

**NEW HORIZONS**  
Bif at home in Vancouver with her dog, Niklaus.

CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

## NAKED CONFESSIONS

When rock star Bif Naked found out she had cancer, she thought things couldn't get much worse. Then her husband left her

by Michelle Magnan photography by Evaan Kheraj

**BETH TORBERT, BETTER KNOWN AS BIF NAKED,** is busy shaking hands and kissing babies. Well, kind of. On a sunny morning in early October, Bif is walking in Vancouver's CIBC Run for the Cure. She started out with a group of friends, but when you're a recognizable rocker it's hard to keep up. Other walkers sideline Bif – who also goes by her given name, Beth, and a handful of others, including B, Biffy and Bifita – with requests for pictures, a handshake, a few words. She is well-known, yes, but she's also a breast cancer survivor. And she is happy to chat with others who've been affected by the disease.

Since her diagnosis in 2007, Bif has navigated one difficult turn after another: She confronted a long-held eating disorder and separated from her husband, *Vancouver Sun* sports-writer Ian Walker, in January 2011. For her, the union – and

its demise – will be forever linked to her fight with breast cancer, as she was diagnosed just one week after their honeymoon. Bif says she can't pinpoint the final straw, but she knows that's when the problems began. "He married a rock star," she says, "and what he got was a cancer patient."

Bif never actually aspired to be a rock star. In the quote accompanying her high school graduation photo, she wrote, "Destination: Actress. Fate: Cleaning lady at MGM." Of course, she's landed closer to the former than to the latter. Bif dropped out of a theatre program at the University of Winnipeg to join a band. She married the drummer at 18, and though the marriage lasted only six months, the music stuck. And when the group required a sexier name, they figured adding *Naked* to the mix was a simple way to draw a crowd. Bif sang with >



► *naked confessions (continued)*



different bands until her manager, Peter Karroll, offered her a solo deal in 1994. Since then, she's recorded seven albums and performed alongside the likes of Billy Idol and Sheryl Crow.

Somewhere between the shows and daily life, the rock-star lifestyle took its toll. Bif's eating habits deteriorated. The progression began innocently enough; Bif turned to veganism in her early 20s to alleviate stomach issues. Eventually, being vegan morphed into eating very little, because, on tour, options were limited. While her band gorged on pizza and steak, Bif ate side salads. The results were plain to see: Bif shrank to a size 0. Only after her year-long fight with breast cancer did she realize how unhealthy her eating habits had become. As part of her recovery, she's made a commitment to giving her body the fuel it needs.

Bif underwent chemotherapy, a lumpectomy and radiation. Camaraderie with her fellow patients got her through the worst. Susie Isman, who was in the same cancer-treatment trial as Bif, recalls how Bif made her laugh the first time they met. "Beth came up to me at the gym, hit me with her hip and said, 'Isn't this a f--ked-up disease!'"

Another woman in the trial, Karen Lavoie, is now a close friend. When Karen was in the hospital, Bif brought her dinner every night, along with magazines, pillows and other treats. "I don't look back and think how hard it was," says Karen, "I think, 'Wow, how amazing, all that love.'"

All the while, Bif's relationship was in trouble. "Ian is a great guy and it should have worked out, but circumstances just took over. I'll go to my grave being bewildered by the whole thing."

Bif laments the marriage's end as "a personal tragedy." But it has not dampened her enthusiasm for love. "I can't wait to get married again!" she says. "I'm a hopeless romantic." The only obstacle, as she sees it, will be meeting someone. "I'm 40! Who am I going to date?" Whoever he is, he must be mature, because she's "finally ready for



**DRIVING FORCE** Activists demonstrate outside the Saudi Arabian embassy in Kiev, Ukraine, calling for women to have the right to drive. Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world where women can't drive. They must instead pay male chauffeurs, running the risk of sexual harassment and even rape.

an adult relationship." And if he has an affinity for heavy metal music, cute dogs and yoga, that would be icing on the vegan cake.

Bif is in the process of documenting all this change in a book of memoirs, an idea she resisted at first. "I mean, I'm not quite done yet!" Some of her to-do list: shooting a television show about her life, studying palliative care and doing charity work. As for which she tackles next, not even Bif will guess. But she is excited. "The fact that I can still make songs or go to yoga or cook for my friends is amazing," she says. Armed with good health, possibilities and, most of all, optimism, she is ready to move forward. "I never know what to expect in life. But I have a feeling it will just get more fun." ❖

**SOCIAL TREND**

**SAMPLING SOBRIETY**  
*My Month*  
**WITHOUT DRINKING!**

A former party girl takes a break from booze – and it changes everything

by Alex Laws

BIF NAKED PHOTO, MARCO GARCIA/GETTY IMAGES ENTERTAINMENT.

