

Life

Go girl

*TV's Elaine Crowley
on finding her
way through grief
to happiness*



**Sunday
Independent**
19.07.26

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*Elaine Crowley on dealing with grief and depression, on how she
has found hope in adversity, and her joy at buying her first home*

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Crowley's courage

The day after we meet, Elaine Crowley is moving into her new apartment in Dublin 8. At the age of 48, she has become a homeowner for the first time. She has been planning the move, saving and watching her spending habits, for “ages”. “Buying when you’re on your own, it’s very difficult. Years and years of planning, because of course, I lived the life, so there were credit cards and loans and everything. So there was a plan,” she says briskly. “Clear off the credit cards, the loans. Try and save up for a bit. I did that, and then a few things happened in my personal life that kind of knocked me off the rails a little bit. So the hunt for the house was put on the back burner.”

Then she began again, saving up and getting mortgage approval.

“It was a nightmare because the prices had gone up a crazy amount. An actually frightening amount. I couldn’t believe it.”

It was, she reflects, one of the most stressful things she has ever done. “I was outbid left, right and centre. I was around for the Celtic Tiger as a news reporter and I just see there’s a kind of icky greediness going on that I hadn’t seen for quite a while, and it’s quite distasteful.”

“But I got to the stage where, as a renter your life is very precarious, and I was afraid my landlord would sell. Just as well I did because I’d literally just gone sale agreed and my landlord told me he was selling up. It was very serendipitous. I’m lucky in that way. And I’m lucky I could afford to buy on my own eventually, because it is a hard slog. It was a long road.”

After a number of years that presented huge stresses and challenges, of which more later, this is a new chapter for the Virgin Media presenter, who began her career with the channel, then TV3, in her early twenties, first in the news department, before presenting on Ireland AM, and *Midday* which became the *Elaine Show*.

This year has been good so far. Alongside buying her own home, she fronted a campaign for Vacious, the shapewear brand owned by Sinead O’Brien, @sineadscurvystyle on Instagram. “I wasn’t expected to be asked to do anything like this, especially when you’re in your forties, it was so nice to be asked, and it was quite liberating. Never in a million years would I have had the balls to do that a few years ago. The confidence is growing.” She also won Look of the Year at the 2026 VIP Style Awards.

“Now, I just feel I have a home. Because I haven’t felt like I’ve had my own home since my mother died. And I suppose where I was living, a lot of tragic things happened in my life while I was there, with the loss of my beloved mother, and my gorgeous nephew. He stayed there with me.”

Elaine’s mother Mary died in 2021. Elaine is the seventh of ten, a close family reared in Mallow, Cork, by schoolteacher



parents. “In 2021, Mam died, my show got axed and I had a breakup around then as well. A lot of crappy things happened around the same time, so that wasn’t great really in hindsight.”

Devastatingly, her 11-year-old nephew Ultan died in 2023, from cancer.

“I feel that need to have a new chapter now and a clean slate in more than one aspect of my life, and I’m embracing it. Really looking forward to it. So the actual physical part of having a home that’s not affected by anything else, only my life the way it is now, is quite liberating. I’m very grateful for it.”

It seems like an odd thing to say, but Elaine Crowley is something of an expert in grief, if a person can achieve such a status, having also lost her beloved father, Sean, when she was just 23 and he was 61.

“I get great solace from a poet called Donna Ashworth. It’s very clichéd but the price of love is heartbreak at the end of the day. Because either you die, or someone around you dies, and that’s just the way it is. I think we do shy away from grief a little bit too much. Like, I have no problem crying if I’m upset anymore, and sometimes it will kick me like a horse in the chest. Which it did recently enough on air actually. You think you’re over it... We were talking about child loss on air and someone very innocently mentioned my nephew. I’m fairly professional I think, but the tears just came into my eyes and I

Above: Television presenter Elaine Crowley in her new apartment
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Right: Elaine wearing Vacious shapewear for the campaign which she fronted

“*I’m going to be honest, for me to be happy is always going to be a struggle*”

actually had to take deep breaths and just power on. But I don’t think that’s a bad thing. I think trying to hide away from the pain we feel is only damaging to us. A good cry, like a real proper rocking sobbing cry, is cathartic.”

She still dreams of her father. “I was 23 when he died and that grief really killed me, because it was my first big blow. I’d like to say it gets easier. It doesn’t. But I think you learn to talk about it a lot more. I spoke to my mam an awful lot before she passed away. I spent so much time with her before she passed away, there was absolutely no regrets there, so it’s fine. She was older. When you’re older, it’s easier to say goodbye. She had a great old life. She was 80, almost 81, when she died and to be fair she’d say it herself, she was lucky to get that long,” she smiles.

“But other types of grief, the grief of my nephew, that’s a different beast altogether. I will probably start crying with you again now, because I can’t really think of him...” her voice breaks and she becomes momentarily indistinct.

“I think for all the family, a piece of all of us was irreversibly damaged that day and irreversibly broken. Justifiably so. It should be. When something like that happens to anyone, your life should never go on as normal. I think of him every day, I mourn him every day, I wish he was here every day. And so do all of my family and so do all of his friends. That sort of grief, I

don't think you should ever get over."

Having lost her father to liposarcoma, a rare and incurable cancer, and her close friend Emma Hannigan to breast cancer, she has been a big supporter of cancer charities.

"People do get uncomfortable when you talk about grief, but it shouldn't... not should, 'should' is an awful word, I hate that as well – but if you have someone in your life that's grieving and if they cry with you, that's a good thing. You don't have to try and change the subject. It's a good thing. So I very openly talk about it."

