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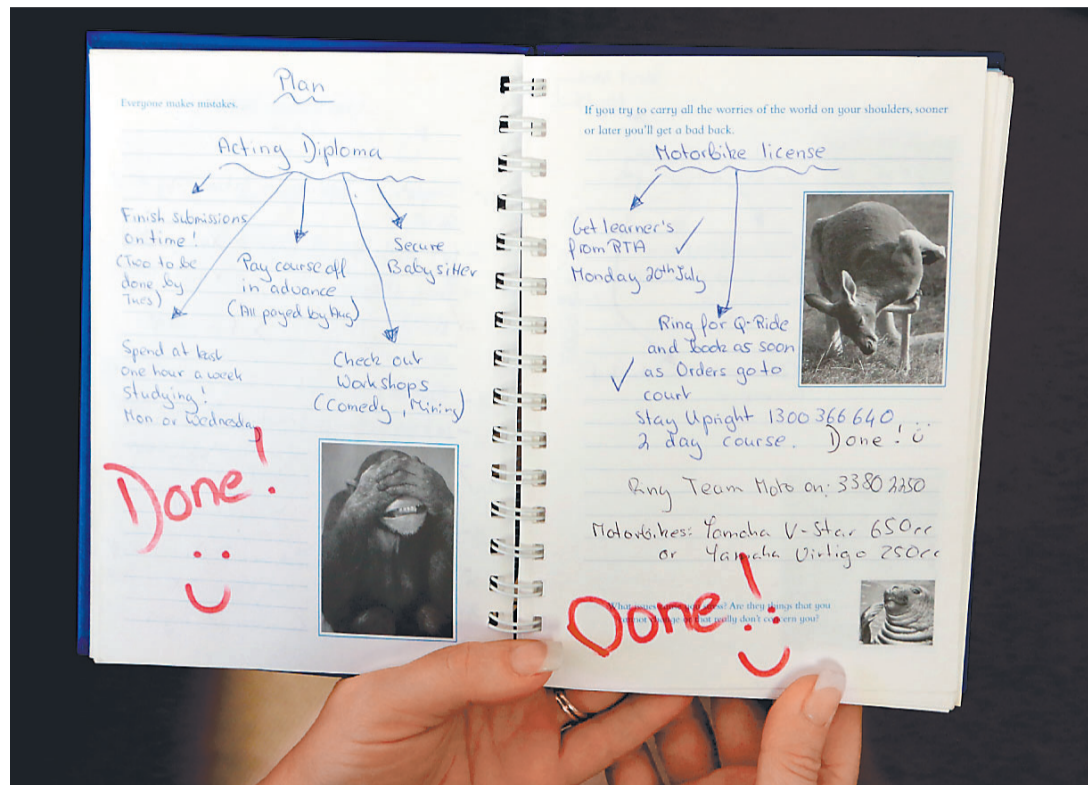
What one woman has achieved with a bucket list
and positive thinking



Dream catcher

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM ARMSTRONG AND MARK CRANITCH





Striking character: Julia Baker wanted a new life and went for it, setting goals with an ever-evolving to-do plan that has so far ticked off puppeteering, acting, stand-up comedy, motorcycle riding and snake handling.

Brisbane actor, comedian and snake-catcher extraordinaire Julia Baker is determined to inspire her daughters and women everywhere to be all they can be, and achieve a few personal goals along the way, as she tells Leanne Edmiston

Julia Baker is a compulsive list writer. Not in your typical groceries to buy, phone calls to make or household tasks to tick off kind of way. More in the transform-your-life way; the bucket list way.

For Baker, seeing is not just believing. It's achieving.

Every year for the past four years, she's written herself a list of goals, stuck them on the fridge, read them every day and made them happen. And in turn, welcomed a sudden flurry of unbidden opportunities that still flow her way.

Baker has transformed herself from an unhappy, unhealthy, unmotivated divorcee into a vibrant, gregarious puppeteer, actor, comedian and motorbike-riding snake catcher. Even partner John Gallacher was once just an extensive list of physical and personal characteristics on a page in her diary.

"When my marriage split up, I went through a whole grieving thing," she explains. "I sat there one day and thought, well, I can go down this path and feel sorry for myself, or I can turn it into something positive.

"I'm actually free to do whatever I want now. I got a diary and I wrote a list of all the things I wanted to do when I was a kid, and things I said I was going to do when I retired. Then I wrote a plan of how I was going to achieve each one. I just went down the list and ticked them off."

Baker says the most important benefit is setting a good example for daughters Simone, 12, and Kayleigh, 10.

"I wanted to be a role model. I didn't want to be some fat, frumpy, upset housewife. I wanted to be me, everything I wanted to be. I wanted them to grow up and achieve. I explained to them I'm not just your mum, and I don't want you to grow up and think you're just a mum or a wife. You've got to be more than that." Then she smiles.

"Now those girls are so proud of me. Every day. Yeah, our mum's strong. That's what I wanted."

Baker's aspirations have now reached new heights. She wants to inspire other women to transform their lives and achieve their dreams.

★★★★

A Brisbane-born, English and German-raised high school dropout, Baker was a rebellious middle child and one-time punk. Such was her predilection for risky behaviour, she was voted by her classmates as least likely to succeed and most likely to die young.

Still, puppeteering parents Karl, a waiter, and Catherine, a teacher, insisted she get a trade, so she trained first as a baker and then in confectionery making. Soon after, she returned to Australia, where she worked as a pastry chef in five-star hotels before marrying and having a family.

