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# Life & Family

WELLNESS MAGAZINE

AUTUMN EDITION 1 2007

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**Fiona Coyne**

*Universal woman*



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# Dear Life & Family readers



## HELLO ME!

I recently started a daily journal. In it I review my day by listing 'what worked?' i.e. positive moments and interactions; 'what didn't work?' such as arguments, irritations, negative thought patterns; and then 'what needs doing?' – possible solutions or alternative choices I could have made.

What I have come to realise is that too much of life is habit, and often bad habit, where we simply do things without having a logical or practical reason for it. By stopping to think about my actions I have started to think about my intentions and have been able to shift out of my daily routine those things that don't have a positive or meaningful role in my life. Suddenly my life seems more peaceful and moments have become more valuable. I have started to act on my dreams, so long left in the dusty cupboard because there simply wasn't time. When we take responsibility for our thoughts, words and actions, we start to live 'in the moment' and with integrity. By defining my internal yardstick of values and desires I can make the right choices for me, live my truth and start to consciously heal those parts of me that need healing. On page 14 Fiona Coyne encourages women to face their fears, name them, write them down. She offers practical ways to finding our authentic selves and rekindling our dreams. Only by accepting and loving ourselves and making positive daily choices can we start to heal ourselves and the world. In the words of Ester and Jerry Hicks in 'Ask and it is Given' (see Giveaways on page 70) "**The greatest gift you can give the world is your happiness**".

Chance to look within and discover your many gifts.

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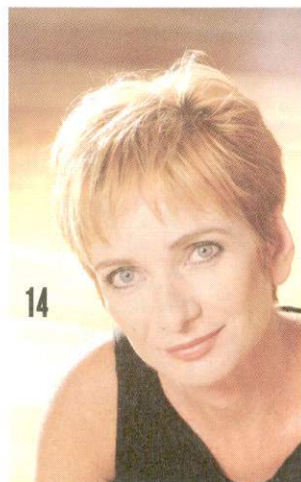
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The black-clad dominatrix of TV series *The Weakest Link* is simply one facet of the multi-dimensional Fiona Coyne. Take a closer look and you'll find a talented actor, playwright, passionate nature conservationist, author and warm-blooded woman, as frail and as powerful as any one of us...

# Mistress of her universe

By Mercedes Westbrook

COVER FEATURE

14

AUTUMN EDITION 1

**H**ow much of the intimidating game show host and how much of the nature-loving self-help guru is Fiona Coyne? In her newly launched book, *Who Moved my Ladder, the Working Woman's Guide to Success*, Fiona's penetrating questions on how we manoeuvre through life is helping women scratch the surface of their defences and find out their true potential both as mothers and career women.

Sipping chardonnay on the patio of the Park Hyatt, as I interview this newly-published author, I find a warm, intelligent, caring woman with a no-nonsense approach to life. While Fiona may not suffer fools, she is a far cry from the stone-faced dominatrix of television quiz show, *The Weakest Link*. And the *raison d'être* for her book in her words: "I was meeting too many unhappy women who while they were surrounded by all the material trappings were feeling stressed out and depressed, and at the same time guilty for having those very feelings ... so I began to open Pandora's box." A bright varsity student, Fiona could have carved a career as an imminent clinical psychologist, except for that acerbic wit of hers (one that serves to remind her of the levity of life). Despite an impressive academic record, it was Fiona's assessor for her Master's degree application who advised her that her dark sense of humour would not serve the best interests of future clients should she go into private practice. Thankfully Fiona instead turned her voyeurism of the human personality towards another sphere, that of playwriting. She has to date produced both thought provoking and acclaimed theatre.

Motivated as a playwright to reveal 'truth', Coyne's latest play *The Shadrack Affair* takes its theme from 'white arrogance/fear'. According to ArtSmart, "her excellent scripts play with situations and prejudices, some of which are peculiarly South African and some of which are universal." Says Fiona: "I always strive to speak what I believe to be true. I am obsessively interested in what informs human behaviour and belief-systems. It is not so much what somebody does

(or does not), or says (or says not) that interests and inspires me; rather, it is *why* and *how* they got to be that way. So every single time somebody says or does something that strikes me as radical and different, I am inspired and driven to know why. And, being a subversive at heart, I want an audience to come away with a little bit of personal discomfort and self-analysis."

