

Shining Star

Much loved for her talent and sunny disposition, Rebecca Gibney has been watched on television screens across the country for nearly three decades. She opens up to MiNDFOOD about her childhood, the benefits of therapy and finding true contentment.

Words by Joanna Tovia Photography by Nick Leary Fashion editor Penny Hunt

Teetering in sky-high heels down an uneven stone footpath, Rebecca Gibney is all smiles. Her lithe figure hugged by knockout pink and brilliant green, she's heading to the sunroom of a magnificent Sydney mansion for her next shot. Not quite right?

No problem, she'll go wherever she's asked to go, have a laugh along the way and share a funny anecdote or two with any one of the 10-strong crew there to dress, make up and photograph her for this month's MiNDFOOD cover.

Turns out, Rebecca Gibney isn't really into brights and doesn't do dresses. She favours the classics, wearing beige, chocolate,

navy, black and white. Pale blue sometimes gets a look in. But after nearly 30 years in the business, dressing up for the camera is second nature and all part of the fun. "I've been around for so long it's flattering at 46 [to know] they still want to put you on the cover. It's a bit of a win for the middle-aged woman!" Gibney says.

Chatting over lunch at the Hilton's Glass Brasserie, Gibney says she still feels 22. "You look in the mirror and you see the lines around your eyes and you say, 'When did that happen?' When you get older you realise you squandered your youth. I used to worry about things all the time – I was always 'too fat' or had 'no hair' – but I look back now and think I was actually all right!"



PHOTOGRAPHY: NICK LEARY/DLM; FASHION ASSISTANT: KARLI BUTSON; MAKE-UP: LIZ KELS/2C MANAGEMENT; HAIR: KEIREN STREET/2C MANAGEMENT; STOCKISTS LISTED ON PAGE 247

"I've been around for so long it's flattering at 46 [to know] they still want to put you on the cover," Gibney says. Ginger and Smart blouse, \$399; Louis Vuitton skirt, \$1600; Sergio Rossi heels at Cosmopolitan Shoes, \$1200.

She's humble about her fame, plays down her abilities and says she'd rather be at home reading a book with Zac, her seven-year-old son (they're reading *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* at the moment), than gracing the red carpet for a premiere. "I'm boring. I'm so boring!" she says, laughing.

But to the two million people who tune in to watch her on *Packed to the Rafters* every week, she's anything but boring. Winning Logies for Most Popular Actress for the past two years running ought to be some indication that she's held in high regard, not to mention her lengthy career in a difficult industry. "You don't ever take it for granted," Gibney admits. She happily chats to fans when they say hello, rarely finding them intrusive. "It doesn't matter who you are, I'll always give [everyone] a go – have a chat, get my photo taken – because I don't believe I'm any better or worse than anyone."

Gibney believes we are essentially all the same. "We all came from the same place, we're all going back to the same place, we're all part of the same source, and the same energy that's running through me is running through you and it's running through everybody." Part of her inspiration comes from Mother Teresa, whom Gibney admires because she was always so giving to everyone she met. "I used to think: 'How could she do that? How can she be that great to everybody?' She said it's because she sees the face of Jesus in everyone she meets and I thought, 'Wow, I'd like to be like that', so ... every person I meet [I try] to give them my full attention and at least give them the opportunity to be who they are."

Gibney says she learned from the greats when it comes to treating other people with respect, working over the years with Sigrid Thornton, Maurie Fields and Val Jellay, and watching how they behaved on and off the set. "In this industry particularly, you're not going to last if you're a diva and you're a pain in the bum and you show up late and you don't know your lines. You might have all the talent in the world but unless you're a good human ..."

There can be no doubt, however, that Gibney's biggest inspiration is her mum, Shirley, whose generous spirit and kindness has triumphed over a difficult childhood and marriage. "My mum should actually be on the cover of this magazine because her story is far more interesting, diverse and tragic than mine."

Gibney's mother was sexually abused from the age of two by her father. "So then, to go on and meet my dad who beat her up for 20 years, you just go, 'Wow, extraordinary human'. She has never once stopped giving. My mum is amazing." Her mother shielded Gibney and her five older brothers and sisters from her husband's alcohol-fueled rages as best she could, but the sounds of shouting and violence were as telling as the bruises the next day. She says her mother couldn't escape her situation and didn't tell anyone because in those days there was simply no one to tell. And although the violence did irreparable damage, she says her father wasn't a bad person, that his alcoholism was a disease.

