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Trisha



Chat show host Trisha Goddard has certainly had a very eventful life, littered with both tragedies and successes. Despite life's setbacks she has firmly found her feet and talks to Dawn Mellowship about her life, love and spirituality.

A ROCKY ROAD TO HAPPINESS

Trisha Goddard, the goddess of daytime TV is an intelligent and astute woman who has been blessed with a phenomenally successful career in journalism and television, presenting over 400 programmes in Australia before hosting her own TV show, the BAFTA winning *Trisha*, in the UK. She has also led a life that could be mistaken for one of her guest's on the Channel Five true-life chat show, *Trisha Goddard* that has many of us simultaneously gripped and cringing with embarrassment at some of the guest's exploits.

Trisha was born in Hackney in 1957 to a white father and West Indian mother, grew up in Surrey and was educated in numerous places, leaving her fluent in five languages. As a child she suffered physical and mental abuse from her dad, a tumultuous period later followed by a series of relationships with abusive boyfriends. Her first husband, an Australian conservative politician called Robert Nestdale, promised a fairy-tale lifestyle, leading Trisha to quit her job as an air hostess and join him in Australia, but the relationship completely disintegrated after just three months. They divorced in 1987. He had told her that he was suffering from Leukaemia, but it later transpired that he was homosexual and Robert died of an AIDS-related illness. Trisha only found out after the birth of her first child and suffered the anxiety of undergoing testing for AIDS. Fortunately Trisha and her daughters were given the all clear.

She was living in Sydney when her sister, Linda, who had struggled with schizophrenia for eight years, committed suicide. Linda doused herself with petrol in her mother's car and lit a match. Her father pulled her out, but she died in hospital a couple of months later. Trisha turned her focus to campaigning on mental health issues.

"When my sister committed suicide I actually talked about the schizophrenia for the first time because of the stigma surrounding

it. As a result of speaking out about the treatment of people who have mental health problems I was hired for 10 years as an Australian Government advisor. I trained in conflict resolution whilst I was doing that because I had to bring so many disparate groups together to re-shape Australia's mental health system, and I learned so much. All those things help me in the work that I do now on the show."

TURBULENT TIMES

The light at the end of the tunnel was still a distant fleck, as Trisha's second husband, Mark Grieve, an Australian television producer, had an affair with her researcher when she was pregnant with her second child, Billie, who was born with respiratory problems. Trisha did not find out until Billie was eight weeks old. This was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and Trisha suffered a nervous breakdown and took a handful of antidepressants. She says of the experience, "I actually didn't realise that I was suffering from depression until I had the breakdown and was in a psychiatric hospital. Coping mechanisms, bad choices and patterns in my life, all of those of things mounted up. I think I probably suffered from depression in the past but I am one of these people who soldiered on through it, worked harder, played harder and pulled myself up by the bootstraps. In the end when all the emotional things hit me at once I had very little left in the fuel tank. I was totally numb. I thought, "This is it. I am in hell and I am going to have various shades of hell for the rest of my life," but the fact that I am here now, if I can do it just about anyone can given the time, support from others and the impetus to help themselves."

Along with the stint in a psychiatric hospital, continued support from professional therapists and friends and sheer strength of character, helped draw Trisha out of the quagmire, but the rough ride wasn't over yet. As a single mum and having quit her high-powered

job and sold her production company to focus on being a full-time mother, Trisha was burdened by debt and close to bankruptcy.

FINDING TRUE LOVE

Life finally improved for Trisha as she overcame her depression, worked on a lifestyle show, called *Live it Up* and trained as a counsellor. It was as a result of her work in mental health that Trisha met and wooed her now husband, Peter Gianfrancesco, now the head of the mental health organisation, *Mind in Norfolk*. I wondered if Trisha had intuitively felt at the outset of the relationship that it would be such a long-lasting and happy union.

"No, I took it one day at a time and he is the first man that I pursued. I phoned about six friends and they had to vote on whether I should ask him out. Three said yes and three said no, so I still had to do the casting vote and being the brave little sheep that I was, I decided to ring him up and ostensibly I met him through mental health work. I just took it one day at a time. Saying that someone is your soul mate is a bit corny but he is my soul mate and I can absolutely see that he is the prize for me changing the bait. I never imagined I could have such a life of contentment and fulfilment that is so exciting. I would say that he is probably one of my first adult relationships."

