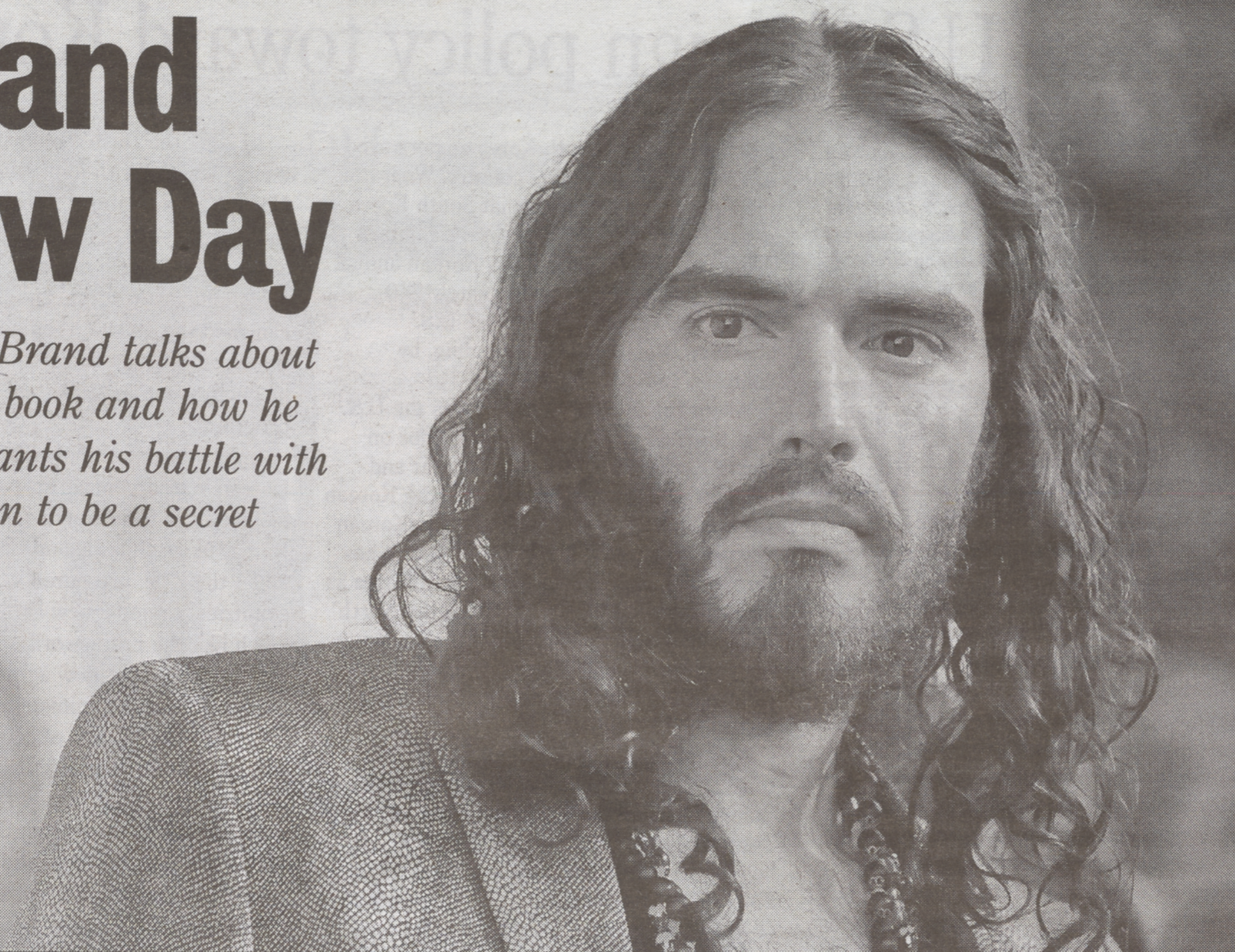


Brand New Day

Russell Brand talks about his new book and how he never wants his battle with addiction to be a secret



CREDIT: REUTERS

BY ANASTASIA SAFIOLEAS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

One are the trademark cheeky taunts and rapid-fire speech. Instead Russell Brand, calling Street Roots' sister paper The Big Issue from London during a long day of press, is softly spoken, polite and generous. One might even call him respectful.

It's a contrast to the rock'n'roll swagger, Jesus-esque hair and the tendency for whip-smart monologues that took Brand on his epic journey from Essex boy to superstar. The Hollywood actor, comedian, writer, editor, political activist and new dad is infamously also a former bulimic, alcoholic and heroin and sex addict. Call him an expert on matters of addiction. Now he's turned self-help guru with the release of his new book, "Recovery: Freedom from Our Addiction."

