

best BITS

You seem full of beans, considering all the reports of your 50th birthday...

I know. I had two weeks of absolute non-stop partying in Thailand, but since I've got back everyone's said how well I look. I don't know how I've managed it. The last day of the holiday, I said to my friends, "I'm so glad this is over. If I'd stayed another day, I'd be going back in a coffin." I think my new, shorter haircut has probably made a big difference.

Talk us through the big day of your 50th...

I'd planned everything down to the nth degree. I'd arranged river transport for everybody to be picked up on the Sathom pier in Bangkok. I was amazed that everybody turned up on time. Mind, I did send quite a threatening e-mail telling everyone not to ruin my birthday by being late! I was really touched, though, by how much effort everybody made. They all dressed up—the girls all had hair extensions and done their nails, and bought new dresses. It was a real occasion.

Did Mark have a birthday surprise for you?

He made a speech. He's never

done a speech before in his whole life. The whole idea of it terrifies him, so that was really special. He told me afterwards that he thought he was going to be sick, but he was really pleased with himself that he did it in front of everybody.

It wasn't meant to be a night of surprises, though.

It was just meant to be fun and it was. We had a sit-down dinner, then a disco and Karaoke. I did my speciality, which is *Holiday* by Madonna, and Denise Welch did her usual medley of her one hit, as she calls it—the song from *Soldier Soldier*. Tim Healy sang *Have We Told You Lately That We Love You?* which was really lovely.

Did Mark get you anything special?

No, I told him not to. But he did. He bought me a Smythson of Bond Street travel wallet. It's a very posh upmarket leather company that does notebooks and paper. He got me a little clutch bag for

travelling. It's bright electric-blue with a snakeskin effect.

Who was the last woman standing?

I wasn't the most drunk, by any means. I could still talk at 2am, whatever Sherrie Hewson says! I know that she's lying—I have video evidence. Denise stayed up till 7am. I would have been disappointed if she'd gone to bed

any earlier than that. And she was up the next day. I saw her heading off down the river on a boat as we were on our way to the airport!

How is 50 different to 40 for you?

I wasn't in a particularly good place when I was 40. I wasn't doing much work-wise. *Loose Women* had just started, but when I turned 40 I went a bit mad, partying. I had a bit of money because I'd sold the flat. For

my 40th, 40 of us went to Stringfellows for dinner and I ended up pole-dancing with Peter Stringfellow. It was a good night, though, and I had all my mates there. But, touch wood, life is getting better and better. I don't want to turn the clock back.

What have you learnt about yourself writing your autobiography?

Loads. The only thing I was dreading was writing about when my mum died in 2003. Every time I read that chapter it's a nightmare. It's harrowing for me, even on the 10th read. It puts me back there. When someone dies, you get used to it over time and stop thinking about the bad bit and just focus on how they used to be. So going through it all again makes it almost feel like it happened yesterday.

Did you read Chris Evans' (her first husband) autobiography?

I read bits of it. I wanted to see if I even got a mention. He used to

'GETTING MARRIED COULD BE A DISASTER

Loose Women's Carol McGiffin talks exclusively to best about her massive 50th birthday bash in Bangkok, her forthcoming autobiography and her wedding hopes and fears...

In a photo from her personal collection, having her cake and eating it, with fiancé Mark





Carol with two of her fellow Loose Women, Sherrie and Jackie
AWARDS 2009

mention me on his radio show for comedy purposes. Then when he did *Desert Island Discs*, he didn't even acknowledge my existence. But I'm in it.

How is your autobiography going to be different to Lynda Bellingham's and Denise Welch's?

It's not the standard kind of autobiography. It's more a series of stories and events from my life. It's not going to be a misery memoir like Lynda's or Denise's because there hasn't been that much misery in my life. The only miserable bits are losing my mum and, I suppose, the Chris episodes. But there's nothing as bad as the terrible time Lynda had in her marriage, and Denise had with her depression.

Now you've done your 50th celebrations, is getting married top of your 'to do' list this year?

Yup, that's the next plan. But I haven't even started. We don't even know where we want to do it. Or how or who with.