When Trisha talks about 'changing the bait,' she is referring to her previous string of relationships with abusive partners.

"I have always said if you don't like the fish you are catching change the bait. I realised in therapy that I kept making the same decisions over and over again in my choice of partner. I was like a sheep sitting there waiting for the next wolf to come and eat me. I thought, "What is it about my fluffy fur that is attracting their fangs?" I realised that I appeared to be superwoman who could do and be everything and when I turned that off and became vulnerable in any way, through child birth or becoming a ►

“Faith should be a uniting thing. My church is wherever I happen to be. It’s in the woods when I am out running with my dogs, I have prayed in a Baha’i temple and I would feel equally at home in a mosque providing I knew what to do, or a church.”

mum, suddenly it was like, “Hello I didn’t buy into this, I married storm trooper Goddard, not sheep Goddard,” so I tended to get into relationships with guys who were perennially 18 years old. I chose irresponsible men who were attracted to me because I looked like I could run the planet and then some and I didn’t show my own vulnerability. I had relationships where I complained that I couldn’t depend on the men I was with and that is because I picked men who were not to be depended on.

Some woman on the TV show who have been brought up as a child to see violence continuously pick violent partners and they see themselves as a victim. You have to ask yourself, what it is about you, that makes you the bait for a violent man? I had a violent partner in the past, but a violent man now would see me and like Dracula faced with garlic, would run screaming.”

LEARNING LESSONS

Peter and Trisha married in 1998 and upped ship, moving to England. Trisha was snapped up by Anglia Television as the host of Trisha, taking the mantle from the bawdy Vanessa Feltz. The rest, as they say, is history. Talking to Trisha now it truly feels like she has strode right up to that light at the end of the tunnel and grasped it firmly with both hands and it doesn’t seem like she’s about to let it go anytime soon. Who can blame her? Trisha has been happily married to Peter for nearly 12 years, has two wonderfully intelligent daughters – who have their heads firmly screwed on, a glowing career, a beautiful home in Norfolk, a new fitness DVD out and the recent release of her autobiography, “Trisha: As I Am,” to celebrate. What was the motive for her autobiographical account?

“To be honest people kept saying to me, “Well you are coming up to 50, you should write a book,” and I just said yes to get people off my back and then before I knew it someone had approached me and said “I hear you are writing a book.” Things kind of galloped away and once I started it was extremely difficult. To cut a long story short I decided that I needed to go back into therapy, while I wrote the book and I know one helped the other. Going into the details of the book brings everything up and in retrospect I am really glad I did it,

although if I had known at the time what was going to be entailed, I would have, like a coward, run for the hills.”

Of course, life can still be a bumpy ride. In 2004 Trisha had to cope with the devastating loss of her mother and personal trainer, who both died in the same year. Her mother-in-law has also passed away, but not one to let life beat her down, Trisha believes that everything happens for a reason.

“If I hadn’t have gone through that hell, to put it in a corny way, I wouldn’t have discovered heaven. I remember a psychiatrist of mine said to me, just before I left Australia to come to England, “Oh, when we look back at the hell you have been through it’s so terrible,” but what if I hadn’t gone through that? I don’t like to think who I would be married to or what I would be like. It is almost too scary to think about that.”

FINDING FAITH

Trisha is refreshingly open about her life and acknowledges that her spiritual beliefs have helped her through some very challenging times.

“I hate putting labels on any faith but the faith in which I have the most affinity would be the Baha’i faith, in that I believe that we give our gods and prophets different names, but I feel that essentially we are talking about the same thing. Faith should be a uniting thing. My church is wherever I happen to be. It’s in the woods when I am out running with my dogs, I have prayed in a Baha’i temple and I would feel equally at home in a mosque providing I knew what to do, or a church. I think it is a very human thing to want differentness but I do believe that we are all talking about the same thing and that has kept me going. If we can see the similarity in faith rather than the differences it would take a lot of the aggression and violence conducted in the name of religion, out of the equation.”

I asked Trisha if she would have found it more difficult to pull through the tough times in her life had she not possessed any spiritual beliefs.