Her *As the Koekie Crumbles* was written and performed as a one woman show by Fiona and has been touted by the theatre world as one of the most successful South African plays of all time. Her *Glass Roots*, which opened in 2004, is a "satirical comedy of bad manners", which won four Fleur du Cap and four Cape Vita and Gauteng Vita awards, as well as multiple national accolades across various categories including five Showtime Awards. Fiona's ability to define a person's character reveals itself in her newly launched book. In *Who moved my Ladder?*, one is coaxed to read further with both anecdotes and revealing personal accounts from Fiona, to then be presented with a piercing character self-analysis checklist that is deft and to the point. After reading her book, you will not only know Fiona a little more as a woman, but most importantly, you'll be equipped with the tools to get to know yourself a little better too. Not another self-help book written by a local celebrity you may be sighing, but on reading the final line, what you may find is just a dab of that Fiona Coyne self-confidence has rubbed off on you, and like her you will be just that much closer to your own well of personal power. Weave in some of the other facets in her career, and Fiona reveals she's soft touch for animals, be it her pet border collies or orphaned elephants and black rhino's. She spent four years in Kenya creating awareness for The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, an organisation that rears, and rehabilitates to the wild, orphaned elephants and black rhino. On her return to Cape Town, her mother city, Fiona began to tackle the corporate world as an International Corporate Communications Specialist and Consultant. Having lived in bush khaki's for so long, only someone like Fiona would connect to the thrill of the challenge by marching in front of a conference room



*“We are increasingly becoming  
a mindless society;  
we are not driven  
by causes, either our  
own or those of society.”*




packed with top businessmen and telling them how to get it on... and warming to it as a career so well, that the owner of the business offered her ownership of the company lock, stock and barrel when she decided to immigrate to another country.

But it was when Fiona joined *The Weakest Link* in 2003 that she gained her public face and yet another dimension in a creative career. "My on-screen personae is a mode I go into in the dressing room. It facilitates a sustained expression of that part of me that is reflected on-screen, but it is only one part of who I am," she explains. As to why such a show is so popular, Fiona has her own ideas: "We all essentially love insulting others, kids do it all the time, however as adults we have been socialised not to, yet deep down we are thinking 'yay' when we see an adult doing it really it is a childish show. And great as a job goes, I get paid to make people believe I am an obnoxious bitch, which makes me a sitting duck for hate mail. I guess that is what get for being a smart arse". But says Fiona, fame can be an isolated existence. "I may be staying in five star hotels, sipping champagne, boarding first class flights to Johannesburg, with people dancing in attendance, but essentially I am doing it all alone." When not shooting the upcoming season, Fiona jets back home to Cape Town to enjoy time with husband Willie, who she met in her 20s when they both worked at CAPAB (the old Cape Performing Arts Board). On the question of children, Fiona admits it took a certain level of sacrifice to decide not to have a family over that of a career, but adds: "What Willie and I have gained is time to lavish on each other with no distractions. Admittedly, it can be double-edged sword as it makes for an intense relationship, but we both share the same values, politics, spiritual attitudes and both have the ability to make the other laugh."

So what does raise Fiona's paternally inherited Scottish ire? "Bigotry, ignorance, self-righteousness and extremists," she immediately says. "We are increasingly becoming a mindless society; we are not driven by causes, either our own or those of society. The world is about communication, yet so many of us don't even know our own fears. In my book I challenge people to face their fears, to name them, write them down as a list like you would when shopping. Try to remember what you wanted to be as a child. Ask yourself what happened in your life that you allowed yourself to move so far away from that dream? You may say life happened, but it is your life and just when did you let go of that right to live it?"

"I encourage people to think about their fears in words," says Fiona. "If you can think it, you can say it, and then you can face it. Go back to basics. Write a diary, create a vision, seek goals, ask yourself 'where to now?', take practical steps and start over again... you can't ignore your authentic self."

Says Fiona: "Too many people hold themselves hostage to themselves, hostage to the security of 'things'; rather we need to invest in our own power and autonomy. Once we begin to live our authentic self, we find courage and start to take chances. Life becomes so much simpler when we follow our hearts. Look around you, everything in the world relates back to our emotions – from business, to politics to money. If you can access your emotions and use them to guide your life you will find happiness, contentment and fulfilment." 

**To win a copy of Fiona Coyne's *Who Moved my Ladder*, from Penguin, send your details to Fiona Coyne Competition, [info@orangepress.co.za](mailto:info@orangepress.co.za) or fax 011 807 4010.**

