

Julia MORRIS

Making Every Bite Count

Many women approach turning 50 with a sense of reluctance and trepidation. But while Julia Morris admits she was not exactly thrilled with the idea, the last two years have been like a “coming of age” for the much-loved Australian comedian, who is now ready - after hitting the birthday milestone last month - to “embrace the second phase” of her life with her trademark honesty and humour.

Not surprisingly, Morris is also using the recent turning points in her life as fodder for the masses in her latest stand-up comedy show *Lift and Separate*.

➔ WORDS MICHELLE MEEHAN - Features Writer



“I have been trying to hold onto my youth through my 40’s, and as I get closer to 50 I’m thinking I’m not sure I’m ever going to be on the catwalks of Milan now, at this late stage,” she said in a typical self-deprecating manner.

“So all of the sacrifices of ‘I won’t have a chocolate there’ or ‘I better not have that’ or ‘I’d better not do that’, all of a sudden there’s been a real crossover.

“And part of it has been clothing for me, which sounds odd, and working out what’s age-appropriate because I just think I look hot in everything.

“So when I see photos I’m thinking ‘Oh dear look at that strange girl hugging that basset hound’ and then I realise oh no, that’s just a plunging neckline.

“It’s very odd to work out when is the right moment to say ‘I’m no longer going to be the oldest person in this young group, I’m now going to be the youngest person in this old group, look how hot I am’... it really sets you free.

“I don’t look 20 and nor would I want to be 20 anymore, the life experiences that I’ve had have led me to this wonderful place.

“So I guess coming to that realisation that I do have to let go of some of that real youth stuff and start to embrace that second phase of my life if 50 is the halfway point, may I be so lucky.

“I didn’t take to it like a duck to water, let’s put it that way,

I was dragged onto the other side by life, and the audience is going to hear all about it.

“The ‘Lift and Separate’ (reference) is not just about what do I do with my body, but why am I letting it get me down?

“There’s no lessons to be taught; there’s only funny stories to be heard.”

After a sold-out tour of Australia’s capital cities in 2017, Morris is heading back out on the road with her highly acclaimed one-woman show this month.

The whirlwind 19-date “Golden Jubilee Tour” will take in a host of regional areas along the east coast of Australia, including a stop at **Newcastle’s Civic Theatre on Sunday, May 20.**

The tour comes just weeks after Morris celebrated her 50th birthday, not with a huge fanfare, as she told *intouch Magazine* in the lead-up to the big day, but by baking - and eating - a cake with her husband, Welsh comedian Dan Thomas, and their daughters Ruby, 11 and Sophie, 9, followed by a visit to her parents, who still live on the Central Coast where she grew up.

“First of all I said to Dan, my husband, when he asked me in December what do I want to do (for my birthday), and I said I think I want to go to Rockefeller Center and go up to the Rainbow Room and have dinner, that’s what I’d like to do, in New York City,” Morris said.

“And then halfway through Africa (filming the most recent

season of *I’m a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!*), I thought ‘if I have to get on another long-haul flight any time soon I’m going to cut myself, so then I thought maybe I’ll just have a big party.’

“Then I thought of how much I’d have to talk to everyone. And it was ‘Oh God, I can’t do it, the leaping guilt of not talking to anyone as long as I spoke to the other person will just about do my head in,’ and so it was something as simple as Dan saying ‘What do you want to do on the day you turn 50?’

“And so I thought well, I really just want to spend it with Dan and the girls. The girls are taking the day off school and, I don’t know if you have seen the television show *Nailed It* where very mediocre cooks make cakes that are very, very much out of their skill set, so we’re making a big cake, the girls and Dan and I, then we’re going to eat it.

“Then on the Saturday, I’m flying up to see Mum and Dad where I’ll celebrate with them (on the Central Coast).

“I’ll head up and spend the afternoon having a beautiful lunch and evening with them, and then back to work.”

The way in which she celebrated, and her decision to restrict her current tour to the east coast of Australia, reflects the importance Morris places on family life and the realisations she came to in 2016 following a period of seemingly inexplicable emotional turmoil.

At the time she admits to feeling overwhelmed by bursts of “fury” - a state completely at odds with her ever-smiling, always laughing public persona.

While at first, she thought it was the result of menopause, Morris came to realise, with the help of a psychologist, that she was simply stretching herself too thin with the pressures of work.

An in-demand actor and comedian, Morris seemed to be almost everywhere, starring as Gemma in the Australian ensemble drama *House Husbands*, co-hosting the reality TV smash hit *I'm a Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here!* with Newcastle-born vet Dr Chris Brown, and on the road with her own stand-up shows.

But while the demands were clearly taking their toll on her emotions, Morris admits that her situation is no different to what many people feel as they try desperately to keep all the balls in the air.

"Everyone's the same amount of busy. Everyone I speak to seems to be as overwrought with work and life as I am, so it's so relative, I don't think I'm going harder than anyone else, it's just that I do it in so many different places," she said.

"I hadn't really done enough research on the differences between perimenopause and menopause. So the truth of it is actually that I thought I was going completely insane and then went to see the psychologist and she said look, I don't mean to burst your bubble, but you're just really busy. Let's put things in place, so you don't leap out of the car when someone takes your car spot and bash them to death.

"I have to keep things pretty emotion-volume turned down. Otherwise, I'm just spinning in my wheels. I'm not able to take on as much as I did when I was younger, and yet still seem to be doing so, so I definitely had to go and learn some skills so as not to be furious all the time.

"The fury (I felt) is in another league. In actual fact, the show (*Lift and Separate*) is about lots of those stories of losing my cool when I shouldn't have... but what can you do, you've just got to try and not do it again."

Talking with the therapist helped Morris prioritise things, with family right at the top of the list – however finding a balance between the various demands in her life still isn't easy.