PROTEST PHOTO, SERGEI CHUZAVKOV/AP PHOTO. AL-TAWHEEL PHOTO, DANIEL BEREHULAK/GETTY IMAGES.

**I WAS TALKING ANIMATEDLY**, waving around my fourth glass of over-priced wine at the rooftop bar of a snazzy Toronto hotel. This might not sound too reckless, but it was a Monday night, I'd been in bed with the flu not long before, and my drinking buddy was someone I had met only once, in a professional capacity. Add to that the two work deadlines looming the following morning, which I was making it increasingly difficult to meet.

By the time I got home, I'd been out for five hours and spent every penny in my bank account. I woke up at 6 a.m. to a vise-like grip around my chest: guilt, something I'd become quite familiar with since my three-year relationship had recently ended, and I was hitting the bottle harder than usual. This, however, was a new low, and,

lying on my bed in floods of tears, my new apartment still filled with moving boxes, I vowed to start a month of not drinking.

I had been toying with the idea of quitting for a while. As someone who often puts away double the recommended healthy limit and as the daughter of an alcoholic, I was aware of how quickly drinking habits can take hold. But the reason I wanted to try giving it up wasn't fear of becoming an alcoholic. I wanted to see what life would be like without booze, if I could still be fun, maybe even have more fun, sober.

Apparently I was not alone. With phrases like "soberista" and "teetotal twentysomethings" creeping into our consciousness, it's emerging as a new social trend. The people leading the charge are young: Blake Lively, Peaches Geldof and, more recently,

**IN THE NEWS**

**A BATTLE** *Royal*

A billionaire princess is leading a tweeting revolution for women's rights in Saudi Arabia *by Alanna Glassman*



It was the tweet heard around the world: Saudi princess Ameerah al-Taweel announced the royal pardon of a woman sentenced to public flogging. The crime? Daring to drive in Saudi Arabia. But despite the unprecedented reprieve from King Abdullah and the publicity generated from Princess Ameerah's tweets, the ruling from the sharia court (which enforces the country's strict religious laws) wasn't overturned.

The accused woman, 34-year-old Shaima Jastaniah, is now appealing the sentence, but if she doesn't win she's faced with 10 humiliating and painful lashes – all for getting behind the wheel one hot afternoon.

Usually when Saudi police catch a woman driving, they let her go after she signs a pledge not to do it again. This isn't what happened to Shaima. Many believe the court's extreme verdict reflects a conservative backlash against King Abdullah's reforms: He has decreed women will be allowed to vote in the 2015 elections and promised to protect their rights. It seems that has antagonized the powerful clergy.

Social media may not bring justice for Shaima, but it's starting an important conversation. Saudi activists regularly tweet stories of injustice to 27-year-old Princess Ameerah, who uses her social prominence to advocate

for equality. Saudi Arabian women are also posting videos of themselves driving on YouTube.

To gain support for her plight, Shaima (who has a master's in liberal arts from Houston's University of St.

Thomas) called her former professor Nivien Saleh. "Shaima told me she wanted to drive, just like she did in the States," says Nivien. "And she wanted the same for other women. She feels it's a basic human right."

Texas is where Shaima learned to love driving, says Nivien. She cruised around town in her black BMW X5, and after she left, she shipped it home to the Middle East. "Texans are larger than life, and so is she," says Nivien. One day, the Texan in Shaima came out, and, longing for some time alone, she grabbed her keys. She was caught three hours later.

Now she'll play a waiting game. "Either way, this nightmare won't be over for Shaima," says Nivien. "The appeals court will uphold the ruling and she'll be lashed, or her case will be pushed back for review."

While Shaima's fate still hangs in the balance, her cause has already galvanized women in her own country, as well as people around the world. Even Oprah's been asked to help by making a video of herself honking for change! *Show your support online at change.org.*

Harry Potter himself, Daniel Radcliffe. And it's not just young celebs who are choosing to stick to soda – universities are now offering dry residence halls. But what would it be like for me, a 30-year-old social drinker?

