

The reinvention of REBECCA GIBNEY

She's had a stellar acting career and played one of TV's best-loved characters. Turns out Rebecca Gibney is only just getting started. She opened up to Prevention about new opportunity, carving her own path—and truly embracing her 50s

By Alex Davies Photography Peter Brew-Bevan

There's one thing that strikes you immediately about Rebecca Gibney: her laugh. A warm, unrestrained and unselfconscious burst that fills the photo studio as our photographer cracks a joke, or while the actor recalls a story during our chat. We say actor but these days it's also producer and creator—most recently of hit series *Wanted*, a six-parter about two women on the run that launched to a staggering 1.18 million viewers. It's part of a career shift for Gibney, a move behind the camera as well as in front of it. Her mission? To tell strong stories about strong characters, especially women 40+. Here, the force behind *Julie Rafter* talks frankly about *Wanted's* second season (it's happening!), menopause (that's happening, too) and why living in the moment is the best place to be.

Congratulations on the success of *Wanted*. Why do you think it's been so incredibly popular?

There was a gap in the market for a female-driven drama and I think audiences are really embracing that now. It's an adventure about ordinary women, someone who's normally desk-bound, put in an extraordinary situation. One's a check-out chick and the other one's an accountant, and they're put in this diabolical situation. You ask yourself, 'What would I do?'

So, a second season has been confirmed, what can we expect?

I can only tell you that it's happening, which is really exciting. Obviously when you do a second season you want to try and make it better than the first, so we're pushing the boundaries of where we think we can go with it, and it's great fun. We're getting to explore the characters and their friendship, or lack thereof, a lot more. I can't give away too much, but again it's going to be a rollicking good ride.



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You co-created and produced *Wanted for Seven*. Why move behind the lens?

I've always been someone who thinks, 'If the work's not there, then go out and make it'. If opportunity doesn't knock, you just build a door. I've had an incredible career as an actor but I'm also getting to an age now where I like the idea of creating things for other women. My husband [Richard Bell] is a production designer and we started a production company 10 years ago. It really unlocked a part of my brain I hadn't ever exercised before—just the idea of creating different shows or genres and thinking, 'What's the show I'd like to see on TV?'

What does it mean to be on the cover of *Prevention's Positive Ageing* issue?

It's so flattering and also really humbling. I feel incredibly grateful because my attitude to ageing is about embracing it. We keep hearing 'Stop the clock!' and 'Fight this and that!' but they're all the wrong words. They don't encourage anything positive. It's 'embrace' and 'celebrate' and 'love'. Love your curves, celebrate your uniqueness, celebrate ageing. Do whatever makes you feel good, whether that's getting fit or not, eating well or not. Just try and enjoy it as much as you can.

You turn 52 this year. How does it feel?

There's such comfort in being really comfortable with who you are. And in your own skin. I'm a good person and don't have to prove myself to anybody. I'm truly grateful for every single minute of every day, because as you get older you realise just how fleeting and precious life is. Ageing isn't for sissies, though—I've got aching bits I never had before! And I can't lose the weight as quickly because I'm going into menopause, but I'm starting to embrace that. I want to be around for another 20 years so it's about trying to be healthy for my son and family.

Why is creating really strong female characters over 40 so important?

Because for a long time women felt like they were becoming invisible over a certain age... I think

women still feel like that sometimes. And even if that's something as simple as walking into a shop, generally younger people will get assistance before an older person. So, it's about showing we're still vital and intelligent, that we in fact have more to offer now than we did in our 20s and 30s. We've got life experience and wisdom. I look at my mum who's 81 now and such an active member of our society, and that's what I want to try and celebrate.

What's your relationship like with your mum Shirley? Are you very close?

The other day I had an argument with my son [Zach, 12] and he went, "I'm sorry, but I'm going through puberty" and I went, "Sorry but I'm going through menopause—I win!" And I think about the hell I must've given mum as a teenager. She dealt with so much. My father was a violent alcoholic, who physically and emotionally abused her. The person she is today... I marvel at it. She raised me and my sisters to be incredibly compassionate. She had some issues with her heart last year and it brought us all together. The thought of losing her... I can't even go there. But we've talked about it and she says, "Darling, when my time comes, I'm ready. You can mourn for me not being here but don't mourn for my life because I know I'm loved by my children, and I've been blessed to have this life".