Alongside the loss of her nephew and her mother, the last decade or so has seen Elaine undergo her own health issues.

"I'd be basically like that duck in the water with the legs going mad underneath and on the surface it looks lovely. I mean I look at my Instagram account, and you know what, I nearly vomit myself. It looks great, there am I all dolled up, fabulous hair and makeup, and it's, for f**k's sake Elaine, would you cop on, you don't look like that all the time. But I think I treat it now like a photo album. We put things in a photo album that we like. I don't want to put me crying in a corner in a photo album. And I don't like that sort of...I don't like showing my knickers too much in public. Well, maybe I have in the past," she grins, "but I'm not going to do it anymore."

When I ask how she is now, she pauses for a minute, then says firmly, "I'm going to be honest, for me to be happy is always going to be a struggle. And there are still times when... I'm going to be honest right, where I don't want to be around. I don't see the point in this existence that we have, and I could lie and tell you everything is hunky-dory, but I don't. And that's unfortunately a side of the lifelong depression I have had. I will have a major depressive disorder my entire life. I will always have it but I know in my brain that it will go away now," she says of the realisation that an episode will pass. "But it still does happen and it's still quite difficult. I just have to come to terms with my life the way it is."

Part of what she has had to come to terms with is not having had children, largely a result of having gone into early menopause when she was 33.

"I couldn't have children and that was a grief in itself that I never acknowledged. Going into early menopause I think was something that I never truly came to terms with at all. I never talked about it, because I was so ashamed."

"I could have had [children] younger but... I was never in a relationship in a position to have children." She had one pregnancy which didn't last, "it was like a blip and gone, do you know what I mean?"

Elaine was in work when she received her test results around her fertility levels. "They called it 'early ovarian failure' for want of a better phrase. I have a sister who was a fertility nurse. I didn't know what it meant and I rang her, and she said, 'oh no, Lainey, I'm so sorry'. I was on the news desk at the time. I thought, 'OK that's not good', and I kind of shoved it in a drawer, and put it away, didn't think about it anymore and kind of wrote myself »



I've been so good at masking over the years. Now, I make no apologies. If I don't want to go to something, I don't go to it



Crowley's courage



There was a kind of whole perfect storm, or an imperfect storm, of everything physically and mentally wrong

» off as ever having any sort of normal relationship for a long while.”

She can see now that it affected her more deeply than she realised at the time.

“Because we’re brought up to think in a very linear fashion. Like in my family, very normal, traditional parents, teachers: you grow up, you go to college, you meet someone, you marry, you have kids, blah blah blah,” she cites the list in a sing-song voice. “And so the cycle continues. And the rug was kind of pulled out from under me then in more ways than one.

“I kind of felt very worthless after that for a lot of years, because you know, you’re in your early to mid-thirties, these are the times when you’re looking for a relationship maybe to be with somebody, not to settle down with but to share your life with. And I made some very poor decisions regarding my personal life,” she smiles through a grimace. “Because I didn’t value myself very much, so I didn’t think anyone else would value me. I suppose I felt like I was defective goods.”

She traces some of her major episodes now to times in her life when she was undergoing major hormonal changes – puberty and early menopause, but also to the ADHD that was only diagnosed in her thirties.

“Most women go through life not realising they’re ADHD. I was in the thick of my menopause diagnosis when my psychiatrist actually said to me, ‘OK, we’re trying to deal with your major depressive disorder, we seem to have sorted that out a bit, let’s talk about your ADHD now.’ I was like, ‘what ADHD?’ The diagnosis came when Elaine was in her late thirties, early forties.

“I didn’t take much notice of it [until] recently,” she says thoughtfully. She tried the medication but did not find it helpful, so stopped. Now, with the conversation online having taken off, she finds herself recognising her own experience in what she reads, thinking, ‘hang on a second, that makes so much sense’. “So I’m being a bit more forgiving towards myself now.

“I think a lot of it is linked to the undiagnosed ADHD,” she says, of her mental health challenges, describing discovering and identifying with Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria, something common in a person with ADHD.

“Someone might say something horrible about you, and to you, it’s water off a dog’s back but for me, it would wound me deeply and I will dwell on it for weeks and weeks and weeks. That’s



why I’m being more forgiving of myself now because I think that whole thing was very much linked. ADHD, in women particularly, and major depressive disorder are very interlinked.”

She laughs slightly bashfully, and says while it sounds like there is “loads of stuff wrong with me... it’s all tied into... the mental and the physical was all in one, and they both made the other one worse. Now I’m the ripe old age of 48, I’m bloody delighted to be so, might I add. How I kept working the way I did through that period, because I was presenting and producing at that time, I will never know how I did it, looking back. How I actually did it in one piece.”

Off camera, she was constantly exhausted. Coping with things in the wrong way.

“As in, if I ever got too overwhelmed ... ‘yeah, I’ll drink that’,” she says, adopting

chirpy tones. She doesn’t drink white wine anymore because before her mother died, she made Elaine promise she would give it up.

“For me anyway it became a default coping mechanism, which isn’t good. It wasn’t even alcohol, it was just everything. There was a kind of a whole perfect storm, or an imperfect storm, of everything physically and mentally wrong with me at once. And when you do go into early menopause, or any sort of menopause on top of that, everything just kind of f**ked up at the same time in my body and my mind. Which was very traumatic.”

She laughs and says she forgot to mention she was also diagnosed with PCOS.

“My poor endocrinologist was saying you’re a bit of an anomaly. I wasn’t supposed to have menopause until late,



I’ve just given myself a massive kick up the arse to be grateful. Working limbs, my skin is working, and getting older, it’s a privilege