

Authentically AMANDA

With a career that continues to soar, a beautiful family and beloved friends, one thing's for sure: at 56, Amanda Keller has it made. But she doesn't take any of it for granted.

BY CECILY-ANNA BENNETT PHOTOGRAPHY CORRIE BOND

There's something you can't help but notice when you first meet Amanda Keller. It's not the fact that she's shorter than she appears on her hit Network 10 show *The Living Room*. Nor is it that her energy belies the fact she seems to work around the clock (even if it is a well-oiled routine). It's her warmth; a sense that even though she's been up since the crack of a sparrow's hoo-ha recording her daily Sydney radio show with friend Brendan 'Jonesy' Jones on 101.7 WFSM, she has a generosity of spirit that's impossible to fake.

During the photo shoot she's animated, fun – and it's clear she's comfortable in her skin. Her smile is genuine and afterwards, she engages with everyone involved, thanking each person individually for their support. Her natural affinity with people and her obvious kindness is an innate quality that is perhaps responsible in some small part, not only for her myriad successes, but for the fact that she's a media personality who is so clearly well-liked.

When we sit down to chat, it's over forkfuls of salad (edamame and roasted sweet potato with brown rice, seaweed and white miso, in ►

I'M A GOOD SLOTHER AND SLEEPER SO AN AFTERNOON SLEEP IS EVERYTHING FOR ME



case you were wondering.) Even then, she's more concerned about the hazards of spitting food at me as I urge her to talk mid-mouthful, than she is about satisfying the need to quell her rumbling stomach.

LIFE'S SPILLS AND THRILLS

In addition to her commitments to her regular TV and radio gigs, Amanda's the new co-host (with Grant Denyer) of one of the most glittery prime-time television shows, *Dancing With The Stars*, which returns to Network 10 in February. It's a format she's familiar with, having been a competitor herself some 12 years ago (with moderate success – she was voted out on the fifth round). But, with so much on her proverbial plate, you have to ask, how does she fit it all in?

"I think I look busier than I am because the radio show is every day, *The Living Room* is pretty much two shows once a fortnight and the thing about *Dancing [With the Stars]* is that it's live, and that's what I love about the radio – so it'll be out and done, and the next week, it's out and done again," she explains. "Grant does breakfast radio as well, so the adrenaline of it being live will keep us awake until the evening. That's what really appeals to me about live TV – all the nerves, all the spills – and that's just the two of us!

"The world just feels mean at the moment and so something that's as exuberant and bright as *Dancing* – there's just something life-affirming and fun about it. I think Australia is so ready for that."

Exuberant and bright are two words that could easily be lent to Amanda. But is it exhausting, I ponder, feeling as though you have to be 'on' all the time? What's the secret to flicking that off switch?

"I'm a good slother and a sleeper, so an afternoon sleep for me is everything. I also love watching my sons [Liam, 17, and Jack, 15] play weekend sport for school. I'm very aware of how I used to feel about having to get up early and take them, but now I'm getting to the tail end of those years, I've become a bit sentimental," Amanda says.

"It seems everything makes me cry these days because I'm feeling the beginnings of endings. I sort of feel like I'm clutching at their feet a little as they're off embarking on their new journeys. I try and get to their sport as often as I can now because there'll come a time when I go 'Wow, I don't have that anymore and I'll really miss it'.

"My mum died 12 years ago and a thousand times I felt like saying to her how I didn't appreciate [her] at the time. I left home, went overseas – it didn't occur to me what my parents were going through. Now I see it so differently; how gracious they were in letting me go, and how that's our job – to raise good humans for the world and let them go. It's a hard lesson."

TIME FOR REINVENTION?

At 56, Amanda's one of thousands of Australian women juggling a busy professional life as well as the responsibilities of being a mother, wife and friend. It's no surprise that like so many women, whether they appear to have their lives together or not, even Amanda occasionally succumbs to a sense of overwhelm.

"I was in New Zealand with my girlfriends recently and these are the things we talk about – we're the generation dealing with elderly parents and kids – and I don't know if previous generations ever really had both those things [together]. ►

Fun and games with Amanda



PLAY ON WORDS
Amanda's a regular on *Have You Been Paying Attention*, where comedians battle it out to see who knows the most about recent news.



TEAM WORK
The Living Room team (including Amanda, here with Barry, Miguel and Dr Chris) clearly have lots of fun on the award-winning show.



RAISING GOOD HUMANS
Amanda is making the most of her time with her teenage boys, Liam and Jack, knowing they'll soon be off on their own adventures.



DANCING QUEEN
Amanda will soon be adding another TV show to her resume, co-hosting *Dancing With The Stars* on Network 10 with Grant Denyer.

AMANDA WEARS (OPENER): TLUXE TOP, LORNA JANE PANTS, JEANSWEST JACKET, SPRING COURT SNEAKERS, ALIX YANG EARRINGS, ANGELINA ALVAREZ BANGLE. (THIS PAGE) SPORTSCRAFT SHIRT, BLACK LAMB NECKLACE. JEANSWEST JEANS. TIMELINE IMAGES XXXXXXXX.



Short and sweet

Gym workout or a walk outside?

