

Rude mum goes on comedy rampage

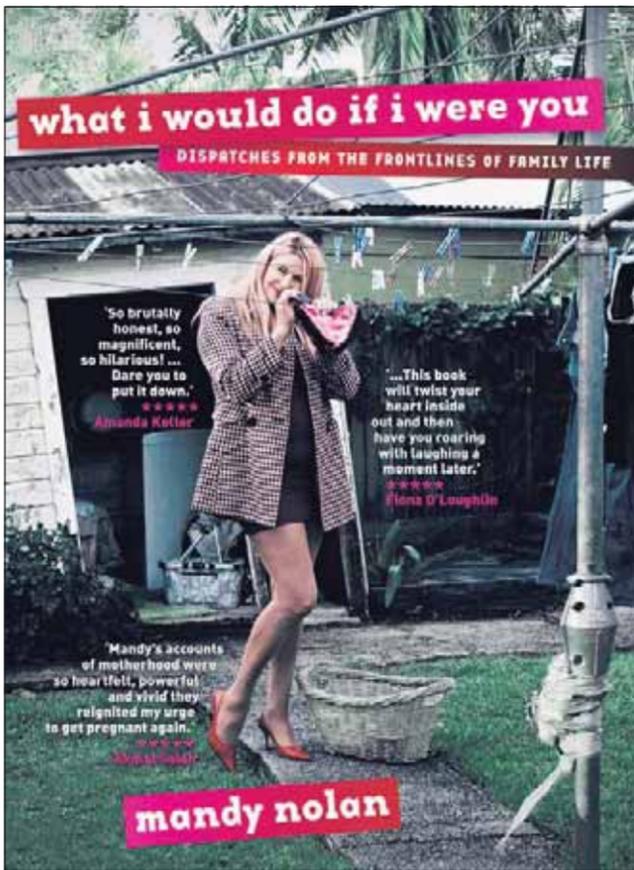
What I Would Do If I Were You - Dispatches from the frontlines of family life by Mandy Nolan (Finch Publishing, RRP \$29.99)

Reviewed by Michael McDonald

Despite her consistently depicting herself as a slattern, Mandy Nolan is a one-woman industry, cramming more activity into one day than most folk would care to attempt in a fortnight: caring for innumerable children, liaising with countless ex-partners, writing newspaper articles, performing stand-up routines, running comedy workshops, running comedy workshops, teaching those with dementia to remember and teaching those with troubles to forget through the healing power of laughter.

And despite her consistently failing to understand that the apostrophe is not required with the plural form of nouns except in the possessive, she writes a hot column full of humour, empathy and weirdness. It's reliably funny every week and bound to piss off somebody with a particular broom up their arse. Editors make sacrifices of small rodents on altars of bloodied stone to strange gods in order to have such columnists.

Also, despite me having very little experience of domestic life with big families, she has asked me to review her book. This is like asking Kevin Rudd to dubstep dance, but here goes.



What I Would Do is like her Soapbox for *The Echo*. It contains a series of riffs – or what William S Burroughs presciently called 'routines' – on a series of catastrophes such as Christmas, Divorce, Teenagers, Relatives, Pets and Fashion. It contains vulgarity by the shirtload. It is further enhanced by a very readable typeface and Mandy's own amusing drawings. (I forgot to mention she's also an artist and her paintings sell. I think she does them in her sleep with the canvas tied to the mirrored ceiling above her bed.)

Mandy's comedy is always frank and sometimes brutally frank. The brutality tears off the everyday scab of niceness and reveals the wound beneath while at the same time making us laugh. It's an exceptional, cathartic skill.

In *What I Would Do* Mandy reveals more of her life in those candid tones: 'I never loved my grandfather... He was less like a man and more of a stain. He didn't drink while I was growing up. I think if he had still been a pishhead, he might have been a lot more fun. At least he would have expressed emotion. He

had a range of one: disinterested disconnection with a touch of disdain.'

A shy person in a standup suit, Mandy Nolan is the perfect antidote to the precious persona of Byron. She's the fly in the New Age ointment, the bogan at the A-list ball. Her book, like all her writing and performing, excoriates pretentiousness and celebrates us everyday clods struggling to come to terms with our own psyches.

So, obviously, if you're looking for Jane Austen Lite, don't go here. Otherwise buy this book and keep her household in dog food.

Especially buy this book if you've enjoyed her writing and/or standup, participated in one of her workshops or if you're a member of one of those many community groups to which Mandy has given her time for free over the last 20 years. It's payback time.

And rest assured – you'll laugh, you'll cry, you'll learn to dubstep dance.

■ Mandy's Byron book launch has sold out. However she is doing a free gig with Dave Callan at Ballina RSL on October 20 at 8pm. See more details at www.mandynolan.com.au.

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