

EXCLUSIVE

The Road to Happiness

Jenny McCarthy talks about how self-love
led her to an unexpected beginning

Words by Vanessa Pascale
Photo Credit: Anthony Tahlier

"I love Miami. Can I start with that? I can tell you that it's special to me because Evan was conceived in Miami. On *that* note." She smiles.

It's these off-the-cuff, intimate comments that are Jenny McCarthy hallmarks. We're not sure what she may reveal next and that's what we love about her. The 1994 Playmate of the Year returned to the pages of *Playboy* (her 6th cover) —the publication that activated her career in entertainment— two years ago to show that this blonde bombshell is hotter than ever. But it's not just her stunning exterior she's revealing; Jenny is equally into baring her soul in her *New York Times* bestselling books --and we wait, with bated breath, for her to let it all out 'cause we simply can't get enough.

In high spirits today, Jenny is wearing that just-married glow as it's barely a week after the blue-eyed actress-activist-host-author wed Donnie Wahlberg. The intimate wedding took place in St. Charles, Illinois about an hour from where Jenny grew up. The bride, in a white strapless Ines Di Santo gown, maraschino-cherry-red lips and curled tresses, channeled Rita Hayworth-ish glamour. An occasion fraught with magical moments, Jenny's fondest ones include her 12-year-old son, Evan.

Right before Evan was to walk her down the aisle, he goes missing. "Evan is on the lobby couch," Jenny explains. She walks over to the sofa behind us and sprawls out. "Like this. And you hear, dun-dun-dun, and I'm going, 'Evan, get up now!' Evan's like, uh. There was this point, we go around this tree, and I spot him and he goes like this [puts his arm out for her to take] and I just kinda lost it. He looked so proud... Afterwards, he hugged me and said, 'I'm so happy for you, Mom. I cried tears of joy when he said, 'Kiss the bride.'" Jenny was especially touched when Evan gave an unexpected toast welcoming Donnie to the family, which elicited tears from everyone in the room. "The great thing about Evan is that he just speaks through his heart. There's nothing manufactured. He'll also tell you like it is. He tells me that I'm aging quickly," she laughs.

Jenny has a great deal to beam about. Her release, this August, from her one-season stint on ABC's *The View* freed her up for a full-time spot on SiriusXM Radio's roster doing her *Dirty, Sexy, Funny* show that premiered in a limited-run over summer. Set to take to the airwaves this fall with a 2-hour live talk show, --five days a week from 10 in the morning till noon-- Jenny can't wait to get started. "I'm craving it! I wanna go over there now. [Sirius said] 'We want Howard to roll out right into your show, and we're going to really get behind you, and let you say whatever you want,' which for me," she lets out a sigh of relief, "is such pure joy to not be censored."

Dirty, Sexy, Funny originated as a comedy tour, but has evolved into a

burgeoning brand. Three years ago, Jenny noticed a dearth of female comedy troupes, so she traversed the country to recruit the funniest, rawest female comedienne, and formed a troupe. From there, Jenny took the idea to Sirius radio, where it has found a permanent home. And now, A&E (home of Donnie's reality show, *Wahlburgers*) is getting in on the DSF action with an upcoming docuseries. "While I've been on tour with them, the things that have been happening behind-the-scenes, I can't write," Jenny says elatedly. "My dad has been on tour with us selling merchandise and I've got Paula Bell...who is trying to sleep with my dad... It's endless. Then there's me, I get stage fright."

What has been the biggest surprise in your life thus far?

"Let me get real with myself."

She takes a few moments to reflect. "I can't believe I am as happy as I am today.

If you cut to a few years ago, when I was single, anyone who's been single for more than a year, you know there's this loneliness that you can't really describe.

You just want to share your life with somebody so badly.

And everyday tasks or everyday accomplishments don't seem like accomplishments because you have no one to share it with or get romantic with. I'm not including the incredible part of being a mother --that has been wonderful. Now that everything has happened the way I'd hoped, where I have the career of my choice, I have a husband that loves me incredibly and he's so good to my son. I love his kids. And then having Evan be, I just dropped him off at school, where he is, doing so well, I just have such gratitude for the present moment. That's my biggest wow.

Wow, I got here at 41, and not 71, realizing what's important in life."

It comes as a surprise that Jenny gets a bout of the nerves before taking the stage, especially when you take into account the number of events [*Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve*] and shows [*Singled Out*, *Two & a Half Men*, *The View*] she's performed live on. She tells me that being on tour, and meditating, has helped her work through this fear --which at one point induced vomiting. Jenny likes to tackle issues head-on, and welcomes the chance to better herself.

While some might fear getting caught in the self-help section at the book store, Jenny is very open about investing in these guides, highly recommending works by self-inquiry guru, Byron Katie. Jenny has done a wealth of research and interviews for her own tomes --which cover topics on everything from motherhood to relationships--to provide her readers with insightful and entertaining stories they can learn from. *Stirring the Pot* is her most recent book, where she offers up

personal anecdotes and astute tips on *getting what you want out of life* --as the subtitle reads. As a reflective author, Jenny is candid about her experiences and what she's taken away from each. A significant part of Jenny's likeability is her fearlessness in addressing subjects that many women would be uncomfortable letting others know are issues for them, like insecurity.