You're clearly open with each other.

We had that right from the get-go because of the difficult situations when we were growing up. Sometimes mum would have to bundle us in the car and ride round the block until dad calmed down, so she'd have to talk to us about that sort of stuff at a very early age. So even though I had my periods of being a vile teenager, I knew I could rely on her 100%. She's phenomenal. And because I'm at an age where so many people don't have their mothers with them, I know I'm very, very lucky.

You grew up in New Zealand. How do you feel about that part of the world?

I love it. One of my sisters and my brother are still

Rebecca on...

HIDDEN TALENTS

I do pretty good Kasey Chambers and Dolly Parton impersonations, but usually only after a couple of Champagnes!

HER LIFE MANTRA

It's better to be kind than right. And to be content rather than always striving for happy. Contentment is a word that's not used enough.

PLAYING JULIE RAFTER

It was like putting on a comfy dressing gown. Julie's just me, my mum and my sisters all rolled into one. One of my sisters would ring me and say "I saw me! I saw my expression!"

HER SON ZACH

He's just so open, confident and in love with life. Richard and I are incredibly proud. We're raising a good person, even though he doesn't take the rubbish out sometimes!

NIPS AND TUCKS

Today, I'm hoping to age gracefully. Tomorrow I might want to do something about my eyelids. At the moment I don't want to. Every line on my face tells a story.



TO BE TRULY
CONTENT IS
THE MOST
WONDERFUL
FEELING IN
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there and I've got my beautiful nieces. It's the place I was born. I'm an avid All Blacks supporter and as long as they're not playing, I'm a massive Wallabies supporter! I'm intrinsically a Kiwi but I've spent more of my life in Australia. My best friends are Australian, my career is here, so I'm incredibly grateful and miss both countries when I'm away.

How important is nature to you?

It's everything. I love the beach and ocean, but there's just something about being in a forest, looking at these giant trees that have been there way before me and will be there way after I'm gone and thinking, 'How important is the wet towel on the floor my husband left this morning?' I don't tend to sweat the small stuff that much anymore.

Do you exercise outdoors much?

I love hiking and walking. I practice yoga by myself, too. Also skiing, which I took up two years ago. The boys go off and do blue and black runs and I stick on my nice green ones, but I love it. Being in the fresh air and the cold, slowly going down a slope and the sense of freedom that comes with it.

What's a week in your food life like?

I've cut back on sugar, and have found my moods are stabilising and I'm not as hungry. But I do love a glass of wine and dark chocolate—I'm 80/20. I had an Ayurvedic consult and it turns out my body responds well to cooked food. The practitioner suggested making everything warm, especially in winter and I went, "So, is that like mulled wine?"

You've been married for 15 years. What have you learned about relationships?

The weird thing is we lived on the same street when we were five, then worked in the same industry for 15 years and never met, so when we finally did it was like coming home. I think as you get older you search for that companion who wants the same things. When you're younger, opposites attract but, for me, that doesn't work. I need to be with someone who just gets me, and we get each other completely. I'm really content. We tend to all strive for excitement or glamour, yet to be truly content is the most wonderful feeling. It's a state of bliss because you don't want for anything.

Do you often practice mindfulness?

I get just as grumpy as the next person in traffic! But I try really hard to pull myself back, because sometimes I get anxiety. I haven't had it for ages but if I'm overworked or stressed, I bring myself back to breathing, focusing on feelings and being in this present moment. It's a lifetime of practice.

You've spoken to us about your anxiety before. Why are you so open about it?

Because we don't talk about mental health enough. It's something that affects us all, and there are so many people who can help. I had a nervous breakdown at 32 and sought help. It's just taking that step of picking up the phone or talking to a friend. There's always someone there for you.

How important are your friendships?

I've got a handful of incredibly close female friends. I nurture those relationships and that's why I'm so adamant we need to be kinder to each other as women. If we support each other more, stop bagging each other and actually nurture the other women in our lives or even the ones that are strangers, I think it'd make us all feel better.

Lastly, any big goals for the future?

I'm focusing on *Wanted* and would love to do some more smaller things. With technology the way it is, perhaps even a web series. But I don't focus too far ahead anymore. I still have goals but I don't put them in the forefront because at the moment it's about this day and first of all making sure all my loved ones are well, happy and healthy. Actually, I'm going to FaceTime my mum right now! **P**