I wanted to see how it felt to do all the things I would normally do, just sober. So I signed up for *everything*. I went to dinners, a movie screening, a dance party, a wedding, even an ugly-sweater singles party – all without any Dutch courage.

The first few days were a breeze – the adrenaline boost from doing something different felt good. Obviously I faced resistance from people in the beginning. They asked if I was pregnant and joked their calendars were full for the month. But in the end most people forgot I wasn't ►

### > *sampling sobriety (continued)*

drinking. In fact, most of the time the 'social experiment' was easier than I'd expected.

There were, however, some experiences that were real eye-openers. Toward the end of the night at a friend's wedding, a cute guy I'd been smiling at asked me to slow dance. He was sweet enough, but my sobriety instantly divided us. Like everyone in the room, he was slurring and stank of booze (it really reeks!). I tried to angle my face so that his breath was not flowing directly into my

nostrils, but his stunted conversation and wandering hands were too much. The song ended; I told him my feet hurt and left. Had I been under the influence, the situation could have ended in a mismatched hookup.

Make-out opportunities aside, my life was undeniably better for the month I was not drinking. I exercised more, I was less tired, and, thanks to the money I didn't spend on cocktails, I could indulge in some fabulous shopping (including a pony-skin handbag and second-hand Jimmy Choos).

I almost effortlessly went from half a pack of cigarettes a day to two or



### GOOD CLEAN FUN

*Alex Laws braves an ugly-sweater singles party without a cocktail.*

three and lost five pounds, despite the fact that I replaced the wine bottle I kept on the kitchen counter with a cookie jar.

Since the experiment, I have returned to drinking occasionally but have had much more success at stopping after a glass or two. Socializing sober made me realize who I wanted to spend time with and gave me confidence that I am fun and engaging to be around. I finally unpacked my house, and I'm seeing life as a glass half full, regardless of whether there's booze in it! ❖



## CAREER

# THE SWEET LIFE

**Niki Brinton** shares her transformation from high school math teacher to cupcake queen

by **Yuki Hayashi** | photography by **Roberto Caruso**

### Why cupcakes?

After spending 15 years teaching high school math, I reflected on what I really wanted to do. I've always baked for relaxation, so I directed my entrepreneurial spirit that way.

### How did you start the business?

I took an extended unpaid leave of absence. That allowed me to test my business plan in small doses over a two-year period, with the safety net of a job to go

what our customer wants. It's also what she needs, and that's convenience. We developed online ordering, so even if it's the middle of the night, she can make a dent in her to-do list. And we've added delivery.

### Work-life balance: myth or reality?

It's essential! Family time is on my calendar and can't be usurped by business. So is date night. I've been lucky enough to find quality staff, which allows me to spend weekends with my family. And I work only 15 days a month so I can spend time with my daughter, who is in senior kindergarten, and I take the whole summer off to be with my kids.

### What do you like about being an entrepreneur?

Being able to set the bar, especially when it comes to our nut-free program. My daughter's allergy motivated me to consult with Anaphylaxis Canada to design a program in which suppliers provide me with documentation regarding what exactly moves through their plant, how the equipment is cleaned and when they introduce new product.

### How do you unwind?

I hide in the guest room early in the morning. I call the bakeries first to check that everything's okay — which is a necessary part of being able to unwind. Then I read until my kids find me and climb in for cuddles. That helps too. ❖



back to if it didn't work out. I worked from home for three months; then I sublet a small area in a gourmet-food shop for four months. From there, I leased a shopping mall kiosk. It took about seven months before I felt a shop would fly. We opened our first store in Oakville [Ont.] in February 2010 and our Burlington location that December.

### How did teaching help you?

Preparation, preparation and more preparation. That's what teaching's all about. And that's how I approach every business move. I'm still preparing today. I have many systems in place, which I'm now preparing for use by franchisees.

### How did you set your bakery apart?

As a working mom [to two kids, ages 6 and 7], I'm the epitome of my own target market. For me, quality ingredients without preservatives are important. That's why we do everything by hand, from squeezing and zesting our citrus to frosting every cupcake. But it's not just about

## INSIGHTS FROM THE Corner Office

### NIKI BRINTON

**Occupation:** Entrepreneur, Cupid's Gourmet Cupcakes

**Age:** 44

**Hometown:** Oakville, Ontario

**Education:** BSc in mathematics from McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, and a BEd from New Brunswick's Mount Allison University