At the zenith of her *Playboy* fame, Jenny's self-esteem was considerably low. Her book, *Love, Lust & Faking It* brings these feelings to light when she references the time she dated Teletubby: a chubby, hairy guy with a list of shortcomings, because he was "safe." The last straw came when Teletubby flips out over the bagels she ordered from room service (he doesn't eat bagels, how dare she?) in The Four Seasons' suite she treated him to. "Isn't that crazy?" asks Jenny when I recount the incident. "I realize a lot of girls do this, too. You'll date losers, so you feel better about yourself. Finally I was like, I'm going to raise my bar and that's how I ended *Love, Lust & Faking It*. I kept *wanting* guys that were better, but I realized I had to better myself in order to attract them." And that's what Jenny has done over the past decade, worked on self-love and bolstering her self-esteem.

Now 41, Jenny has a few words of advice for her 25-year-old self. "I would tell myself to do things that show that you love yourself. When you do that, that's when your self-worth goes up and that's when you attract better people... I think when people become famous, or if they're sexually desired, it does something to their self-worth, believe it or not, because you're thinking this isn't going to last. Look at Marilyn Monroe, painfully insecure. Look at the best pin-up, Anna Nicole Smith... A lot of people self-destruct and I did not want that to happen to me. I wanted to love myself as I got older, more and more. Now I'm teaching Evan that. 'Who do you love the most?!' she asks, adopting a cheerleader's pitch. "He's like, 'I love myself the most!' I'm like, 'that's right!' But not in an egoic way," she assures me.

Jenny's cell phone rings. "Now you have to deal with my fiancé. (She means husband.) I hope he's being recorded." She smiles mischievously.

"Beh-beh!" She turns her phone screen toward me so that I can see Donnie's face via FaceTime. "You're being recorded," she warns, "Do you want to say hi?" she asks him.

He blows her a succession of kisses.

"Hi. Don't you love my baby's hat?" Donnie asks me. [Donnie brings up the hat a few more times. He loves the hat.]

"I literally looked in the mirror and was like, 'Oh no! Let me put a hat on.'"

"I am just loving this whole swag right now," he continues. [In addition to the burgundy fedora beset by a sparkly band, Jenny is wearing a white shirt imprinted with a black zebra-like pattern, dark blue jeans and black blazer.]

"I got swag, Beh-beh."

"I know you do, Mama."

"I hardly ever have swag." She laughs. "I'm in like PMS sweatpants constantly. Ahhh, look at your ring. I love it," Jenny coos, when his wedding ring appears in the shot.

This is just a snippet of their conversation, which was inundated with I-love-you-so-muchs. The call ends when Donnie is wanted on set (he is presently starring in CBS' *Blue Bloods*). It's possible their chat might have continued throughout our interview if he didn't have somewhere to be. Like teenagers in love, both were blissfully oblivious to the fact that I, a complete stranger, was privy to their PDA fest.

But I get it. When it has taken some time to get to *this* euphoric place, you drink in every ounce of it. I comment on her 10-carat yellow sapphire engagement ring. It is stunning. She extends her hand to show me her wedding band. "He has a matching one. He got me two. This is the matching one. It's got our initials, a J and there's a D and there's a heart. I like sapphires instead of diamonds, so I made sure he got me these. This is the backup wedding band..." Her gaze lingers on the sparkling jewels. "As you can tell, he's very, very compassionate and sweet. And I'm happy," she breathes dreamily. I can tell, I say to her. And I mean it.





How did you know Donnie was “The One”?

“Donnie was someone I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with because he knew how to do the work. He kinda evolved through the years like I have -- a very similar path.

We both got pretty famous at an early age. We both used that money to support our family, kinda went broke and rebuilt ourselves and stayed relevant through the years from hard work and dedication, but also self-improvement. A lot of people in this business go on and on and become so egoic. One thing I noticed about him is that he was self-aware and that’s what I really loved.

He worked on self-love, and if you love yourself then you can love someone else completely. He was the first guy I met that I went, Wow, he’s spiritually evolving where I want to be and go.”

How did Jenny finally reach this happy place? She found contentment in being alone. "After that pain, I said, you know what, I'm just going to be ok with myself and really start enjoying the quiet, and taking myself to the movies. As soon as I found enjoyment and peace in that, I felt like I rebooted my system, and that actually helped me raise my bar. I went through that single time. Some people jump from relationship to relationship, it's very dangerous because basically you're in the same movie, but you're casting a different actor. So that year, or years, of loneliness turned into ok being alone and helped me find happily ever after."