A bit of both. I see my trainer Doug a few times a week, because if I didn't, I'd never go. When Doug's on holidays, I don't set foot in the gym. On weekends, I walk the dog – a border collie called Mini. My son wanted to call her Aventador, after the car, but I talked him into Mini. Imagine having to call Aventador at the park. I'd have to flush my own head down the toilet.

Beach or mountains?

I live not far from the beach, but I go swimming about once every 10 years. I like living near the water but it doesn't occur to me to go swimming. I'm not a swimming costume person.

Favourite song to dance to?

Taylor Swift's *Shake It Off* will always get me on the dance floor. So will Stevie Wonder. But if I'm out and I hear *Rock Lobster* I have to sit down because of our [WSFM] playlist. I've heard it too often.

Happiest dance memory?

Whenever I catch up with my girlfriends. Even if it's just us skanky dancing in the lounge room, that's the memory I have of how freeing music is. You're with your friends, there's a burst of happiness, and you express it by dancing.

Best music moments?

When everyone is off doing their own thing on a Saturday or Sunday morning, I bake a cake, put Spotify on and listen to a whole lot of daggy albums from when I grew up – the albums I've had for years and just sing along at the top of my lungs. It's my favourite thing.



STYLIST: JACKIE SHAW; HAIR & MAKE-UP: ALLISON BOYLE; AMANDA WEARS: LAYERD TOP, JEAN SWEST JEANS, ANTHEA CRAWFORD JACKET, SPRING COURT SNEAKERS, ANGELINA ALVAREZ EARRINGS

At the same time, there's also the 'liberation of the Third Act' – once your kids have left home and you're thinking well, do I want another career reinvention? And if so, what do I want it to be? Because, if we're lucky, we get another crack at it. For me, I've never been busier professionally and I love that. I do get tired and I do get cranky, but I suck it in and get on with it. I think, 'Well I'll have an afternoon snooze tomorrow and I'll feel better',” she says.

“If things are linear, I feel like ‘I've got this, this and this’, but then if something else is added to the pile and I start to become completely overwhelmed. Harley's very good at helping me put it into perspective and see it's all doable. They're never hard things, and I have to remind myself they're things I've always wanted, but even the best things in the world can feel overwhelming when there's a lot of them.”

On the subject of Harley, Amanda's other-half of 28 years, it's clear they share not only an enduring love for each other but a deep respect and grounding energy. Is there a secret to keeping the spark alive for that long?

“I've learnt over the years not to over-analyse our relationship. Just letting it happen has been where the calmness comes for me; knowing that if one week's rocky or cranky, that it'll be different the next. We're good parents together. We absolutely back each other up. Even though it looks like I'm busy [with work], I'm there in the afternoons, we all eat dinner together. We're a regular domestic family.”

GETTING STRONGER

As a mother of two teenage sons, Amanda's only too aware of the pressures society places on mothers – and on women in general – to do more and be more, for everyone. She admits to feeling conflicted as a natural-born people pleaser, but as she gets older, she's strengthening her resolve to do what she wants more often, as opposed to what's expected.

“I find that sometimes after making sure everyone else is fine and happy, you get home and feel exhausted. You give a lot more of yourself away. Every new year's resolution I think I'm going to try and say no a bit more – but that's what I find really hard. Especially for women – it's hard to say no without being judged. Saying yes and complaining about it, that's the worst of all options. Say yes graciously and do it, or say no. As Jeff Goldblum said in an interview, ‘Accept, enjoy, be gracious, be grateful’.

“I used to watch Andrew Denton and he was so good at it – he'd just say no and people would respect his answer. A friend of mine, who's a

I DO GET TIRED AND I DO GET CRANKY BUT I SUCK IT IN AND GET ON WITH IT.

psychologist, said to me, ‘No is a sentence’. She's right – but it never is. It's always ‘No, but...’”

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

If there's one thing Amanda's glad she didn't say no to, it was her annual get-together with her closest girlfriends. She admits it would have been easy to just count herself out, but her interactions with the people she loves are her lifeblood.

“Before I went away with my girlfriends to New Zealand, I thought I could easily have just spent a week in bed, snoozing and recalibrating at home, but I'm so glad I went. It was five days with about eight of us. Once a year we all meet up (some are in Sydney, one's in Melbourne, another's in Bathurst and one just moved to New Zealand) and it was so life affirming to just laugh hard together,” she says.

“One minute we'd be crying with laughter, the next minute we'd be crying with sadness, then we'd be deep, then we'd be shallow, then we'd be dumb, then we'd be shopping – and I came home feeling so energised. Even though I'd been tempted to hide and reboot, I think that was exactly what I needed, to get out of my head a bit. Those friendships – they're the wisest, funniest women in the world and we had the best week.”

There she goes again, speaking honestly and generously, with so much warmth that it's impossible not to smile along. It's clear that she's devoted to her family and her friendships. But does she ever take a minute to stop, take stock of everything she's achieved and appreciate herself?

“I had a teenage diary and I have to remind myself when I'm busy that my teenage self would have just been so excited to think I have two beautiful sons, a husband – I take great pride in the fact that we've lasted 28 years – and I have all these jobs that I love. I would have loved to have known all that when I was 14,” she says.

“I often feel such gratitude when I think of how much my younger self would feel, knowing where the journey went. I am very aware of feeling lucky, I don't take any of that for granted.” **P**

Dancing With The Stars will be screening on Network 10 in February.