"I loved my father desperately, we all did. When he was sober he was a really good, kind, loving, gorgeous human being. It was just when he drank he had this problem and his rage was



"In this industry particularly, you're not going to last if you're a diva and you're a pain in the bum and you show up late and you don't know your lines."

After nearly 30 years in the business, dressing up for the cameras is second nature to Gibney. Burberry dress, \$1350; Hélène Zubeldia earrings, \$250, and brooch (worn as ring), \$165, both at Bijoux Bemille; Bally wedges, \$895.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

From her television beginnings in the mid-1980s, Rebecca Gibney has gone on to become one of the screen's most enduring and beloved personalities.

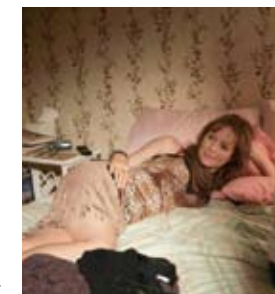
Flying Doctors
Gibney starred as mechanic Emma Plimpton in the critically acclaimed series, from 1986-1989; she earned numerous Logie nominations.



Halifax f.p.
From 1994-2002, Gibney played forensic psychologist Jane Halifax in a TV role said to have been written just for her. The show aired in 60 countries.



Clubland
As the hard-partying friend to Brenda Blethyn's main character, Gibney played against type in this 2007 black comedy, directed by Cherie Nowlan.



Packed to the Rafters
Since 2008, Gibney has appeared as matriarch Julie Rafter (alongside Erik Thomson, pictured) in *Packed to the Rafters*.



Battling severe depression in her early 30s, Gibney says she went into "a very black hole". Carla Zampatti dress, \$529; Hélène Zubeldia necklace, \$820, at Bijoux Bemille; Jimmy Choo heels, \$2750.



"On the surface I had the most wonderful life ... yet I felt nothing except the most enormous sense of self-loathing."

so great that unfortunately he took it out on Mum ... I think if he got the help he needed, if he was able to go and talk to someone about why he was doing what he was doing, they could have actually moved through it."

Gibney has had to go through her own journey to heal the scars of the past, experiencing depression and panic attacks throughout her teens and 20s. It was after the breakdown of her marriage to musician Jack Jones, and during a four-month break from work – she'd just finished *Halifax* and had done six telemovies in a row – that she finally reached out for help. "On the surface I had the most wonderful life ... yet I felt nothing except the most enormous sense of self-loathing."

Not only did she need to let go of the anger towards her father, but also towards her grandfather for his depravity. "I hated what he'd done to Mum." Her grandfather also made attempts to behave inappropriately towards her, but Gibney was able to fend off his advances. "I was old enough to put a stop to it. I knew what was going on. But the flood of anger that went through me was quite extreme."

When her grandfather was dying, Gibney's mother stood by his bed in the hospital and said, 'I forgive you'. "I stood in the doorway marvelling at her ability not to yell at him," she says.

So deep was Gibney's depression at 31 that for about a month she didn't want to go on and says she couldn't leave her flat without taking a Valium. "People would ring up and say, 'What are we doing?' and I'd put on my mask and say, 'I'm fine, I'm just a bit sick'."

Gibney started seeing a psychiatrist and continued to do so for several years. "I did go into a very black hole. Every time I saw this psychiatrist I [would say], 'I keep clawing at the hole but I can't get up and I can't get out!'"

The thought of her mum not being able to cope should Gibney commit suicide made her battle through the depression. Although she can still suffer panic attacks, Gibney says she now has the tools to deal with them. But depression she has



WITH MUM
Rebecca Gibney says her mother, Shirley (left), who endured years of abuse at the hands of her father and her husband, is an "extraordinary woman. She has never once stopped giving. My mum is amazing."

conquered for good. "When you're in a black hole, when you've been in the pit, you don't want to go back there. And I'm so glad that rage is gone, that intense rage."

And now? Gibney relishes life and all its pleasures. "Aren't these good, how good are these?" she says of the tempura Pacific oysters we've ordered. "Oh, my God!" she says after trying a truffle French fry, and she describes her tiger flathead as "a work of art". Her wine of choice? A glass of Huia Pinot Gris from New Zealand, where she grew up. She and production designer Richard Bell, her husband of 10 years, actually lived on the same street when they were five, although they didn't know it at the time. "Come the rugby, we are both staunch All Blacks supporters," she says.