“Yes. When my darling mother in law died I felt so much for my husband because he did not have a God. God is great. Whoever your God is you can get angry with that God, you can put hope in that God. Having to have hope purely in human kind would be too scary. It definitely helps

when you have faith in a greater spiritual enlightenment. Karma to me is if you continuously give out shit it comes back to you because people treat you in a language they think you will understand.

One of the things that spirituality gives us is a framework. We are becoming increasingly chaotic in the West and spiritualism and faith, whether we agreed with them or not, gave us frameworks. Those frameworks have gone and the new gods are the next biggest model car or designer handbag. These are really false gods and we don’t have any order.

The biggest problem with the guests on my show is that they don’t know what they are living for. I say “Why are you here? Why are you on this planet, what is your purpose, what are doing? Are you making the planet a better or worse place, what will you be remembered for?” It’s why they fight amongst each other and little arguments become massive, because the minutiae of their relationship becomes their purpose. There is no God to serve or jobs to do, or boss to serve. There is nothing else to serve but themselves, so they stuff themselves with food and obsess about whether their bloke is texting 200 times a day or seeing somebody. How do they have time to do that?”

That’s the sad thing I really do believe there are estates and whole swathes of Western society that have become like zoos. If you take animals in the wild they have no choice but to hunt or be hunted. They have to travel to get their meat. They are lean and happy. They know when to rest and play. They have a purpose. When you put them in cages, street after street, they lose purpose. They are like animals in some of the old zoos that were terrible. They pace up and down, they start attacking each other, pulling out their own fur, eating too much, fighting amongst themselves and they turn on each other. That is what is happening with Western Society. We have created huge zoos where the animals have no purpose and the only way they survive is by killing each other rather than banding together and protecting the whole herd.”

POUNDING THE PAVEMENT

Exercise has also helped Trisha battle through bouts of depression. Over the last three years she has lost a total of three stone and after being asked numerous times how she managed to look so good



at 50 years of age and being approached by production companies to make a fitness DVD, Trisha finally took the plunge with *Trisha Rejuvenate*, although she produced it with her own production company.

"I had been asked before and they had always suggested these bouncing up and down Jane Fonda type videos and I said, "You know what that is not what I do at all. I am not going to jump around in leotard like a mad rabbit" It's about long, strong muscles, so weight training is the way to do it and then something like dog walking that keeps you active and the whole mind, body thing. I wanted to bring the psychological as well as the physical and the physical was about raising your pulse rate not by bouncing up and down, but by getting strong. I think there is something really empowering psychologically about feeling strong. I know a lot of women who are 30 and who seem old because they are thin but saggy. They don't hold themselves well and they don't stride with purpose because they have no muscular strength. I wanted the approach of helping people feeling strong within themselves and showing how powerful that is. The way you

hold yourself and feel about yourself shows and it gives you confidence."

Trisha wholeheartedly recommends exercise as a way of helping those suffering from depression.

"Something like dog walking is fantastic, because you become very isolated if you have been depressed and you don't particularly like people looking at you, but if you have a dog they tend to focus on the dog. You don't even have to own a dog, most areas there is a charity or even the council run dog walking schemes for elderly people, or people with disabilities. Where I live there is a girl who collects a dog everyday, takes it for a walk and then delivers it home and that puts her in contact with the elderly person, who also gets that contact of a young person knocking on her door. She also gets the dog, exercise, the uplifting mood and she sees lots of people every day. How is that not a win-win situation?"

Stormy waters seem to have subsided for Trisha Goddard, but no doubt, if the crashing waves return she will weather the storm.

Trisha Goddard's fitness DVD, *Trisha*

Rejuvenate, is available in good stockists, RRP £15.99. Her autobiography, *Trisha: As I Am*, is now on sale, RRP £17.99 (John Blake Publishing).

Following this interview Trisha has sadly been diagnosed with breast cancer and is now being treated after a lump was discovered during a recent routine mammogram.

She is now spending time at home following her second operation to be with her family to focus on her recovery.

Her business partner Malcolm Allsop said "Trisha does not want to feel like a sick person, and plans to return to work soon after her second operation. Fortunately her shows are recorded several weeks in advance so she is hoping that transmission will not be interrupted."

"When she had her medical last year the doctor said she had the fitness level of an endurance athlete. She is strong and will come through this as she has with other setbacks in her life."

Our thoughts are with Trisha and her family at this difficult time and we wish her a full and speedy recovery.