

SANE

FACTSHEET

SANDY

When publisher Ian Syson read the manuscript of Sandy Jeffs' autobiography, *Flying with Paper Wings*, he was blown away by it. 'It's a story of survival,' he says. 'When I read it, I thought, how does she live with this?'

Sandy admits she found the five years it took to write the book extremely difficult. 'I struggled for my sanity every day,' she says.

She continues to grapple with the hallucinatory voices she hears, a symptom of the Schizophrenia she has lived with for over 30 years.

'I don't hear them during the day, but every night when I go to bed they persecute and denigrate me and now I wake up to them as well which is a real pain in the arse,' she says. 'I think to myself, I just can't do this any more.'

At times, she has been tempted to end her life. But Sandy resists. She keeps going for the sake of her friends, for her public work, for 'the stuff I do', and to feel connected to the world.

Sandy has good friends who support her. She remains warm, funny and enthusiastic while battling demons few of us could imagine.

Difficult days that feel insurmountable, she breaks down into increments: 15 minutes for breakfast, half an hour to check emails, set times for washing clothes and doing dishes. She fills gaps by playing CDs or listening to the radio.

'Schizophrenia is a horrible housemate,' Sandy says. 'You have to learn to understand its moods and the way they affect you. It might be through voices. It might be negative thoughts. It might be delusions. Living with that is hard work.'

Exercise is important for Sandy. For many years she has played with a local tennis group, and at the age of 47 joined a hockey team. Quite apart from the social and health benefits, the camaraderie, she says, is intoxicating.



Through her public presentations Sandy has discovered that she is a powerful communicator. It fills her with wonder, especially when she gets a standing ovation.

Ian Syson is not surprised at her success. (*Flying with Paper Wings* was short-listed for *The Age* Book of the Year, and received the SANE Book of the Year Award, and a Commendation in the Australian Human Rights Awards.)

‘She is a remarkable person,’ says Ian. ‘People hear her story and want to read the book. It’s selling as well as anything I’ve ever published.’

Sandy shares a house in the country with friends, Robbie and Dido, who don’t hold back when they feel ‘tough love’ is needed.

‘They’ll say, “You’re hearing voices, aren’t you?” And my voices are going, “Don’t tell them, don’t tell them!” And they say, “We know – we can tell by your face so don’t lie to us.”’

The publication of her first book, *Poems from the Madhouse*, changed Sandy’s life. ‘I entered my forties with no future, identity or self esteem, and left that decade with success, hope, and a much stronger sense of self.’

Four more volumes of poetry, and now her memoir, have given Sandy a significant public profile. Her capacity to write with honesty and humour about the realities of living with Schizophrenia touches people’s hearts. ‘I feel as though I am speaking for those who have been silenced by the illness,’ she says.

Sandy’s autobiography has achieved even more. As she writes: ‘It has allowed me to delve into the darkness, to return with truths and lost dreams, and turn them into poems.’