Realising she couldn't return to hospitality and seeing a local market for children's entertainment, Baker convinced her dad to make her a Punch and Judy booth.

THE SUBCONSCIOUS BRAIN IS 94 PER CENT OF YOUR BRAIN AND THE CONSCIOUS BRAIN IS ONLY 6 PER CENT, AND YET MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THE SUBCONSCIOUS BRAIN



They made the puppets, she started busking at Petrie Markets, and Kiddywinks Puppet Theatre was born.

Not long after, she wrote her first goal list: get a motorcycle licence and buy a motorbike, do an acting course, go horseriding, get a pet snake. She lost 27kg and quit smoking.

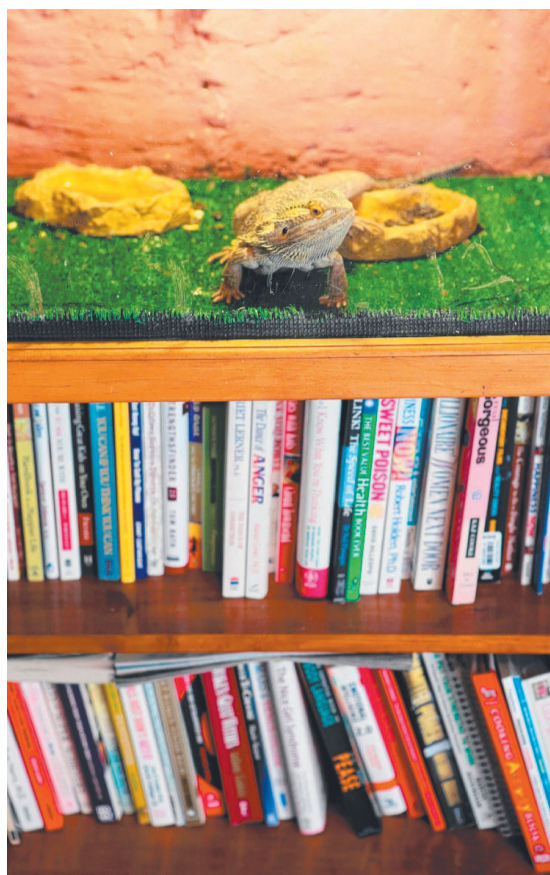
A maroon, flame-licked Yamaha 1100cc, complete with matching sidecar, sits in the driveway of her nondescript Petrie home, on Brisbane's north. Where a dining setting would normally be are enclosures for four pet snakes – Jake (bredli python), Jezebel (coastal carpet python), Jessie (black and gold jungle python) and Harley Davidson (Kayleigh's small spotted python) – along with Buddy, the bearded dragon.

Baker earned her snake-catching licence, is on the preferred list for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, and regularly relocates reptiles from people's homes, cars and gardens into local bushland.

She fell in love with snakes after being photographed with one at Australia Zoo.

"As they put this massive snake around me, something happened. I got this real shiver, this chemistry or adrenalin rush; it was like, wow! I just absolutely love this animal."

I SAID TO HIM, YOU'RE MY MIRACLE! I MEAN, YOU'RE HERE, YOU WERE A LIST. YOU'RE HERE! IF YOU CAN COME TRUE, WHAT ELSE CAN COME TRUE?



Two acting trophies are proudly displayed on a bookshelf, awarded for best actress in local amateur theatre productions. Baker's also an extra in PJ Hogan's latest movie, *Mental*, and has appeared in ABC miniseries *Mabo* and sci-fi drama *Terra Nova*. She's completed an online marketing diploma and several comedy workshops, regularly performing at open-mic nights around Brisbane. "I had a couple of really good nights, then I had a couple where I bombed. Trust me, give me a snake any day," Baker laughs.

When she put on her list a dream man – a tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed, successful, passionate Scotsman, who would drive a 4WD and could be a father of one to three children – she didn't think she'd find him. Two weeks later she met John.

"Honestly, he's more than I put on that list and he says the same about me," she says. "We've been together 18 months now, and he actually had 'Je t'aime Julia' tattooed on his arm in Paris. I said to him, you're my miracle! I mean, you're here, you were a list. You're here! If you can come true, what else can come true?"

★★★★

It's not *The Secret* and it may not be *The Answer* for everyone, but Baker swears by her extensive catalogue of motivational books. She is a particular fan of American life coaching phenomenon Anthony Robbins, and she plans to attend his firewalk event in Sydney next year.

"It's not just reading them, I actually did the things they told me to do and things started to happen," she says. "I just started attracting all these opportunities."

Baker dismisses common scepticism of self-help books and their teachings as "a shame".

"I don't do star signs, I don't do religion, I don't do hypnosis. This is scientific, it's not hocus-pocus," she argues.

"The subconscious brain is 94 per cent of your brain and the conscious brain is only 6 per cent, and yet most people don't know how to use the subconscious brain.

"By setting goals, visualising things, you're tapping into your subconscious brain and that makes you more focused without you knowing. If there's nothing scientific behind it, I'm not interested."

Baker says the most important things to remember are to focus on the positive, take the best from every situation and accept it will not always be easy.

Her goal now is to have a reality TV show based on her snake-catching adventures and the everyday characters she meets. To entice TV stations, she's shooting a trailer with local documentary filmmakers Flickchicks, starting this month.

It's on her list so stay tuned.

snakecatchers.com

Daring do: Baker the snake-catcher has four pet pythons, along with Buddy, the bearded dragon. She swears by her extensive catalogue of motivational books.

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