Hollywood movies have made way for a more subdued Brand, who these days would like to take your hand and lead you towards enlightenment.

Don't fret. There are still signs of the sassy Brand we've gotten to know. "Recovery" sports irreverent chapter titles such as "Are you a bit fucked up?" and "Could you not be fucked?" He describes Hollywood as "anathema" (i.e. a polite way of saying revolting) and believes the revolution is ongoing.

"I really love the magazine," he says thoughtfully, having recently sat down to chat with a handful of Big Issue vendors in the UK. They tackled addiction, homelessness and recovery, a palpable sense of comradeship among them. "When I was in that room and they're talking about their own feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and despair, the first thing it did was end the illusion that I experience those things in solitude," he said solemnly.

"What I'm learning is because I'm a person who has access to two things – exhibitionism and oratory – it can lead me to



PHOTO BY LOUISE HAYWOOD-SCHIEFER

Top, Russell Brand arrives at the Hollywood FX Summer Comedies Party in Los Angeles, Calif. Above, Brand sat down and talked about addiction and other issues with vendors from The Big Issue UK, Street Roots' sister paper in Great Britain.

be quite domineering in certain contexts. But when talking about addiction there's a great deal for me to learn, particularly when it comes to dealing with extreme poverty and extreme suffering. The things I heard in that room with those vendors were really valuable and insightful. There were a lot of things I understood and which resonated with me, but there were certainly a lot of things that were much more extreme from the suffering I've experienced."

Brand has been clean for 15 years and wants to help others achieve the same using the tried and tested 12-step recovery program made famous by Alcoholics Anonymous. The book also extols his much-publicized call to decriminalize drugs and turn addiction into a health issue, not a moral or judicial one. It's a self-help book that uses Brand's own path to recovery as a

blueprint of sorts.

"The program has been effective in getting me and millions of other people clean from substance abuse," he said. "It is effective also for other forms of addiction – behavioral addiction, which may not be criminal but I believe is equally severe, addictions around food, addictions around gambling..."

Delve deeper and you'll find Brand's philosophy also reflects his long-held spiritual belief that even if you don't have an extreme and obvious form of suffering, everyone still understands suffering.

"I don't know anyone who isn't in some type of pain unless they're successfully distracting themselves, if not chemically then perhaps through behavior or some other form of illusion. My belief is this program can be used by anybody in any

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situation, because what it is talking about is the human condition – the odd habit we have of attaching our happiness to external things. I do it still. I still think if I get that jumper I'll be happy, if my wife behaves in this way I'll be happy ... The 12-step program can work with everyday issues because it is a system of thinking."

Brand readily admits writing this book has helped with his own ongoing recovery. Despite many drug-free years, the irresistible pull of narcotics is ever-present. He once wrote in The Guardian: "I cannot accurately convey to you the efficiency of heroin in neutralizing pain. It transforms a tight, white fist into a gentle, brown wave. From my first inhalation ... it fumigated my private hell and lay me down in its hazy pastures ..."

He said, quietly but matter-of-factly: "With most people who have addiction issues, if you're not in your recovery then you're in your addiction. If you're not concentrating on feeling better, then you are drifting towards being worse. That's my experience. I can't for a moment disconnect."

Like "My Booky Wook" and its follow-up "Booky Wook 2," Brand uses Recovery to lay bare the terrible truths of his own life. He unflinchingly describes himself as more addicted, more narcissistic, more driven by lust and the need for power and recognition than most people. And revels in the admission.

"I don't feel like I've exposed anything. Sometimes I think the choices are vulnerability or ignorance. The exposure offers the opportunity for connection. Me and those vendors connect because when I came into the room I said, 'The reason I'm an addict is because when I was a kid I felt worthless and I can return to that feeling of worthlessness in a moment if I'm not careful'. For me that's not weak to say that. It's honest, and honesty is a value – it's a strength."

This year Brand married Laura Gallacher (Katy Perry and Brand divorced in 2012), and is now a dad to 11-month-old Mabel. In "Recovery" he writes about her birth in a way that touchingly parallels his own kind of rebirth. "It's made me realise that you can't spend your time wrapped up in yourself and what you want because now there's this little baby," he said to me, animatedly. "Watching my daughter deal with the survival instinct – 'feed me, pay attention to me' – it's fascinating. Not to mention what it's doing to my heart – I can feel new territories of love open up just by her smile."

"My daughter is just romping towards me right now," he said suddenly. There's pure delight in his voice, and across the crackly line I can hear Mabel's happy babble. But just when I think I've lost him, he offers a parting gem for the vendors of The Big Issue: "They are on the frontline in every way and I admire their bravery. I hope I can support them in the way they support me."

Courtesy of The Big Issue Australia / INSP. ngo