When she moved to Wellington, Gibney decided she wanted to be New Zealand's first female prime minister and used to sit in parliament after school watching the proceedings. But fate stepped in when her mother made her 14-year-old tomboy daughter do a modelling course so she could learn how to apply make-up. She soon found herself modelling for catalogues and cast in a movie. "I was terrible. It was the worst experience of my life and I hated it and I said, 'That's it, I'm never acting again', but then Television NZ called for auditions for this kids' show called Sea Urchins." And so it went on. The only time she hasn't worked is by choice: for four years after her son Zac was born and the family moved to Tasmania.

When she was 26, Gibney headed to Hollywood to try her luck. "I lasted three weeks," she says, recalling a meeting with the head of Disney casting. "It was in the days of my panic attacks, and I just sat there going, 'I can't do this'. I didn't have any self-belief. Because I'd never studied or trained, I didn't believe in my acting ability, I didn't believe I was that good looking. I just thought I was really ordinary, so I thought why would Hollywood think I was special if I don't?"

But making a decision not to be defined by her past and seeking help to lay to rest unresolved feelings about her childhood has brought Gibney a sense of peace and wellbeing. "You can't blame any individual for what happened to you, for how you live your life. Go and get help and move on," she advises. "You can move through it."

These days, when Gibney leaves work and heads to her home on Sydney's Northern Beaches, she does so with gratitude and gladness. "I'm boring! I'm so happy! I'm really content with my life."

Packed to the Rafters is now in its fourth season, and although long days on set mean she is not always home to tuck her son into bed, Gibney's production schedule is such that she gets weekends and school holidays off and has a break every seven weeks. She makes the most of her time off by doing everyday mum things with her son, and is quite happy to curl up on the couch with the people she loves, Zac's carpet python, Little Miss Sunshine, wrapped around her arm.

Seven has committed to at least two more seasons of Packed to the Rafters and so has Gibney. Beyond that? Gibney is being proactive. She and Bell have teamed up to start a production company, successfully pitching a pilot telemovie to Seven in which Gibney will play a role. And giving herself a rare pat on the back, Gibney says: "After 27, 28 years in the business, I kind of do know a good script from a bad one, I kind of do know a good show. I love the idea of casting and putting together the whole thing." Gibney also looks forward to a time when she'll be behind the cameras, rather than in front of them. "While I love what I do, it's not what I am."

MORE AT MINDFOOD.COM

VISIT Discover Gibney, a regular on the red carpet at the TV Week Logie Awards, talking about winning the Gold Logie. KEYWORDS: LOGIE, GIBNEY

GLOBAL OUTLOOK

As a supporter of World Vision for more than 30 years, Rebecca Gibney has witnessed enough hardship to change her perspective on life. "You're just given that bigger picture. You land in a place like Africa and you're thrown into the deep end ... People are living in dung huts on less than one meal a day and kids are suffering from malnutrition and dying from stupid diseases like malaria and dehydration and you think, 'This is obscene!' You can't come back and do nothing."

Gibney has made nine trips to African countries to highlight the plight of people living in poverty there (she is pictured in Malawi, at right). Asked if she ever feels like taking any of the children home, she answers: "All the time." One of the hardest days was in Uganda. Their parents having died of HIV, a family of six boys were raising themselves. The oldest, aged 12, took care of his brothers, including harvesting the crops to feed them. Gibney had arranged for money to be sent to the family, as well as providing a goat, a well and toys, but when the

day's filming was finished and it was time to go, the youngest boy, aged three, wanted to go too and followed Gibney as she made her way to the car and got in. He stood by the car window with arms outstretched, even as it pulled away. "His mum had died when he was a baby so he'd never been held and I'd spent the day holding him. That took me a long time to get over, that I'd left that little boy there."

Given the number of childless couples who want to adopt, Gibney says the adoption laws need to change. But any assistance people can provide is helpful. Gibney also supports Children First Foundation, The Bonnie Babes Foundation, and The National Breast Cancer Foundation.

MORE AT MINDFOOD.COM

VISIT Explore whether nations should focus less on aid and more on foreign investment in Africa.

KEYWORDS: AID, AFRICA



"You can't blame any individual for what happened to you, for how you live your life. Go and get help and move on. You can move through it."

Gibney says she has finally discovered a true sense of peace: "I'm so happy. I'm really content with my life." Hugo Boss dress, \$845; Marni necklace, \$1145; Prada heels, \$760.