



DARING TO *Win*

TV host Lana Coc-Kroft tells Sarah Lang why she never diets, how exercise makes her a better parent, and why she says yes to the things that terrify her

PHOTOGRAPHS EMMA BASS

A FEW BEADS OF SWEAT shine on Lana Coc-Kroft's forehead. She's just finished her morning gym workout and has dashed home in her exercise gear to meet me at her Westmere, Auckland home.

Overlooking the harbour, it's a comfy but not flashy family home, with a playground and small vege garden clinging onto the backyard slope. Her "inspirational" property-manager husband Steve is out working on a renovation site; sons Damien, nine, and Bronson, seven, are at school; and two-year-old Tyler, who's usually "stuck to her mum like glue", is at a friend's house.

While being mum to three kids is a fulltime job in itself, Lana still squeezes in plenty of work projects. Since she was propelled to household-name status

wearing pretty frocks and turning the blocks on game show *Wheel of Fortune* (in 1988 and then 1991-96), the former Miss New Zealand has dipped her toes in radio (as 91ZM host for five years) and presented a bevy of TV shows including *Mountain Dew On The Edge*, *Sportscafé*, *Can You Hackett*, *Test The Nation*, *Across The Ditch* and *On the Road*. Currently she's filming new challenge-based show *Who Dares Wins* (which goes on air in February); fronts occasional ad campaigns; is a sought-after MC and speaker; and lends her name, voice, face, time and energies to a mind-boggling number of charities.

And Lana's reputation as one of our fittest TV personalities – likely spawned by three years hosting adventure sports show *Mountain Dew On The Edge* and →





THIS PAGE: Lana's lifetime philosophy has been to jump in and go for it. She partly attributes this attitude to being the youngest child, learning by example.

a decade co-hosting sports-synopsis-show *Sportscafé* – is hard-earned. “I think there’s a preconception that I’m into sports,” she grins. “People say ‘Oh didn’t you play something for New Zealand?’ No, but she admits that over the years that firm, fit body hasn’t maintained itself.

Pulling back from her longtime hobby basketball recently, the 41-year-old now prefers whipping off to a Les Mills class three times a week after dropping the boys off at school. “I find it motivating to work out to loud music in a group. And it’s not so easy to skive off!”

But she’s not one of those solely gym-sculpted types. As well as jogging (“And I use that term loosely”), come summer you’ll find her out and about with the kids.

“I’m not manic about it but I do like to look after my body. Maybe it’s just a part of growing older. If you don’t look after your body then it won’t look after you later.

“For me it’s part of my philosophy that you can have it all: Eat great food and drink wine, but you pay a price

Plus it gives her a bit of ‘me time’, something she doesn’t get a lot of. Up at 6am for the family’s morning-catch-up session, she drops the boys at school, heads to the gym, and then spends the afternoon with Tyler.

When Steve takes a break from work to fulfil his dad duties, Lana gets a fleeting work window. “I don’t work all the time, so when I do it I love it and I work really hard.”

Come 3pm it’s time to ferry the boys to after-school activities before heading home to throw together dinner. In the evenings she might read; most nights she’s in bed by 9.30pm “and the day’s gone, the month’s gone. I do get really tired because my kids have all been insomniacs. If I don’t get my sleep it sort of takes the fun out of me.”

Although she’s not exactly burning the midnight oil any more, Lana still likes to get glammed up to go out. “I like to feel hot. I think it’s important for women to expose at least one part of their body to feel hot. Whether it’s your chest, legs or arms, something’s got to come out.”

I’M WORKING ON TV2 SURROUNDED BY YOUNG SLIM WOMEN... NOT THAT I REALLY GIVE A FAT RAT’S HOW OTHER WOMEN LOOK! BUT MY ROUTINE MAKES ME FEEL GOOD

if you’re not sweating it out. That’s part of my wider philosophy: you need to get the right balance with your commitment to your family, to yourself, to your community, to your work – if you give too much to one and not enough to another, things start to go wrong.

“I exercise because it makes me a better mother. I find I’m a lot calmer when I have a physical release. And I believe in leading by example as I want my children to be fit and healthy and find exercise fun.”

Weight’s not something that concerns her. “Whether you lose 5kg on a diet or put on 5kg over a hard winter, it all balances out and you learn your body is happy at a certain weight. I haven’t had a set of scales for 20 years.

“I don’t think being skinny’s good and I don’t think being overweight’s good.” She’s happy in between. While she’s never really had to watch her weight, Lana’s certainly not overly indulgent: She doesn’t touch coffee, limits any junk food to the morning so she can burn it off later, and usually has a carb-based lunch and a salad or vege-based dinner. When she needs to shape up for a show, she cuts out potatoes, most bread and her daily chocolate bar – and ups the gym to five times a week.

“I naturally carry a bit more weight than I did 20 years ago, and I’m working on TV2 surrounded by young, slim women... not that I really give a fat rat’s how other women look! But my routine makes me feel good.”

