

'My ideal age is 93!'

After overcoming debilitating depression, bestselling Irish author **MARIAN KEYES**, 52, tells *Yours* how she lives for today and is embracing her age. *Paul Ewart* reports

She's the bestselling author whose brilliantly observational novels have won her countless fans across the globe. With book sales of 33 million-plus and counting, Marian Keyes is one of the most successful female authors of all time, and the queen of the page-turner is now back with her latest offering, *Making It Up As I Go Along*. It's a collection of autobiographical observations about life, love, health and everything in between, and the title is testament to how the writer lives her life.

"I wish I could say I had a grand plan," she tells *Yours*, "but everything that has happened to me has very much happened by accident – including becoming a writer!"

Born in Limerick and raised in Dublin, the eldest of five children, Marian graduated with a law degree, but her writing career only kickstarted later in life – in traumatic circumstances.

At the age of 30, she attempted suicide and ended up in rehab, following a long battle with alcoholism. Emerging several months later, Marian penned her first bestseller, *Watermelon*, and secured a three-book deal, all within six months of her overdose.

However, while her career has soared ever since, 14 years later the black dog reared its ugly head once again and the author went through a gruelling three-year battle with depression from 2009, leaving her unable to work and resulting in a "nervous breakdown". Unsurprisingly,

these experiences have translated into novels suffused with real-life grit. Amidst the humour and happy endings, Marian tackles hard-hitting subjects ranging from depression and drug addiction to alcoholism and domestic violence. And while the author has managed to find equilibrium in her life since then, looking back at that dark period still fills her with terror.

"I'm so desperate to avoid it happening again. I've analysed it until I'm blue in the face, but – and forgive me for swearing – sometimes a sh**ty thing is just a sh**ty thing," she says matter-of-factly. "I suppose the one huge good thing that has come from it is that every day when I wake up and feel halfway normal, I'm so grateful. I think of all those years I had before that terrible time, back when I thought I had worries, but they were nothing in comparison.

"If you go through something catastrophic, it puts things into perspective. I've decided to lay off and just live for today... today is lovely and, if it [the depression] happens again, I'll deal with it again."

It's this no-nonsense, straight-talking, self-deprecating attitude that makes Marian every bit as engaging as one of her "flawed" heroines. Honest and candid, being an open book comes naturally to the writer.

"I was going to say that I have nothing to be ashamed of, but I have plenty to be ashamed of!" she says, laughing. "I'm honest and it suits me. I've never had any boundaries, which is a good thing and a bad thing.

"I'd rather not have secrets, because it's an awful lot of work hiding things. I look at somebody like Beyoncé – not that I'm comparing myself to her – but I think, *What hard bloody work it must be to be her!* I'm just another human being struggling along like everybody else. By being honest about my



AN OPEN BOOK
Marian's "ordinary" life in Ireland is her recipe for happiness

own many, many flaws, people can get comfort from that and think, *Thank Christ, I'm not the only one!*

She's topped the bestseller lists for years, won multiple awards and had her work translated into more than 30 languages, but life wasn't always a rollercoaster ride of success. "I didn't

start writing until I was 30. Up until then I thought I was a complete failure and good at nothing," she reflects. "I spent a lot of time being really skint – they say money doesn't buy happiness, but being poor is awful."

Thankfully, that's no longer a problem. Marian's catalogue of bestsellers have brought her fame and wealth beyond her wildest dreams. Yet, rather than relocating to the bright lights of London or LA, she has remained in her native Ireland, specifically in the seaside town of Dún Laoghaire, where she lives with her husband, Tony.

"My life is incredibly ordinary most of the time," she explains. "I live in

a suburb of Dublin, I do the school run to pick up my nephews, I take my mother to the supermarket... life is just the way I want it."

In *Making It Up As I Go Along*, the author has advice for women nearing the age of 50 – a milestone dreaded by many, yet one she celebrated.

"I don't mind getting older at all," she says, smiling. "As I've aged, I feel life is kinder and that less is expected of me. Now I'm 52, I'm looking forward to 60. Believe it or not, my ideal age is 93 – and I really do mean that.

"Nobody will ask me for anything, I'll know plenty and I can do what I like. I can eat whatever I fancy, not talk to people who bore me and it would all be put down to the eccentricities of age. When you get older you start to think, *Who cares? We're only here for the blink of an eyelid – who cares what we do?* Getting old is good – being young is awful! I wouldn't have my youth back for anything." •

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PICTURES: DEAN CHALKLEY

Turn the page
For Marian's latest book extract



Revelling on the high seas

Yours has been given this exclusive peek at Marian's latest book, *Making It Up As I Along*

Norway

One summer I went to Norway on a cruise of the fjords with Himself and Himself's parents. I am very fond of Himself's parents (John and Shirley). I am also doing a load of sucking up to them because my sister-in-law, Caron, has recently given birth to delicious Jude, so she is currently enjoying the position of Most Favoured Daughter-in-Law.

So we set sail from Newcastle, and one of the things I fear most in life is being hungry, and I was terrified I wouldn't get fed enough on the boat and what would I be able to do about it, seeing as I was a long way from any shops?

But I couldn't have been more wrong: there was TONS of food – breakfast, morning coffee and bikkies, lunch, afternoon tea, a five-course dinner and, if you were still hungry after all

that, there were midnight snacks. It was FABULOUS!

Every day at noon you'd hear this distant rumble, like the ship had come aground on an iceberg, but it was simply the stampede of everyone storming the dining-room doors as soon as they opened for lunch.

Normally I'd be in the thick of that sort of brouhaha, but they were a determined-looking bunch (despite being generally very aged) and I didn't fancy my chances, so Himself and myself usually waited until a bit later, when all the pushing and scratching had calmed down. My mammy had been on this self-same cruise two years ago and when I told her about all the pandemonium, she said, not a bit surprised, "Oh, yes, any time there was food, they were like pigs at a trough."

Right then! Norway! A stunningly beautiful country – clean and pure and uncrowded and unpolluted and any of the people I met were very nice.

We saw glaciers and fjords and the midnight sun and my personal highlight was the Marimekko shop in Trondheim where I went pure BERSERK. I bought two nightdresses (one stripy, one spotty), one light-blue raincoat, one matching umbrella, one pair of pink felt slippers, three tea towels and an adorable little pink dress and matching tights for my goddaughter, Kitten. I bought so much they gave me 10 per cent off and two free packets of patterned paper napkins (one blue, one green).

Another highlight was the Noa Noa shop in Bergen, but I managed to be more restrained and no one gave me any paper napkins there (but I am not complaining).

Other Norwegian highlights included four nights of shipboard bingo. John and Shirley had never played before, and when Shirley won forty-eight quid on the last night she was full of talk of taking it up regularly on her return home. I fear I may have corrupted her.



Top read

Making It Up As I Go Along
by Marian Keyes
(RRP \$32.99,
Penguin Random
House) is out now