"I rarely use the word balance because I've never seen it, it just doesn't exist in my life," Morris said.

"The one thing that always gives is that you're not as good a friend as your friends are. I'm not that active in contacting my friends; they're very good with saying ok come on, we haven't seen you for a few months, what are you doing? Let's step out.

"Most of the time is really time for work and for my family, so you do need to step out every so often just to mix it up a little bit and not go stir crazy with only doing those things.

"But my girls are 9 and 11, so they're still at the ages where they're speaking to us. I want to be around as much as possible for that because I'm sure they're not even going to care once they're in their teen years, they're not really going to mind whether I'm

there or not, it will be one less lecture they're going to hear.

"Family is central to everyone; you just can't help it; these human beings rely on you for pretty much every waking moment of theirs.

"Sometimes the over-whelming straightjacket of being a parent makes my travelling just seem glorious. But even that's a coming of age too; I don't want to be in a hotel room by myself on the other side of the country. If I've got a chance and I've got time I'd just rather hang with my peeps."

That being said, Morris is still determined to make the most of what is the most successful and in-demand period in her career.

In July, Morris will begin taping episodes for the newest addition to Australia's already packed reality television dating genre – *Blind Date*.

A contemporary version of the hugely successful British dating show, Morris said she was excited about adding her own unique spin to the format.

"Oh my gosh I am pretty excited, we start shooting halfway through July, and we're seeing all sorts of couples in this new version of the show, this updated version of the lovely Cilla Black's *Blind Date*," she said.

"I think that I will bring a knowing, winking edge to this genre. Having lived through it, all sorts of different experiences, my life experiences will help young people find love in a very funny atmosphere."

With a career spanning 33 years, Morris certainly has plenty of experiences to draw on. Her time in the spotlight began in 1985 with her television debut at the age of 17 on *New Faces*.

The show, which was hosted by Bert Newton, proved to be a hotbed for fresh talent, with many contestants going on to build long and successful careers, including Morris, television personality Daryl Somers, comedians Paul Hogan and Col Elliott, as well as country and western stars Keith Urban and John Williamson.

By 1995 Morris was a household name in Australia, starring in shows including *Full Frontal*, *In Melbourne Tonight* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

She then spent seven years living and working in the UK, where she met her husband, before they returned to Australia in 2007 following the birth of their first daughter.

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Morris' star continued to rise with appearances in everything from the Astra-Award winning *Singing Office* to winning popular celebrity singing show *It Takes Two* with opera star David Hobson.

A string of acclaimed and award-winning stand-up comedy shows, the publication of the memoirs of her time abroad *Don't You Know Who I Used To Be*, and more television appearances followed before Morris was cast in her first major acting role as Gemma in *House Husbands*.

In 2013 she scored the gig hosting *Australia's Got Talent* alongside judges Dawn French, Geri Halliwell, Timomatic and Kyle Sandilands, before later going on to film four seasons of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*, which broadcasts

live five nights a week from Kruger National Park in South Africa. The most recent season wrapped up in March this year, allowing Morris to squeeze in her birthday and some precious time with her family before hitting the road with the *Lift and Separate* tour.

Morris said turning 50 also came with the impetus to do what feels right for her - on and off the stage - and a determination to make every moment count.

"I've never had another job either; this has been my only job. So I would hope this many years in, that I'm going to be at least ok... hopefully, I'll be heaps funnier than just ok," she laughs.

"A lot of it is my life observations, and observations of myself and most of the time I'm saying stuff that no-one would dare say about themselves, it's the stuff that we keep private so that no-one judges you. And I'm just wearing it like a badge to the power of hilarity. If I'm going to be that tragic, I might as well make some money off it.

"What completely drives me outside of work is family and trying to have friends over for meals. I don't really get to go out very much, mainly because I can't be bothered. And I know if my friends come over and we have a big barbecue I can probably get away with a tracksuit and trainers, so most of my passion drives towards getting people to my home so we can laugh in our mufti clothes.

"I rock a luxe tracksuit, and I'm made for a trainer... these days I'm only in heels on the stage, I would not wear heels to dinner.

"In fact, for a lot of functions I'm even trying to work how the outfit works with super funky trainers, and I'm having a lot of joy with it.

"It's a more modern take on the sensible shoe. But gosh, I went to a wedding a couple of weeks ago in this exquisite

white dress and these really funky white trainers and I was in two minds, maybe being a wedding, maybe it is a heels type scenario.

"Anyway I decided to go with these diamante-studded trainers, every woman in the room was swirling around me in an absolute tsunami of both admiration and chartreuse with envy. They're like 'How did you get away with it?' I'm like, 'Mate; you just wear them'.

"(It's about) making everything worth it. I even do it with my food now, if it's an average slice of cake I'm like, you know what, I'm not taking on calories for that. I feel a little bit Masterchef-ey in that way, I'm like no, that's not up to standard, I'm not going to put the calories on for that, I'm not going to bother.

"I think that it's also like taking a bite out of life, I'm going to make every bite count.

"I'm not always successful at it. I have these great, they're practically inspirational quotes that could go on blackboards outside of cafes they're so deep, but in actual fact, no-one nails it every day. No-one nails it even all day in one day. You just try your best, then put your head on the pillow at the end of the day and hope you didn't hurt anyone's feelings.

"That's oversimplifying it but that's kind of where it's at, and I'm going to teach some of those skills of how to get to that place in the (stand-up) show." ■

Tickets to Julia Morris' *Lift and Separate Golden Jubilee Tour* at Newcastle Civic Theatre on Sunday, May 20 are on sale now. Contact the Ticketek Box Office on 4929 1977 for tickets or for more information visit www.civictheatrenewcastle.com.au



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