



CYNDI LAUPER ON FAMILY

Lauper met her husband, actor David Thornton, when they were working on the 1991 film *Off and Running*. They have a son, Declyn Wallace, 18.

Thornton's father taught English at Harvard University and is an expert on Scottish poet Robert Burns. Lauper remembers seeing her father-in-law apparently shedding a tear at her wedding, so she told him not to cry: "I said, 'You're not losing a son, you're gaining somebody who don't speak English too good.'"

Of being a mother, she says she is "a terrible parent".

"I try but I feel like I want to tell my son so many things, but, at 18, they don't want to hear any of it. And it's so disheartening. And I feel like I haven't been a great parent. I wanted him to know all this stuff but then I'm falling into the same trap of those unspoken expectations. What I want him to know and what he has to learn for himself and experience in life is different. I can't make him into a mini-me."

Life, she says, does not always turn out how you thought it would be. And becoming a globally successful singer and music icon does not change that.

"When you first start out you think you're going to have a white picket fence and it's going to be like a really enchanted cottage and everything's going to be nice, nothing really bad is going to happen. You know, animals and people and everyone's laughing. And after dinner we sit around and play piano and sing songs and everyone goes to sleep happy. It's not like that." She does, she says, have a wonderful and sweet husband. She was able to feature her beloved mother, Catrine Lauper, in her videos. And she loves her son "endlessly". "I am extraordinarily lucky. So, so, so lucky."

Lenny Ann Low

language of it between them. It was there and it really affected me."

This inspired the *Kinky Boots* song *Not My Father's Son*, with the lyrics "I'm not my father's son/I'm not the image of what he dreamed of/With the strength of Sparta and the patience of Job/still couldn't be the one/to echo what he'd done/and mirror what was not in me."

"I saw my son trying to be his father," she says. "The disappointment for any boy or man is huge. I always take pieces of real life and use them so that it can be real. People can identify with something if it's real, as opposed to just some jargon that I probably couldn't come up with anyway, because I ain't that good."

If there is one enduring fact about Lauper, it is that she never stops working. While she and Fierstein were creating *Kinky Boots*, Lauper also recorded and released her 10th studio album, *Memphis Blues*, toured Asia and wrote *Cyndi Lauper: A Memoir*, the latter a ballsy, no-holds-barred account of her difficult childhood and often

not-so-glamorous career. In May she released a country music album, *Detour*, recorded in Nashville and featuring covers of *I Fall To Pieces*, *You're The Reason Our Kids Are Ugly* and *Night Life*, sung with Willie Nelson.

Next April she returns to Australia to tour with Blondie and attend the Sydney premiere of *Kinky Boots*.

"I never want to stop," she says. "I don't ever give up. And, you know, you can't make yourself into somebody else. But, if you accept yourself, as Harvey says, you'll accept others, too."

Lauper says she is her own worst critic – "I'm pretty harsh on myself" – but she counters "the voices" with meditation.

"I have a life that is extraordinary. I travel, I meet people. That I even can make a living out of singing and writing ... I mean, c'mon."

Kinky Boots is at the Capitol Theatre, Haymarket, from April next year. Tickets on sale from December 5; kinkybootsthemusical.com.au.

Fiona Higgins has returned to Australia after three years in Indonesia.



Trouble in paradise

Australia's favourite tropical playground is the setting for a group of characters confronting their phobias, writes **THUY ON**.

One of the characters in Fiona Higgins' new book says rather tartly, "I think a fair few Aussies consider it the ninth state of Australia." She is referring, of course, to Bali, the setting for *Fearless*. As in her previous novel, Higgins has assembled six strangers (one of them, Cara, also appeared in *The Mothers' Group*) and placed them not in Sydney this time, but on the steamy tropical island, a location many Australians treat as their own personal playground.

Her protagonists are there not to frolic, but to attend a workshop to confront and overcome their particular phobias (which include fear of flying, heights, public speaking and intimacy). Under the guidance of various earnest therapists, Australians Janelle and Cara, American Annie, Englishman Henry, French Remy and Italian Lorenzo undertake all sorts of scary and confronting classes including parasailing, Balinese vagina spa, and tooth-filing ceremonies.

The guests make tentative friendships with one another and a pair even fall in love, but about two-thirds of the way through the book, a catastrophic event occurs that really tests their mettle, an incident that none of their fearless training had adequately prepared them for.

Higgins, who is fluent in Indonesian, has done a fine balancing act in her narrative, exploring the beauty and shortcomings of Bali (for every fragrant frangipani, there's a street defecation) and noting that many of the tourist villas are foreign-owned and "advancing like cancer across the fields". The author is well aware of the conundrum of the Balinese economy; how the desperate need for tourism sits alongside the destruction and pollution of the natural habitat resulting from the influx of travellers.

"Bali embodies many of the world's common tensions: globalism versus localism, capitalism versus spirituality, short-term self-interest versus the wellbeing of future generations," Higgins says. "The dichotomies are magnified, perhaps, because of the transient expatriate population: very few visitors end up having a long association with Bali. So the challenge for the island is how to balance these tensions in a sustainable way. There's no easy answer,

but hopefully *Fearless* challenges readers not to ignore the complexity."

To the hordes of Australians descending upon the popular hotspot every year, Higgins adds, "Especially when we're on holidays in Bali – how can we engage with, rather than turn away from, the discomfiting problems?"

Higgins herself recently returned to Australia after a three-year stay in Indonesia while her husband was working in agricultural development there. They live with their three children in Sydney, where she works in philanthropy and non-profit organisations. She didn't set out to write a book based in Bali as her third novel.

"Strangely enough, the idea was born out of an intense tropical fever I suffered in 2014," she says. "At some point I was delirious – literally hallucinating – and these [imaginary] people filed into my bedroom. They were all international visitors attending a personal development workshop in Ubud. They shared their histories with me, and the writer in me

wanted to document what they were saying, but I was too weak to move, so I spoke into my iPhone instead. After I recorded a few sentences about each of them, I simply fell asleep and forgot all about it."

Later, these few sentences formed the basis of *Fearless*. It's characteristic of the serendipitous ways in which Higgins' novels came to be written. "Sometimes I have a sense of what might happen, but I never set out with a

predetermined plot ... It's quite an unconscious, organic process."

Though she won't say whether she participated in all the unusual workshop activities offered to her characters in the name of research, Higgins admits to a willingness to try out new things.

Like her previous novel, *Fearless* is about connections forged between unlikely people. Higgins agrees that it's particularly hard making friends in middle age when you're set in your ways and travel the usual paths. "But when you take time out of your ordinary life to engage in some kind of personal development, whether it's training for a group sporting event or workshop, there's definitely scope for new friendships derived from intense shared experience."

Fearless by Fiona Higgins, Allen & Unwin, \$29.99.

