



TWO

OF US

STORY BY Rosamund Burton | PHOTOGRAPH BY Simon Schluter

Comedians Denise Scott (left), 61, and Judith Lucy, 48, admired each other's work from afar before collaborating on a project with colleague Lynda Gibson – and bonded for good when Gibson's cancer became terminal.

DENISE: We met in about 1990 at Le Joke, a tiny stand-up venue on top of the Last Laugh Theatre Restaurant in Melbourne's Collingwood. I was 34, and Judith about 21. We were both starting out in stand-up. She wore a skivvy and twirled a cabana sausage around her head, and was amazing from the get-go.

In 1999, I thought it would be great if my friend Lynda Gibson and I did a show with Judith, and she agreed. So we created *Comedy is Not Pretty* and became friends. When Lynda was in remission from ovarian cancer, in 2003, we did our second show, *Comedy is Still Not Pretty*. During the rehearsing, the cancer came back. That's when Judith and I became close, and also when the ludicrous nude suits came into being.

Lynda wrote about being on her death bed, and brought this into rehearsal. We hadn't even discussed that she was dying. I credit Judith, because she took that scene and made it really entertaining by having her and I fight over who was going to get the eulogy gig, because the funeral was going to be full of celebrities. It was funny and confronting. Come Lynda's actual funeral, Judith and I did a eulogy together.

For all the self-loathing and self-doubt we explore in our work, Judith is a very positive person. She really appreciates what she's got, which is love and great friendships.

We're both so non-assertive. If we were to verbally disagree I would run away and cry, because that's just not how we connect.

She has done a lot of work on resolving being adopted after only finding out about it aged 25, and also dealing with both her parents dying prematurely, and then meeting her birth mother. I don't see scars. I see real triumph.

Judith raves on about making a sandwich as if it's a five-course dégustation, but hasn't ever cooked. A mutual friend house-sat for Judith, and rang asking how to switch on her oven. "I wouldn't have a clue. I've never done it," Judith replied. She'd lived there for years.

Before a show, Judith gets this furrowed brow in the dressing room, and she's quiet and apologetic. Then I'll hear weird noises in another room: her voice warm-up. I put on make-up and have a glass of white wine, and am anxious, too. So there's this swirling tornado of anxiety.

Being protective of Judith, I was a bit suss

before I met [Judith's partner] Jared about him being a younger man. She had farewelled him in Melbourne, and when we landed at Adelaide he jumped up from behind a pot plant. That made me more suss. I thought, "What sort of man pops out from behind a pot plant?" He'd never seen Judith perform, let alone in a nude suit, but when he seemed really taken by Judith wearing a flesh-coloured leotard with pubic hair drawn on it, I knew he was a winner.

Working with Judith is such a joy. Plus, she brings in a really big crowd, so I'm with her for the money.

JUDITH: I moved to Melbourne when I was 20. I can't pinpoint when I met Scotty, but I recall seeing her on stage in the *Natural Normans*: Lynne McGranger, Sal Upton, Lynda Gibson and Denise. They were playing sleazy male lounge singers, singing disgusting, sexist songs. They were hilarious and Scotty stole every last line. When she and Lynda asked if I'd like to do a show with them, it blew my tiny mind, because I'd been a fan of theirs since then.

Comedy is Still Not Pretty was an incredibly difficult show, but it was also one we were all proud of. Scotty and I really bonded then. Once you've been through a production where you've seen someone the two of you love dying, it puts everything else in perspective.

That's when the nude suits were born. My birth mother said to me after seeing the show, "There's nothing wrong with your figure, but that's not doing you any favours."

We've got a lot in common in our experience of being female stand-ups. I've had a room full of soldiers turn on me and threaten to drop their pants. And the abuse: "You're ugly." "You're fat." "I wouldn't fuck you." We both came from that. Now we often do corporate gigs, where you'll be a surprise. A while back, a bunch of insurance people had decided the surprise was going to be Delta Goodrem, so the bone-crushing disappointment, when it was me, was palpable.

When we're putting together a show, we meet at 11am at one of our places, and by mid-day we're ready for lunch. We have a long lunch, and that's that day's work done. We spread that over months.

We love a lunch, and sometimes we'll do a double date with John and Jared. Scotty has been with John for more than 30 years, whereas soon Jared and I will have been together for four years, and if we hang in just a little bit longer this will be my longest relationship.

Scotty forgot a word on the opening night of *Disappointments*. She was just looking at me but I didn't realise it was a word she was looking for, so I'm spouting random sentences, hoping something will help. As we were talking about ageing and menopause, the audience just thought it was part of the show. If we had been doing Chekhov it might have been a problem.

Neither of us likes conflict. I'll often want one more drink, and Scotty's quite happy to sit and watch me drink it. We have a very easy relationship. I love Scotty to bits. She's top shelf. ■

The Disappointments tour kicks off at the Adelaide Fringe Festival on March 6 before moving to other states.

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