

# My bonkers life

Jennifer Saunders talks exclusively to Victoria Young about procrastinating, her grandson Freddie, and her new autobiography, *Bonkers*

**Comedienne Jennifer Saunders, 55, has three daughters with her husband Ade Edmondson, and they live in London.**

**I am very prone to procrastination.**

A lot of it is to do with nerves and being a perfectionist. I only started the book because of desperation. I thought I was going to have to give the money back, which was what finally pushed me into it. When I finished each chapter, I'd have a little celebration, then I'd think, "Christ, there are all these other chapters to bloody write now."

**Writing about the difficult things like breast cancer was the easiest part.**

It's the only time there's been a plan and a structure in my life, and I knew what I was doing, so I could remember. The rest of my life is a mishmash. My approach to breast cancer was matter-of-fact – but I'm not really a panicker.

**I never planned to write a book. It's all Clare Balding's fault.**

I went to her book launch, and after a few Sauvignons, was charmed and flattered by her editor into submission. I'm glad I did it. I found it very difficult but it's a good discipline.

**My family life was pretty lovely and harmonious.**

My father was in the RAF so we moved a lot, but I can't remember it being traumatic, which is down to my mum. The best way to describe her is non-fussy. I wish I'd known that comedy was a good way of making friends because I would have manipulated it. I was more of a hope-no-one-notices-me child.

**My dad was really funny, and my mum too.**

**Her default setting was always to laugh, even when bad things happened.** She had a stroke in 2010, and while we were waiting for the

ambulance, I said we should pack a bag and asked her where her nighties were. She said "In the donkey", which turned out to be the chest of drawers. We laughed until tears streamed down our cheeks. The medics must have thought we were mad. Even now, when she has a bit of an odd moment, instead of getting frustrated or cross, she finds it hilarious.

**After my father was diagnosed with cancer, he was extraordinarily good-humoured throughout.**

Thanks to his wonderful GP, he was able to die peacefully at home, and we sent his ashes up in a firework from the top of the hill in front of their house, which was fitting for a man who loved to fly.

**My relationship with my mother is lovely.**

She comes over a lot of weekends, although she's recently got this new whippet from a rescue centre, so doesn't like to leave it alone.

**Ade and I spend most of the week in London, and weekends and holidays in Devon.**

Living in Devon was great for the kids, but once they'd left home, it seemed easier to move back to London to work.

**At Christmas everyone comes to us. This will be my grandson Freddie's second Christmas.**

He's just gorgeous, honestly; so calm and so nice. If Freddie is in the room we stare at him, and when he is taken out we revert to looking at photos of him. He's a little king. He will never be able to do any wrong in my eyes.

**REMAINING AMBITIONS?**

**To get my now four-year-old horse Freddie to Badminton with the event rider Piggy French. And to have dinner at The Wolseley with my grandson, Freddie, when he turns 16 and can have a glass of Champagne with me. I'd also like to direct something – I think that'll be the next thing I do, actually.**

**Ella, our eldest daughter, is such a great mum.** It seems to come naturally, and I never thought it would be a goth. She has extraordinary patience. There's something so lovely about seeing your own children being great parents.

**At Ella's wedding, Ade made a speech that had us all in tears.**

He loves his girls with a passion and they love him. He has been an extraordinary father.

**We have an easy-going relationship with our daughters.** They really do tell me most things. They must think it's okay to tell me stuff. I am unshockable, but they never tell me anything that shocking.

**Beattie, my middle daughter, is a comedienne.** I was amazed that she invited us to the first gig she ever did at uni. She was in a female double act, which was a brave move. And I was thinking, "Oh God, I hope she's funny" – and she was. It was such a relief.

**Freya is the youngest and is studying fashion at university.** There is little more enjoyable than getting her to do her impersonations of the girls she worked for when she did magazine internships. We're always on at her to write it down, but I know she's thinking, "Yeah, that's what you do, Parents. I am different." And she is. She is determined to make her own way and has Ade's work ethic to help her.

**In the early days of *French And Saunders*, we got stuff wrong.** We knew we wanted something to be a bit different but didn't know what, and we didn't physically know how to do it until the second series. We knew we didn't want to be trad telly, but we thought the way to do it was to pretend to be trad telly. The more we did it, the more we knew how to do it.

**I was so thrilled – and very proud – when Ade won *Celebrity MasterChef*.** He learned a huge amount about how to cook, and does a wonderful stuffed lamb cutlet. I make a very good smoked salmon pasta, and a lemony chicken thing. My favourite thing in the world is roast chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy. >>

**JENNIFER: THE REAL ME**

**Saver or spender?**

I'm a spender. I don't splurge but if I did, it would be on art or cars or in fact horses.

**Who are you closest to?**

Ade, I think. Your husband – that's the right answer, right?