Who's it more stressful for?

It's stressful for Mark because he just doesn't like being the focus of all the attention. I said to him you

can't get away from it. We've discussed all the options—go away, take a few people, take nobody, do it in the UK.

There are a lot of people who would genuinely want to be there, though. Not for showbiz reasons, but because it's a bit of a love story. And it so wasn't on the cards for me. Jackie Brambles would be heartbroken if we got married and she wasn't there. People actually want to be there to see it happen, so it would be really mean not to let them.

So it sounds like a big 'do'?

I'd like quite to have a big one. But there's no hurry.

What, for you, are the main wedding worries?

The problem with having a big wedding is that there is too much potential for disaster. That's what's putting me off a bit. It might rain, people might not turn up, the photos might not come out. There's so much danger with weddings.

Would you have a wedding planner?

I don't believe in wedding planners. I organised my 50th birthday all by myself—every single detail, at the same time as

CONTINUED OVERLEAF ►

best BITS

'Maybe I was an angry old woman when I didn't have Mark'

◀ CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

writing my book and working on *Loose Women*. I even flew out to Thailand for three nights just to finalise everything and pay the deposits. I don't want to have anyone else organising my stuff. Sorry, *our* stuff (laughs). I keep doing that! I can't help it. I've been on my own so long that everything's about *me*. But I'm getting better!

Are wedding presents important?

No, don't want 'em. I hate wedding presents. I hate wedding lists. I'm 50. We've got everything we need. I've got a kettle and a toaster and all the furniture I need to sit on!

How do you expect marriage to be different second time around?

I'll marry the right person. That's all there is to it. That first marriage couldn't have been more wrong. I wasn't working then, so I was doing the washing, ironing, cleaning and cooking, although I didn't mind doing wifey things. Getting up in the morning and not having to go to work and just walking the dog was quite

nice. But then I ended up being isolated and that's not healthy – especially when your husband is either working or sleeping. That's when you tend to go a bit mad. But I don't mind being called 'The Wife'.

Will you be Carol Cassidy (Mark's surname)?

In some respects, yes, but not professionally. It does sound a bit like a Country and Western singer – Carol Cassidy!

Will you invite everyone from *Loose Women* to the wedding?

I did for my 50th. I invited everyone who works on

the show. About seven people from *Loose Women* came.

Were you surprised when Jane was quoted as saying she's leaving *Loose Women*?

She's not leaving. She's having a month off 'cos she's knackered and she's on tour. Well, I hope she's not leaving. No, she's not leaving. Shut up! I hope no one leaves. I'm happy with the women we've got.

Kate Thornton's been given quite a lot of stick on forums saying she doesn't reveal enough of herself to be a *Loose Woman*. What do you think?

I'm not responding to those people. They're just bullies. All of those people who go onto those sites and think they can control what happens on TV, when the majority are actually quite happy with it, make me cross. Kate's part of the team. She has given a lot away about herself, she's a really good presenter. She is a *Loose Woman*. If people don't like her, then they'll just have to get used to it because she's definitely not going anywhere.

What do you say to people who reckon you're boring now you've settled down?

I have grown up a bit recently. That's why I'm trying out the sensible look in your photo-shoot. But those people can just sod off. Why have people got a problem with me being happy? Maybe I was an angry old woman when I didn't have Mark, but why can't people just be happy for me? I still have a moan. I was

happy being single, but I wasn't determined to be single my whole life. People are bananas. They're saying the same about Simon Cowell.

So you don't think Simon will lose his mojo if he married and settles down?

So what if he does? It's nice to be nice, isn't it? I don't think he'll change professionally. Simon's job is to tell people that they're rubbish when they are.

So is knicker-flashing a thing of the past with the new loved-up Carol?

Who knows? Never say never is what I say...

WORKING THE SENSIBLE LOOK AT 50

FEATURE: PAUL SIMPER. PHOTOS: CAROL MCGIFFIN; NEIL COOPER; ALPHA; GETTY. HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SARAH JANE GREEN



Carol says Chris wasn't the right person for her