Now blissfully married just as cuddle-inducing-weather rolls in, Jenny has Thanksgiving and her birthday to look forward to. As far as traditions go, Jenny tells me that she cooks her Thanksgiving turkey just like Martha Stewart does —brining it first -- and cooks all the sides. "I'm one of those crazy, anal people. I have to have everything done at the same time, and it has to be hot! So I kinda lose my mind if like, my Uncle Tom is sitting on the couch not coming to the table when it's hot. Basically, I'm OCD when it comes to my Thanksgiving dinner, *but* I do it very well."

Going off of Jenny's books that have depicted memories of holidays past and a couple of tales she shares during our interview, Thanksgiving with Jenny's family is a sidesplitting affair. Some are unaware that Melissa McCarthy of *Bridesmaids* and *Mike & Molly* fame is Jenny's cousin. And if you enjoy Jenny and Melissa's unbridled humor, you're in for a treat should you have the opportunity to break bread with the McCarthy clan.

"If you came to our Thanksgiving you would see my dad, there's 10 siblings —Missy (which is what their family call Melissa) took my Aunt Sally's personality for the *Bridesmaids* character-- that whole family, all those siblings are that funny. Melissa really got that hardcore comedy. All you do at my house," she expresses animatedly, "you just cry [laughing] and it's all kinda raunchy, out-there, toilet humor. But it works!" The innate desire to make people laugh is without a doubt a McCarthy attribute, just as celebrating in a big way is.

Jenny's birthday is juxtaposed against Halloween, which means that when the clock strikes midnight she is partying hard. "There hasn't been a birthday I haven't been hungover on since I was 20." When Donnie asked what she wants for her birthday this year, Jenny told him, "the most badass Halloween party ever." And yes, Jenny is dressing up. She wants to be Groot, the "spiritual being" from the movie, *Guardians of the Galaxy*. I squint at her incredulously — envisioning her dressed up as the creature she's showing me on her iPhone. We'll just have to wait and see. But I realize her connection to Groot later on.

When I finally ask her what she thinks people would be surprised to find out about her, it all makes sense. "How spiritual I am. I'm really, really into New Age and bettering myself. With so much criticism in this business, if you don't kinda work on how to handle it, I think it can destroy you. So I kinda welcome it. It shows me the work I need to do." If I were asked the same question about Jenny, I would say how profoundly wise she is. And it's a shame that she doesn't receive the credit she deserves for evolving into the incredibly inspiring and knowledgeable woman we see today. But that sort of adulation is not what matters — her healthy outlook and commitment to introspective thinking have served her extremely well. The greatest part is that in her journey to heal herself, she found everything she was searching for. **ML**

Jenny, we want more!

What's your favorite TV show?

"I like such weird ones. I was watching one all weekend called *The Ghost Inside My Child*," she laughs. "It's like, 'my 3-year-old is like, Daddy or Mommy, my brother was killed at war.' It's all about these kids remembering their past lives. I'm addicted to that shit. What else am I addicted to? *Naked and Afraid*. Of course I love *Wahlburgers*."

You give great relationship advice --do you keep in touch with old flames?

"That's a great question. Not anymore. I think that people are exes for a reason and I think that if there's too much of a connection kept with them, you don't move forward."

Have Jim Carey and you stayed in touch?

"No, but I can tell you this, 'cause I'm pretty honest about everything, I was on Howard Stern a couple of years ago and he was like, 'Do you talk to Jim Carey?' I said no. He said I can't believe that because you have a son and why wouldn't they talk? I left it at that and the media blew it up. A few months after that, Jim called me. He was like, I just want to offer an olive branch. I'd like to just say goodbye in a very nice, respectful, adult way with a normal conversation. We did and he talked to Evan and it was so wonderful and what every former relationship should be like so you can kinda move forward with nothing but good memories."

You look amazing. What is your beauty secret? Did you find the Fountain of Youth?

"I actually found the Fountain of Youth, which is why I'm the spokesperson for SkinnyStix. My girlfriend was drinking this stuff and I'm like, what the hell is that? I drink it throughout the day. I'm not as hungry. It makes my mood better and I have energy. I've got every one of my friends hooked on it. Besides that, I do like Botox. I watched that Cindy Crawford thing with the melon. I wanted her so badly to look in the camera and go, 'Ok, I use this melon but I also do Botox.' I can't stand when people don't tell the truth."

Jenny on *The View*

"Barbara Walters, to work with her in that last year, both of our last year, she really took me under her wing. She was such a wonderful boss... I really studied well and she got a kick outta my personality. I was hired to bring some light and pop culture, but they changed direction. I'm excited to see this new season. I'm going to be the first one to have a viewing party at my house with my friends. They did try their hand at not having war and they wanted to go back to having some real heated debates. I'm glad I'm watching them from home 'cause I'm not that heated debate kinda girl."

You're so outspoken, is there anything that has gotten you into hot water?

"My mom would say *Playboy*," she laughs. "Being raised very Catholic, that was really hard back in the day. My hardest thing to overcome was having relatives disown us, getting letters from uncles saying you're damned to hell. It didn't help that I posed in my Catholic school uniform, but I was a rebel."