longest – and Barack won! Barack's decency, humility and good humour make him a one-in-a-generation leader. He did so much for America and the world.

As told to Rob McGibbon. For rewards that revolve around you, check out Virgin Red, the new group-wide rewards club from Virgin. Visit virgin.com/virgin-red