**What quality is most important in a partner?**

Being allowed my own space.

**What are you best at?**

Fixing practical things.

**Biggest regret?**

That I didn't do the extra lap in the *Top Gear* car because I could have beaten Simon Cowell.

**One thing you'd change in your life?**

My ability to put on weight. I used to be able to lose weight as quickly as I put it on, but now

I can't. The menopause does terrible things.

**Do you exercise?**

I should do more. I've been on holiday and I haven't exercised, but I will. Next time you see me, you'll say I'm so thin.

**When did you last feel really happy?**

I tend to always feel happy. I'm definitely a happy person.



## exclusive interview

**I loved going back to riding for the TV show *Back In The Saddle*.** I enjoyed the jumping, but Ade said, "Why risk it? You don't want to fall off at your age." I did a fall-over as Edina in the very last *Ab Fab*, and thought, "This doesn't work any more, does it?" Before, I used to bounce, but it hurts now.

***French And Saunders* and *Ab Fab* are part of me.** I often think of things in Edina's terms, which are my terms, in a way. One thing I miss is that I have nowhere to say all the things I know I shouldn't say.

**As you get older, you can say stuff because people don't pay attention.** Like, "I think that airbrushing is fine." I'm this age now and I want a bit of bloody airbrushing! Everyone is so anti it, but why? Do you think the old film stars of yesteryear didn't have a few filters on and a bit of mush on the lens? Come on! I don't want someone that I don't know with their spectacles coming that close to my face. I want the general filter of life and bad eyesight to be put over that photograph. Lighting can be very harsh and people should have a bit of kindness.

**The best thing about this age and stage is that I think I know better than some people now.** It started when I was about 50. I feel slightly more bloody-minded and more confident. It's to do with experience and the realisation that sometimes you have to push yourself forward. I didn't seem to do that much when I was younger. It didn't seem to hold me back, but I had other people to do it for me – I had Dawn French!

**My friendship with Dawn is a once-in-a-lifetime friendship.** But it took a while to realise that. It's not feeling self-conscious with someone, or never having to make polite conversation. I don't think Dawn and I have ever made polite conversation in our lives.

**"As you get older, you can say stuff because people don't pay attention"**

**I sometimes regret not being part of *French And Saunders* any more.** Mainly when we see things on telly that we want to take the mick out of. But Dawn is very much into her writing now, and living in Cornwall and being happy.

**We text each other a lot – we texted each other over the birth of Prince George.** Although when Kate was pregnant, we were given no extra information at all. We were given no memorandums, and were expected to learn everything from the newspapers.

**Girlfriends are very important to me.** Harriet was at college with me, as was my friend Jo-Bo – Joanna Bowen. I never quite trust women that don't have girlfriends. I find it quite odd.

***Viva Forever!* closing was disappointing.** I'm sure it'll come back: it just hit the wrong time and the critics were out for it. I think they couldn't bear Judy Craymer having another hit [after *Mamma Mia!*]. It's so English: "Oh no, we can't have another success." I also think there's a lot of resentment towards the Spice Girls, even though they have their fans. There's a cynicism about it, which is such a shame. But it was great fun, I loved it and the kids in it were so great.

**Disappointments like that don't tend to fill me with self-doubt.** I'm philosophical. Not everything can work, but you've always got to keep trying; that's my general outlook. **w&h**

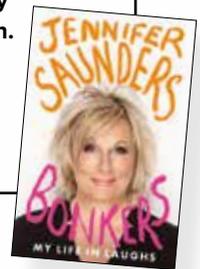
## MY LIFE IN LAUGHS

Jennifer sets the tone for her fabulous new book in this sneak preview...

People like a little bit of misery. They like a "mis mem". Well, I'm afraid I have had very little "mis" in my life, and nowadays I have even less "mem". So we can knock that one on the head. In fact, my brain is a bit soupy overall re the past. Sometimes it's hard to know what is an actual memory and what is simply a memory of a photograph. Was I really called "Podge" as a child? Answer: yes. Was I really surly, apathetic and introverted at school? Apparently not. That is simply an image I invent for myself. The truth is, I was fairly friendly, sometimes hard-working, and quite good at things. My mother has kept my school reports. I imagined these would be a rich source of hilarity and irony, but they turn out to be decidedly average.

Memory is a liquid and strange thing. Researching my own life, I realise that there are major events I have forgotten, people I don't remember meeting, shows I don't remember being in and places I don't remember going. And that can leave you vulnerable. But, dear reader, I will tell you all I remember, and embellish all that I don't. For my publisher's sake, I shall name-drop regularly and mention royalty as much as possible. Press on.

Jennifer Saunders' book *Bonkers: My Life In Laughs* (Viking) is out this month.



Jennifer with her whippet, Olive