

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

'I LIKE WHO I AM!' JANN ARDEN WITH A NEW MEMOIR, A NEW ALBUM AND A HIT TV SERIES, THE CANADIAN STAR IS HAVING THE TIME OF HER LIFE

Chatting with Jann Arden feels like having a heart-to-heart with your best friend. Easy-going, funny and honest, the multiplatinum Canadian singer-songwriter, actress and author has a way with words and doesn't shy away from telling it like it is.

These days, Jann is imparting life lessons on aging – or, rather, the pleasure of finally getting to an age that infuses her with confidence, clarity and a strong sense of self. It's the product of turning into a "crone," she says, eloquently describing the term as a "kick-ass, take-no-prisoners, damn-the-torpedoes, own-your-own-crap, great kind of person to be." For Jann, being a crone is nothing short of extraordinary.

"I always tell people, 'You don't even start becoming a person until you're 40,'" Jann, 58, tells us via FaceTime from her home on southern Alberta's Elbow River. "They look at me like I've got five heads! But I think those of us in our 50s realize that to be true."

Quarantining with her BFF – a 12-year-old Morkie named Midi – Jann is actually having an incredible year. Not only is she releasing her candid and poignant memoir *If I Knew Then: Finding Wisdom in Failure and Power in Aging* (on Oct. 27), she's also returned to TV screens in *Jann*, the sitcom loosely based on her life, now in its second season. She has a brand-new album out, *Hits & Other Gems*, featuring fan favourites like "Could I Be Your Girl" and "Insensitive." She has a weekly podcast and thriving social-media presence. And although the happily single Calgary native was sad to cancel her cross-Canada tour in April, she was thrilled to become the first 2020 inductee into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame just days into lockdown.

In our exclusive chat, the Juno winner and member of the Order of Canada gets real about friendships, family and how she has learned to finally live her best life in her own spectacular way.

Congratulations on such an amazing fall, Jann! How does it feel to be everywhere? Well, [the timing] is a bit deceiving. The TV show was supposed to be out in March, the greatest hits package was supposed to be out at the beginning of May. Everything got pushed into five weeks. It seems like I'm really a keener and very accomplished! But it's a little bit of a fib because COVID changed the game.

What have you been doing during lockdown? I

"When I was eight or nine, my mom said to me, 'You're going to die someday so make the best of it!'" says Jann. Today, at 58, the multi-talented Albertan is at her finest in mind, body and spirit and has no intention of slowing down.

'You don't want to be in a romantic relationship with me because it will end up on a record ... TV Jann dates more than I do!'

have my little dog. I live on a fairly big piece of land by a river. I have nothing to complain about at all. My life really didn't change all that much because when I'm home, I'm quite isolated. I do all my writing here, I do recording here. I've written more music in the past six months than I have in the past three years! I've got lots of wildlife here, I've got a road that no one is ever on that I walk all the time. I do a podcast every week. I've been writing season 3 of *Jann*. I've done dozens of Zoom calls. I've been busy!

Sounds tiring! How did you unwind? I read a lot of books about the Roman Empire. And I read two or three books about Cleopatra because I was fascinated by her ... She was supposed to be this beautiful woman but so many writers are saying no, she was actually very average-looking but had an enormous amount of sex appeal because she was so friggin' smart and witty and funny! She spoke seven languages. Men found her irresistible for all the other reasons than what we would think of.

What's it like living in such a remote location? It's kind of like the wildlife highway! I'm a little reluctant in the early mornings or evenings to go down [by the river] because those are the killing fields. It's literally bears, cougars, foxes, coyotes and lots of predators. Things live and die very quickly out here! This morning I saw deer and foxes walking the perimeter. They're just curious to see if I left a bag of hotdog buns on the deck!

What prompted you to write a book about aging? I became a crone. I felt her move in about four years ago and she's still moving in ... When the real sense of self moves in, the conversations we start having in our own heads become less volatile,

less critical and much more like cheering you on, like, "You can do it! You can get it! Try out for that job! Just do it anyway! Move if you want to! Paint that wall!" Whereas everything before that just seems like, "No, I don't deserve to make a decision that has merit."

You battled alcoholism but have been sober for the past four years. How has it changed you? One thing I didn't think I'd ever be able to say in my life – and this may seem trite – is that I really like myself. I like my own company. I like who I am. I like how I am with people. I like how I'm making my way in the world. I like how I use my voice. I like making mistakes. And that is the goal of time spent alone: to actually have a fondness for self and a true appreciation for who you are, the kind of person you are. It is so important to be able to say that out loud and really have someone else bear witness to that self-worth. It is a very hard uphill climb to discover that.

You attribute your independence to your mom, who had a difficult marriage and passed away from Alzheimer's disease in 2018. When I was 15, she said to me, "Jann, I hope you aspire to more than just getting married." When you have your own mother telling you that – and I know it's because she wished for a different outcome in her own life – I thought that was pretty friggin' awesome.

