

‘I knew it was time to go...’

» Coleen reveals show ‘saved her life’

» Confesses rows split the Loose Women

» Admits: ‘I’ve cried so many tears’

There was a real sense of loss last week when *Loose Women* favourite Coleen

Nolan revealed she would be quitting the award-winning daytime show. Here, in her first magazine interview since the announcement, she reveals exclusively to *Best* the reasons behind her shock decision, and lifts the lid on the show’s best-kept secrets...

Finally cutting loose

The tabloid headlines summed it up simply... ‘Coleen Cuts Loose’. But those three words could never capture the sleepless nights and soul-searching that led to Coleen Nolan bringing down the curtain on her decade-long career with *Loose Women*.

“I had a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes after the news went public,” confesses a clearly emotional Coleen. “Although the decision was a year in the making,

once the news was out there, I thought, ‘Wow, there’s no going back now’. But you sometimes have to take a chance and move on. I didn’t want to get to the stage where it became mundane. I owed the show and its fans more than that.

“I’ve given my opinion on almost every subject and shared every detail about my life, so now seems like



Tension

Coleen has never shied away from on-screen clashes

the right time to make the break. But it still feels very, very scary.”

When Coleen joined the show over 10 years ago, she was reeling from a series of calamities she describes as the worst time of her life. “I’d been dumped by *This Morning* after a disastrous stint presenting there with Twiggy, plus I had a young baby and was going through a messy divorce from Shane Ritchie. To say I needed the job was an understatement.

Loose Women saved my life – that’s no exaggeration. My confidence was at rock

bottom and I felt like I would never work again. I remember thinking, ‘What if the viewers hate me? I’m not an actress, so I couldn’t be anything but myself. Luckily, the show’s executive producer at the time, Johnny McCune, gave me the chance. ‘It always be grateful to him.’

A crazy journey

Coleen describes the resulting years with the show – which has picked up a string of awards – as “a crazy journey”. And she admits that one of the major attractions was the often heated discussions that took place live on air. “When you put a lot of



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passionate and opinionated women in a room together the sparks are bound to fly sometimes. People like Carol [McGiffin] or newcomer Janet [Street Porter] will tend to have the most provocative opinions.

"I remember Carol and me going head to head when we were discussing ID cards and civil liberties. She's quite 'right on' and I couldn't get my point of view across, which drove me mad. It made for great TV, though. We've had a bust-up on every subject under the sun, from binge-drinking to plastic surgery and one-night stands, and the viewers love it when passions run high."

Another headline-making episode saw twice-wed mum-of-three Coleen confessing that she would happily let her then-17-year-old son Shane Jnr sleep with a prostitute. "All hell broke loose after I said that, and my ex-husband Shane was quoted in the press as saying he was 'disgusted'. But I stand by my comments in the context they were made. As usual they were blown out of proportion."

And Coleen insists that no matter how heated the on-air arguments between the *LW* stars get, the disagreements never spill over into their off-screen lives. "We're very different people, and because we all live so far away from each

Controversy

Comments about son Shane Jnr caused a media storm





other we don't hang out like close friends would, but there is a mutual respect there."

And she admits that she'll miss some of her colleagues terribly. "I'm so close to Kate [Thornton] and Andrea [McLean], and Sherrie Hewson, who's a real darling, is such a one-off that I'll tune in just to see what craziness she's up to. And Denise will always be a friend."

But while she might be sorry to leave some of her co-presenters behind, Coleen won't miss the daily six-hour commute between her Cheshire home and the *Loose Women* studios in London. "It is knacker, but then it's my



Interactive

'The Hub' slot on *This Morning* has proved popular

"She's got a really dry, sarcastic sense of humour and I love that."

As for her own future plans, **Best's** columnist comes over uncharacteristically coy. She admits to loving her popular 'Hub' spot on *This Morning*, where she interacts with viewers via email and Twitter, and many believe that she would be a natural choice to stand in for the

main show's pregnant host, Holly Willoughby, who begins her maternity

I've been crippled with guilt about not being around enough for my family

decision to do it," she says. "I'm a typical working mum who's crippled with guilt about not being around enough for my family, but it's worth the commute if I can pick up my daughter Ciara, who's nine, from school or be there to put the washing on. My husband Ray would happily do those things, but I think it's my place to do it. It eases my guilt."

leave in a few weeks' time, and who Coleen stood in for on *Dancing On Ice* recently.

Coleen says she'd also love to be involved with a show featuring the general public. "Real people interest me more than celebrities any day, and the public have never been anything but nice to me. It's humbling," Coleen confesses.

Still, with four months of *Loose Women* ahead of her, Coleen has a few more celebrity encounters to look forward to, and has set her sights high when it comes to the line-up she hopes will appear on her final show. "OK, it's a bit of a fantasy list," Coleen admits, "but I would love to have Brad and Angelina on – my Ray is obsessed with her! Then there are Posh and Becks, who fascinate me, because we all feel we know what's going on in their marriage, when no one actually has a clue!"

"But if I could only choose one, it'd have to be George Clooney, on a closed set, with only me asking the questions. Well, a girl has to be selfish sometimes, and he'd be my perfect leaving gift!"

A new beginning

The star insists that, despite her huge popularity with the show's fans, her departure won't harm the programme. "The new regulars are fab – especially Janet Street Porter," she enthuses. "I wasn't expecting to like her, but she's a sweetheart – forthright, but willing to listen to others' views and even change her opinion occasionally." And with a knowing smile, she adds: "That is soooo refreshing!"

Coleen's also a fan of comedian Sarah Millican, who'll appear regularly too.



I'd love Brad and Angelina on my last show... but George Clooney above all!