

Denise Drysdale

on Life, Love and the Universe ...

by Maggie Wilde

From Graham Kennedy's 'In Melbourne Tonight' in 1964, to the new host of TV1's 'Summer of Love' for season 2005, Denise Drysdale has giggled her way through 40 years of Australian television. Twice awarded TV Weeks Gold Logie for 'Most Popular Female Personality', Ernie Sigley's original Barrel Girl is adamant that 40 years on... 'Things just get better and better.'

Sacked early in her television career for being 'overweight' Denise Drysdale has fought back repeatedly to succeed in an industry where many have failed. Not deterred by labels such as 'the weak link' or 'overweight' her persistence and determination to defy negativity has enabled her to laugh with audiences through decades of highs and just as many lows.

"I've been sacked in every decade" she laughs. "A lot of people have been sacked a few times in their life, but I can genuinely say that every decade someone tried to stop me from doing what I love... making people happy... but it just made me stronger and I always bounced back."

With her new TV1 hot spot ready to launch in 2005 Denise is set to have the busiest year to date. "I already have over 40 bookings in 2005 for everything from charity to corporate work, TV commercials and floorshows. I'm so grateful."

Her dream to share love and laughter with the world is heartwarming in its simplicity and is still being shared with audiences today. Even more inspiring is Denise's philosophy on the secrets of success. "For me it's about persistence and gratitude."

When talking about gratitude Denise is serious for the first time. "I really love the people that come to see me. They give me so much and that makes me grateful for every opportunity I get to spend with an audience. So if being grateful has given me more in life then, yes, it's been part of my success, although it's no secret, anyone can choose gratitude."

From her claim to fame as Melbourne's first Go Go dancer at the age of 17 to accepting a Gold Logie years later from none other than

John Wayne himself, Denise has won hearts for her honesty and spontaneity throughout her entire career. "I've put my foot in it so many times. In the early days I got hurt by what was written about me so I decided it was simple, I stopped reading it."

In fact Denise is so adamant about this issue that she employed a clipping service in the 70s to pack all the articles in boxes and store them. "After I'm gone someone can read them and then I can have a giggle from the spirit world."

When asked about the 'real' Denise, the one behind the stage performer she laughs and says "I've had so many ups and downs in my life, but I don't focus on them now. If I talk about them they're sensationalized anyway so I think the best thing in life is to just get on with it and never give up." She sings the praises of her two boys, now 24 and 22. "Pete and Rob have given me strength through all the highs and lows."

In fact through it all Denise has built a strong stable bond with her sons and is in the process of moving back to her farm in Gippsland with her son Rob. "I've missed my boys and my dogs on this trip. Rob is coming to the airport to pick me up tomorrow and he's bringing some of my little babies with him."

Moving back to the farm means that Denise's love for her sons, animals and the land can be brought together in a fairytale dream. "I've got 2 alpacas, Milton and Raymond, 2 Suffolk sheep called Rack and Cutlet, and I've also got Lewinsky the mummy cow and Cass and Stu are the 2 baby ones. Oh and I've got 2 new gorgeous dogs too, Buddy and Oly. I spoke with little Olly Bumps on the phone last night. I was pining," she laughs.

There is no doubt spending time with this lady would lift anyone's spirits. It is definitely not hard to understand why Denise has inspired so many people throughout her long career. In response to my request for a few words of wisdom about living the life of our dreams Denise replied quickly "My advice to anyone is 'Don't give up'. It doesn't matter who you are or what your dream is. There are so many people out there in jobs that have it tough, but if you believe in yourself someone else will too."

It was now time to get into the nitty gritty, my allocated time was coming to a close, but I wanted a little more of the real Denise and knowing that her new TV1 Summer of Love program is soon to launch I raised the gauntlet.

MW: Denise, I gather your new TV1 program gives you the opportunity to delve into the personal lives of mere mortals on topics ranging from life, love and the universe.

DD: Yes, that's right. I got to interview about 30 people on topics ranging from their first kiss, to their first real romance. It was so much fun. Each interview has been put together as a 3 minute segment and they will be played like TV commercials in between programs. It's fantastic.

MW: So Denise, tell me about your first kiss.

DD: (Laughing) You can't ask me those questions. They're mine.

MW: Oops, sorry. But now that I have...

DD: Oh alright, I think it was Dennis O'Connor in Postman's Knock. I was about 11 or 12. I was so embarrassed. I'd been to a convent school all my life and I had no social skills when it came to boys. Not for a long time.

MW: So what about your first romance, the first time you really wanted to do the fandango?

DD: (laughing openly now) Stop it, I can't tell you that. But I will say this. You know how people use the term 'losing' your virginity? I used to say I couldn't wait to 'give' mine away. But I won't tell you who it was with, not even initials. Someone will guess.

MW: So we can gather from that that there's no 'kiss and tell' for Denise Drysdale?

DD: Absolutely. Another of my philosophies. Never never kiss and tell. Another reason why I won't write a book. I couldn't be true to myself if I wrote a book, because I would want to leave out certain bits and it's the truth or nothing. So I say nothing.

MW: So what now for Denise Drysdale? What dreams are left for you to achieve?

DD: If it continues just the way it is now, I'm happy. I don't need anything else. I don't need anything materially, my boys are happy and that's foremost. I've got good friends and I'm enjoying my time on my own now. That is such a remarkable thing for me to say, I've reached a point in life where I am happy with who I am. It's been a long road, but I'm here.

MW: Okay, so what has been your personal career highlight?

DD: Looking in from the outside most people would say getting the Gold Logie from John Wayne was pretty special. But for me it was a special moment with my Dad. I've never told anyone this, but here goes. Dad had a stroke and he was very very sick so I went to spend some time with him. I had just done a TV commercial and I'd been paid a lot of money for it. So we

sat together and I told him how much they'd paid me. He did this cheeky laugh behind his hand... (Denise imitates a cheeky mutley laugh) and I said to him "Can you believe it Dad? It's a good one isn't it?" He snickered through his pain and then we laughed and laughed together in disbelief. I will never forget that moment. He's since passed on but I take him with me everywhere now. I have his ashes in a jar, so he travels the world with me and gets to experience it all.

MW: Do you talk with him?

DD: Absolutely, he's been to South Africa this year, to Vienna and Paris. Even here in Coolangatta, I opened the windows at the hotel and said to him, "Look Dad, nice view."

MW: So what are your thoughts on the spirit world?

DD: I don't believe people ever really leave. Their spirit is never gone. When someone you love passes over their spirit is always there when you listen.

MW: What about the whole spiritual movement, what are your thoughts? Do you meditate?

DD: I do yoga. I've always had trouble sleeping and I had to take sleeping pills for such a long time, but I learnt to breathe properly with yoga, and now I practice it especially when I'm away in different beds all the time. For years I used to average three or four hours sleep a night, now it's changed my life.

MW: Lastly Denise, sometimes we all reach a crossroad in our lives and if we'd taken a different path it could have determine a totally different outcome. Has there ever been a crossroad for you that you regret, is there anything you would change if you could?

DD: No, nothing. No matter what I've been through. How many people get the chance in life to touch people's hearts on such a scale? I wouldn't change a thing. The good and the bad have made me what I am in my life, and I feel the best I've ever felt.

I've learnt to trust again, in human nature and in my personal life.

I sometimes think about people that have taken what seems to be the wrong turn and wonder if they'd received a kiss on the cheek or a cuddle at that point maybe it might have been different for them. ■

