

“Embrace the power of having a PLAN B!”

Lisa Faulkner tells *H&F* how you can turn the negatives of life into positives

words: Joanna Ebsworth

Actress-turned-author Lisa Faulkner is one happy lady. After seven years of dating the *MasterChef* judge and restaurateur John Torode, who she first met when appearing on (and winning) *Celebrity MasterChef* in 2010, the pair – who also present ITV cooking show *John and Lisa’s Weekend Kitchen* together – are now excitedly planning their approaching nuptials, with Lisa’s teenage daughter Billie taking the role as her best woman. But it’s a very different future to the one Lisa had mapped out 14 years ago. Then married to actor Chris Coghill and aged just 33, Lisa had already endured three-and-a-half gruelling rounds of IVF at a top Harley Street fertility clinic when she was told by her doctor that she had unexplainable infertility and was released from treatment. In her quest for motherhood, Lisa’s plan B to adopt soon became her plan A, and she and Chris went on to adopt the then 15-month-old Billie, although the strains of the IVF and

adoption processes ultimately cost the pair their marriage shortly afterwards. It’s a raw and inspiring journey that Lisa describes with brutal honesty in her latest book, *Meant to Be – My Journey to Motherhood* (Ebury Press, £16.99) – which got us thinking: how do you cope when the rollercoaster of life takes you through extreme highs and crushing lows? We caught up with Lisa to find out.

Q WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO WRITE YOUR BOOK?

‘I wrote my book because so many people seem to think getting pregnant is easy, when it really isn’t! The more people heard about my own experiences with IVF and adoption, the more I kept

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hearing the same comments, “I didn’t realise you went through so many rounds of IVF” and “the fact you’ve adopted has really inspired me”. I kept getting asked the same questions from those struggling to conceive, “What do I do next?” So, I set out to share my own journey. When you decide to have a baby, you can feel on a lonely path when things don’t go to plan. Many couples do finally get pregnant and have their happy ending. But there are those that don’t. I wanted to be a hand to hold for anyone slowly starting to think about what to do next.’

Q YOU TALK OF EMBRACING THE POWER OF ‘PLAN B’. CAN YOU EXPLAIN THAT IDEA?

‘From a young age, we’re encouraged to decide what we want to be when we grow up. And as you get older, you develop those ideas of how you want your life to be and end up with a list of things you want to accomplish, such as getting married, buying a house and having a certain number of children. Sadly, we often find out life doesn’t turn out that way. I got that message early on when my mum died from cancer when I was 16 years old. It was a horrible wake-up call that life doesn’t always go to plan, and I think it changed my view on life. I realised life was very short and decided to just grab every opportunity that came my way and embrace it. That’s where having a plan B comes in. When my lovely doctor told me he couldn’t help me anymore, he freed me, because you can’t fix unexplained infertility. He’s my hero, and now I have Billie.’

Q HOW HAS BILLIE CHANGED YOUR LIFE?

‘I think we were meant to be. We were meant to find each other, and we have a connection that goes beyond anything else. She’s a teenager now, so while she brings me immense joy, there’s also a lot of angst and worry. But we talk to each other about everything. We’re very honest; she knows her story, and she’s a beautiful girl inside and out. We just had a holiday together, and I said to her every day how lucky I was to have her, and how much I love her. Love can sweep

you off your feet! Everything fitted in to place when Billie arrived.'

Q ASA WORKING MUM, HOW DO YOU STAY SANE?

'I started yoga almost 20 years ago and it changed my life. I met my yoga teacher, Nadia, through a boyfriend at the time, and she's now a great friend and guru to me. Yoga isn't just about exercise. It's about the breathing, the meditation and being able to go to a place for an hour and a half that keeps me grounded. I practise almost every day, either with Nadia in a class or one-to-one; with my sister who's also a yoga teacher and runs two classes a week; or at home, even if it's just 10 minutes on the mat. It keeps me "okay".'

Q DO YOU DO ANY OTHER FITNESS?

'Nope, it's yoga all the way for me. I can't bear the gym. I've really tried to like the gym but it's just been a huge waste of money on memberships I don't use. Exercise has to not feel like exercise to me, which is why I love going for long walks with my doggie every day. I'm not hugely toned in any way, but I am fit, and that's what's important to me. I want to be healthy, active, fit, well and alive for my daughter, and yoga fits into that.'

Q HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR LOVE OF COOKING WITH NUTRITION?

'John and I are both very conscious of what we eat as a family, probably because we cook so much and are making up recipes all the time. We both cook for all our friends with a lot of thought. If it's at the weekend, the meal might be more of a treat, but the rest of the time, we eat less meat now than ever, which is a conscious decision for environmental reasons. We're just being more mindful about what we put in our bodies, and of foods that are good or bad for the environment. We eat a lot of pulses and vegetables – we try to have a rainbow on our plates, really.'

Q HOW DO YOU CARE FOR YOUR WELLBEING?

'I think self-care is an incredible thing, and I think everyone needs to look after themselves a lot more than they do. If you don't look after you, how can you look after other people? I think there is a lot of pressure on women to look after themselves and, being in the public eye, I know I can get out of a car and someone will be there to take my photo and say, "Oh, look how awful she looks". And while it absolutely shouldn't matter, it does.'



Lisa and fiancé John are mindful of what they eat

MAIN IMAGE: Tony Glanville PHOTOGRAPHY/Getty Images



Lisa and daughter Billie share a special bond

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I can't pretend it doesn't hurt when someone says something upsetting, so I do make an effort to keep fit and look after my skin.'

Q SO, WHAT'S YOUR SKINCARE REGIME?

'I see a lovely woman called Marie Reynolds and my skin has improved so much since seeing her. I have Rosacea, which she tackles from the inside by working on gut health. I take her supplements and drops and use all her skin care. My favourite product is the Restore mask (£68 for 80g; mariereynoldslondon.com), which is one of my go-to products to use the night before I'm filming.'

Q WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN FEELING STRESSED?

'My advice is to take time. Breathe. And know that everything does pass. Sometimes I wish I had the phrase "this too shall pass" tattooed on me somewhere because, actually, wherever you are now, things will change. The wind blows and the sun comes out, and you will get there, but you have to know that, deep down, things will change, and that you've got your own back. It sounds ridiculous, but say to yourself, "I've got you".'



Meant to Be – My Journey to Motherhood by Lisa Faulkner is out now (Ebury Press, £16.99).