But often her trademark smart-casual style is shelved for slop-around-with-the-kids clothes.

The youngest of four children (her name’s an amalgamation of her parents names Anne and Lance), Lana has decided three children is her limit. She has nothing but admiration for mothers who also work nine to five. “Sometimes you just wonder how people do it. I mean, we have a really gifted life, where I don’t work every week of the year and Steve doesn’t either.”

Lana’s about to get her very first, part-time nanny to look after Tyler during four weeks of *Who Dares Wins* filming. And she’s stressing about leaving her.

“Looking at my young daughter, I’ve started to reassess myself and what’s made me ‘me’, why I’ve not often said no and why I like to do heaps of things. I think when you’re the last child, surrounded by older people, you’re exposed to a lot more and you believe you can do it all.”

Including a boot camp. Late 2008, Lana was put through her paces with 120 other advertising-and-media types for a Les Mills Bootcamp. They trained from 6.30am-7.30am, three days a week for four weeks. As Lana was already fit, it wasn’t too much of a trial. “It was only an hour – if we’d had to stay there from 6am to 6pm I would’ve left, because I don’t take discipline very well. Which is ironic because I hand it out in bucket loads!” she laughs.



But she wasn't doing it for fitness. It was to fund raise (\$8000) for the Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust, which runs Westpac Rescue Helicopter – a 365-days-a-year air ambulance and search-and-rescue service. Managed by her brother-in-law, the trust “gets by on the bones of their arse and they're used all the time: car accidents, people stranded in boating, transporting sick children. You don't know when you're going to need them but, boy, when you do you wouldn't want anyone else.

“If I hadn't been medivaced [transported by air ambulance] I would have died. There's absolutely no doubt in anyone's mind.” You'll likely remember the headlines from April 2004 when, while filming *Celebrity Treasure Island* in Fiji, Lana was struck down by rare blood-poisoning disease *Streptococcal A* toxic-shock syndrome, a usually fatal illness. Initially, she'd thought it was just an infection from a coral cut.

“I first knew something was wrong when I got really emotional and wanted to phone home but couldn't remember my mum's number.” Beginning to panic, she deteriorated very quickly. “Within 24 hours I had enormous temperatures, I couldn't walk, and the pain's like someone's taken a sledgehammer to all your bones. I'd been like that for three days by the time they finally got me back...” she trails off and pauses, lost for words.

“I can't articulate it. I knew I was dying, yeah. I just played a counting game, trying to get through minutes at a time.

“By the time I got to hospital I was just a shell really – my eyes might have been open but no one was home. I was basically dead,” says Lana, whose gratitude for the Auckland Hospital doctors almost overwhelms her. “There's no doubt they kept me alive.” Worried if she fell unconscious she'd never wake up, doctors tried to keep her conscious but she slid into a coma. Amazingly though, after 14 days in a coma, she started to recover as protective antibodies began launching an immune response and her organs began rejuvenating.

While relieved to be alive and able to mother her boys, turning from a strong, healthy person into a weakling was a shock. “Being skinny, which I'd always thought I'd wanted to be, was hideous. Being feeble was terrifying. I couldn't pick up or protect my children. I couldn't protect myself. I couldn't walk. I couldn't do anything. I cried a lot. And to Steve's credit and his strength, he just kept saying ‘just take it one day at a time, babe’.”

Soon, Lana started setting her own goals and pushing herself, she cut the normal rehabilitation time in half and was fighting fit again in around six months.

“Now I look back and I think, *how did I get through that?* But you just do.” The silver lining for Lana is that



her blood was used to generate a serum which will help toxic-shock sufferers survive the critical first 14 days.

While nowadays it “feels like it never happened”, the near-fatal illness still reminds her that every day counts.

So after her recovery, and Tyler's birth in 2006, Lana took a two-year sabbatical from work. “I needed it, because I'd just had a really intense, consuming couple of years.” As well as the illness, there was that unsubstantiated rumour of involvement in the 2006 celebrity drugs scandal, which Lana doesn't want to discuss again. All she says is she loved time out – for a period. “But then it just did my head in! I really like to work, to contribute to the household, to be stimulated.” Especially now that “a bit of credibility has come with a bit of maturity”, and TV's no longer a ladder she's scaling.

Following post-school jobs as a customer services officer in a bank, a car yard PA, and a model, Lana's never had a moment's regret about “jumping when the doors opened” into her 20-year broadcasting career.

“I'm lucky. I never thought I'd get to go down this road,” she admits.

But from diving with sharks on *Mountain Dew* through to confronting stage fright, Lana makes a point of stepping outside her comfort zone – both on- and off-screen.

“You've got to stimulate yourself, and say yes to things that frighten you because otherwise you get stuck in a rut. Like I tell my kids, it's so easy to be a spectator. But my philosophy is it's much more fun to get out there and give it a go.” ■