

The *Idol* winner's ready to embark on an emotional new journey

The hurt and pain still run deep, bringing her close to tears.

Casey Donovan doesn't like talking about her estranged dad, or the constant bullying that made her teenage years a misery.

Sad and confused, she could never understand what she'd done wrong, as her divorced parents fought long-running battles through the courts.

Casey, 21, became an oversized misfit who couldn't buy school skirts large enough and wore a swimsuit under her uniform every day, in a desperate bid to hide her wobbly bits.

'It's heartbreaking to have that when you're growing up,' admits the 2004 *Australian Idol* winner, who has at last learnt to embrace her curves after years of self-hatred and depression.

'I was continually being let down, and I got hurt. I had no sense of self-worth, and I guess that's why I packed on so

many kilos. There's always been this little voice in my head telling me that I'm no good.

'So this isn't s***** food fat,' she smiles, gesturing at her generous size 26, 141kg figure.

'This is emotional weight I'm carrying because I seem to get kicked every time I'm down, and that's what I've had to deal with pretty much my entire life.'

BIG AND BEAUTIFUL

Today, with the help of her life coach Tricia Brennan, Casey now understands exactly why she is overweight.

Newly self-confident, she's even become a poster girl for larger women with her Big, Beautiful And Sexy online support group – which attracted nearly 2000 fans in its first weeks.

'It was one of those days when I just thought: "Bugger it, let's state the obvious!"' Loud laughter. 'I'm big, I'm beautiful and I'm sexy. Why should I hide it?'

MY 2010 GOALS

- To shed four dress sizes – from a size 26 to a size 18.
- To eat less, exercise more and generally get healthier. 'One day maybe I'll be able to crack the splits, who knows?' she jokes.
- To continue to help other women through her Big, Beautiful And Sexy support group, accessed via her Facebook page. 'I want to pave the way for all those people who let their size hold them back,' she vows.
- To work towards her own TV show – 'My show would be so wrong, it's right' – and her own fashion label offering wearable, affordable clothes for all shapes and sizes. 'They're two of my goals in life, and I'm only young.'
- To continue making sweet music and furthering her acting career as well.



With the help of her life coach Tricia Brennan, Casey hopes to achieve the 'Strength', 'Courage' and 'Wisdom' tattooed on her arm.



Casey's come a long way from the 16-year-old who won *Australian Idol* in 2004.

So it's ironic that the *Women Of Soul* star now has to lose weight – she aims to shed four dress sizes – on doctor's orders.

SUPPORT GROUP

Casey has tried many times before, and failed. Not even Iron Man Guy Leech, who trained her for a while, could shift the flab that is, in part, a legacy of polycystic ovarian syndrome.

But this time the 21-year-old reckons hard-won self-knowledge will help her succeed, with support from her mum and stepfather, Tracy and Norm Axford, and life coach Tricia.

'Look, I'll never be a stick insect,' grins Casey, who's about to start a strenuous seven-month tour with *The Sapphires* stage show. 'I want to get down to a comfortable size 18, but that's still big, beautiful and sexy. I will always have boobs and hips!'

Eating more sensibly – and not punishing herself by giving up if she has a relapse – is part of the program worked out with her life coach. So too is exercise.

'I've even been riding a bike again,' she chuckles. 'I was stressing out – is this thing going to give way under me, are the tyres going to pop? But it's fun.'

'All this is very much health-related. It's about getting fitter, having more energy and cutting the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. ▶

'Am I going to stay the way I am now and get all those illnesses? I don't think so.

'In the past people in the music industry kept pushing me to lose weight and I just rebelled. I didn't want to play the game,' she explains.

'Now I'm happy with who I am, although it's taken a long time to get here. I'm a stronger person because of everything that's happened to me.'

DEVASTATING LOW

It's been an uphill battle. The astonishing high of Casey's Sydney Opera House *Idol* victory, as an inarticulate, grungy 16-year-old, rapidly gave way to some equally devastating lows.

Dropped by record company Sony BMG after only one album, she was described by outspoken *Idol* judge Ian 'Dicko' Dickson as being a 'horrible disaster'.

And then the long-running feud with her father Merv Donovan became public when it ended up in court after a violent incident at one of her gigs.

DOING IT FOR ME

The sad saga fuels her vocals, but a determined Casey vows that it will no longer shape her life.

'I have had the last year to really sort my head out and discover who I am. I've learnt not to put myself down, but to love every bit of myself as much as I love other people.

'I'm starting an emotional journey, as well as putting the right things in my mouth every day and exercising, and keeping a regular lifestyle.'

She pauses, and pulls a wry face: 'I know I've failed before. But the difference this time is that I can see the end. This time I'm really doing it, I am doing it for me.

'If I had to bet on it, I'd say there's a 95 to 98 per cent certainty that I will be successful!' **NI**

By Jenny Brown

Photos: Nigel Wright



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