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# Funny girl's life not always a barrel of laughs

Radio and television host Meshel Laurie is refreshingly honest about the ups and downs of her career and personal life, writes **Andrew Fenton**

In a world of publicist-supervised, bland interviews filled with safe and dull answers, Meshel Laurie could be the most real person a journalist will ever meet. And one of Australia's most unlikely Buddhists.

From the breakup of her marriage to her battles with drug abuse, depression and her years spent working as a receptionist in Melbourne brothels, nothing is off-limits for the cutting comedian, Nova radio host and star of *This Week Live*. She's even open about the seething jealousy she felt as a struggling young stand-up, being overtaken by others on the way to the top.

"I'm always 100 per cent honest," she says, in a rare moment of peace at home away from her jobs and with her twins at kinder. "It just wouldn't cross my mind to lie most of the time. I just blurt it out."

Laurie says her darkest days were in 2007 when her career seemed to come to a grinding halt after she lost her regular gig on *Rove* to Carrie Bickmore and went into the "lowest depths of depression" she'd experienced in her life. She was prescribed antidepressants, began dabbling again in drugs and even sought advice on how to break her hated Brisbane breakfast radio contract on mental health grounds.

"My phone barely rang," says the comedian, who comes across much gentler than her

public persona suggests. "I was feeling lost and that everything had stopped making sense and (I had) all those bitter feelings of 'I deserve better, I don't deserve this ... I've worked so hard for a long time I should be getting the jobs other people are getting'."

That was when she discovered Buddhism, throwing herself into classes and devouring endless books and podcasts on the subject.

"Within just a couple of weeks I had started to feel better," she says. "My attitude to work changed a lot and suddenly, not coincidentally, I started working again and very differently this time. I was much more open and gentle and not so desperate."

Thanks to IVF, Laurie became a mother to a girl and a boy, Dali and Louie in 2009.

"That and the Buddhism has really worked to bring me back down to Earth and I just can't worry about the stuff I used to worry about. I can't worry that I've got double chins on TV, I just don't have the time or energy, it doesn't feel important compared with everything else I've got on my mind."

Laurie has spent most of the past 10 months effectively a single mother after she and her husband, artist Adrian Lewinski, separated.

But while she may be a Buddhist, she's not claiming to have reached some state of perfect Zen.

"There are so many

moments that I look back on being at friend's houses (who were single mums) and hearing them lose it with their kids and thinking, 'Oh no, that's terrible'. I feel terrible I was so judgmental about their short tempers and short attention spans and chaos because I really get it now. It's incredibly hard work."

The couple are putting a lot of work into saving their marriage,

which looks as if it might finally pay off. After almost a year of marriage counselling, she expects to soon reunite the family under the one roof.

"We're still going to counselling and we're on track for my husband Adrian to move back in with us in maybe two months," she says. "At this stage it's looking good."

In her recently published memoir *The Fence-Painting Fortnight of*



*Destiny*, Laurie details her rise from "Michelle Laurie, the fat girl from Toowoomba" who adored watching ABC's *The Big Gig* and wanted to live in that world, through her early days on the Melbourne comedy scene in the 1990s, to working in transsexual brothels to support herself and then her ever increasing national profile on *Rove*, *The Circle* and *Can of Worms* (where she is scathing about the producers' obsession with her appearance and attempts to glam her up to look like Adele). She also details her drug use — dabbling in everything from pot to the occasional shot of heroin — and her "minor speed habit".

Looking back, her perspective has changed — although just like her experience with brothels she's never going to get moralistic about it.

have found it a little confronting, but they loved it according to Laurie (and pretty much expected it by now). The only person so far who's been "a little bit freaked out" is *The Project*'s Dave Hughes, who took issue with Laurie's assertion she'd never have guessed he'd become a superstar when they first met.

"He found that a bit threatening ... I don't know what the word is he found it, but I found it hilarious that he's regurgitated the paragraph verbatim," she says, laughing. "I said: have you memorised it? hilariously, everyone else was fine, but Hughesy was a bit taken aback."

She wants to continue as an author and write the "definitive Melbourne sex industry book" as soon as she can find a publisher who's interested.

**"I enjoy performing and I like working, but I really, really need quiet time at home"**

"Back then I thought they were fun and I was a very brave person to use them. I thought they were very helpful creatively, but now I just think I was self-medicating depression and anxiety ... to avoid some deeper issues. And for me, I was very socially awkward, and still am. I really am an introvert."

If that sounds odd for someone who makes a living appearing in front of hundreds of thousands of people, Laurie defines an introvert as someone who draws energy from being alone, rather than someone who can't be in public.

"I enjoy performing and I like working, but I really, really need quiet time at home, and more of it at home as I get older," she says.

Given how candid she is in the book, you might think her loved ones may

Laurie's comedy panel show *This Week Live* with Tom Gleeson, Tommy Little and Dave Thornton has had a positive reaction from critics and fans, but only attracts an average audience around 400,000 viewers. But she loves the show and her colleagues.

"It's fun and just a really good vibe, everyone is very kind and gentle to each other," she says. "I'd much rather be on a show I enjoy doing that's not hugely successful than to be on a show that is hugely successful with people that I don't like."

**THIS WEEK LIVE, TEN, TONIGHT, 9.30PM**

Meshel Laurie (left) and (above) with the cast of *This Week Live*. / MAIN PICTURE / JOHN TSIAVIS