You claim that your friends are your greatest successes. Have your friendships changed over the years? Making friends as you get older is a real art form. People have very established lives, they have very established routines, they are busy with their extended families. So when you make a decision to have a new friend, whether you meet

them at a party or at somebody else's get-together or at a club or in a class, you realize how much time you need to invest if you want an authentic, earnest, valuable, intimate friendship. There must be reciprocity. To have a friend, you must be a friend. And especially in your 50s when you're well over the halfway mark, if your friendships are tattered, you have to look at your own life. It's as simple as that! You become what your friends are. They're your greatest resource and your only way forward as you age.

Have your romantic relationships or requirements changed as well? Oh, I think so – a lot! For 35 years, I never came up for air. I've been single now for over four years and it's the best thing that I've ever done. I think my habits were too dive-right-back-into-the-abyss-again. But I've had to look at my behaviour, too. I've had to put that on the table and go: "You're the common denominator in all these failed three-year, five-year, 10-year relationships." Also, not drinking and being more clear-headed and putting myself back into just being creative – I've really enjoyed it! I'm in a really good place and not ►



'The middle is where it's at, people!' writes Jann in her new memoir (above), where she imparts valuable life lessons she hopes young people will take to heart. Below: On the set of her sitcom, *Jann*, 'We're finished writing season 3 and will start filming in January here in Alberta in the dead of winter – it should be a good time!' she says, chuckling.





'Oh my God, the things I've done in my life!'

interested in [a relationship] at all right now. I don't even know what that looks like going forward. It is not a requirement. That's not on a piece of paper that says, "Must find partner!" It's nowhere to be seen right now and that's pretty cool.

Was there a pivotal moment that you realized, "Hey, I'm OK being me!"? I think probably about six months after I ended my last relationship [which lasted for 10 years], I felt very grateful to have gotten out of it. I felt quite sick. I had let it go too far. I was drinking too much. I was profoundly unhappy. I should have been out of it years before. But you talk to so many women who find themselves in this position where you think it's easier to stay than go. I wasn't brave enough to go. I kind of tried and then it just didn't work out – and then another year goes by and then – oh my God! Hopefully those days are behind me. I learned a lot. I wrote a lot of good music. You don't want to be in a relationship with me because it will end up on a record.

You posed nude for *Zoomer* magazine in 2012. Would you do it again? Yes! Bryan Adams took the first pictures of me. It was funny because it was like 50 lb. ago! ... I'm very proud of my body and everything that it has done and that it's still carrying me forward. When women can see something that is not perfect and not a Kardashian, or they can see themselves in me and say, "Oh, she's got back fat and side-boob fat and this and that," that's the trueness of being a person. So it's important.

Have you had any brushes with royalty? I met Prince Charles years ago. I was at an

Jann counts her late mother, Joan Richards (left, top and middle), for inspiring her sense of humour. 'My mom was so funny and she didn't even know it,' says Jann, whose 2017 bestseller chronicled Joan's battle with Alzheimer's. Left, bottom: Reporting from Windsor Castle with CTV anchor Lisa LaFlamme during Prince Harry and Meghan's wedding.

'You don't even start becoming a person until you're 40'

event in Toronto celebrating Canadian artists and I was singing that night. I hadn't followed the royals a lot in my life but my mom was very excited that I was meeting him! We lined up and he shook my hand and said [*mimics British accent*]: "Jann, you've got a lovely little croak in your voice." What do you say to that? [*Laughs*]

And you were a CTV commentator for Prince Harry and Meghan's wedding! That was pretty friggin' awesome. [*Laughs*] Oh my God, the things I've done in my life! I bought a beautiful dress from London designer Ted Baker and I had a fascinator by [Toronto milliner] David Dunkley – it flew over in its own seat! It was so exciting! We were on live TV for like four hours. We couldn't even pee! I'm thinking: "What am I doing?" It was a very surreal and historic moment.

You received the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012 for your contribution to Canada. What do you think of Her Majesty? I'm a huge fan of the Queen. I haven't cried too many times during COVID, but when she gave her speech – mainly for the people in the U.K. – I was so touched by that: "We will be with our friends and families again." I felt like I was hearing Winston Churchill speaking during the Second World War ... It was a beautiful speech and she made me hopeful.

You give people hope, too. Oh, that's kind of you to say. I'm having a ball. I'm really having fun and I work with great people. Thanks for taking time for me!

INTERVIEW: SUZANNE WINTROB



Jann posts regularly on social media, giving loads of play to pooch Mimi – "my most prized possession, the heart that lives outside my body" – and the dirt road beside her home: "I don't take 400 pictures to get one picture where my nose looks OK. I think people like that!"

'You can never stop blooming, people. That's the best part of being a human being' - FROM JANN'S NEW MEMOIR

ALAN EMM/PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE (2; INSTAGRAM (6))