



Reckoning: A Memoir

Magda Szubanski

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Winner, Book of the Year and Biography of the Year, Australian Book Industry Awards, 2016

Heartbreaking, joyous, traumatic, intimate and revelatory, *Reckoning* is the book where Magda Szubanski, one of Australia's most beloved performers, tells her story.

In this extraordinary memoir, Magda describes her journey of self-discovery from a suburban childhood, haunted by the demons of her father's espionage activities in wartime Poland and by her secret awareness of her sexuality, to the complex dramas of adulthood and her need to find out the truth about herself and her family. With courage and compassion she addresses her own frailties and fears, and asks the big questions about life, about the shadows we inherit and the gifts we pass on.

Honest, poignant, utterly captivating, *Reckoning* announces the arrival of a fearless writer and natural storyteller. It will touch the lives of its readers.

Magda Szubanski is one of Australia's best known and most loved performers. She began her career in university revues, then appeared in a number of sketch comedy shows before creating the iconic character of Sharon Strzelecki in ABC-TV's *Kath and Kim*. She has also acted in films (*Babe*, *Babe: Pig in the City*, *Happy Feet*, *The Golden Compass*) and stage shows. *Reckoning* is her first book.

Reckoning: A Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Reckoning: A Memoir for online ebook

Bianca says

When I was young(er) I used to look disdainfully at comedies and comedians, as if they were lesser forms of art and performers respectively. I read "serious" books and watched arthouse dramas. Comedies were for the plebs. Luckily, I'm always willing to change my opinions when called for.

In the last fifteen years or so, after consuming huge quantities of stand-up and funny movies (there are a lot of moronic comedies out there - I'm looking at you Adam Sandler and few of your pals) I've concluded that comedians are some of the smartest people around. After all, it's much more difficult to make people laugh than cry, especially given how subjective humour is. The only TV I watch these days is on demand and most of it it's made up of political and news satire shows, some stand-up specials and the occasional series or movie.

I first saw Magda Szubanski in *Kath and Kim*, a very popular TV series about a particular type of suburban Melburnian. As many Australians would attest, this was one of the most popular Australian series ever. Many had seen Magda in her previous incarnations in various other comedies, TV sketches and variety programs. She's a terrific actor with a uncanny ability to change looks, voice and accents. The rest of the world would know Szubanski via the very popular movie, *Babe*.

Magda is much more than her perceived funny overweight woman persona. I don't know why I was so surprised to discover that she's a gifted writer as well. After all, she'd written some of the material she performed.

She's also a very sensitive soul, who's fought her father's demons and her own. For many years she kept her sexuality out of the public domain, until 2012 when she finally came out as gay. Since then she'd become a prominent figure for the equal rights movement. For those of you who missed the news, in 2017 Australia become one of the many countries in the world to allow same-sex marriage.

I enjoyed this memoir a great deal. I loved that it wasn't focused on her acting career, it wasn't the type of name-dropping memoir that so many famous/celebrities put out. We are made by our parents and families and by our experiences. Magda shows herself through the people closest to her and through some of her experiences. As a new immigrant to Australia, Magda was keen to discover more about her Polish roots via her father, and the Scottish-Irish ones through her mom. Both parents, but especially her father, want to leave the past behind. She did know that her father had killed people during the War, but she didn't know the details. She only discovers them later in life.

Reckoning is a fascinating story of self-discovery, of finding one's roots, and through it all, of self-acceptance. All the accolades are very well deserved.

Highly recommend it

This goes towards my Aussie Authors Challenge 2018 on www.bookloverbookreviews.com

John Purcell says

Pretend you have never heard the name Magda Szubanski. I know it's difficult. You're probably already picturing her as Sharon Strzelecki in *Kath and Kim*, or as Esme Hoggett in *Babe*, or as Pixie-Anne Wheatley or Chenille from *Fast Forward*.

But do try. *Reckoning* isn't a celebrity memoir. Magda's story is rich, beautifully told and moving. The daughter of Polish and Scottish migrants, it's a thoroughly Australian story. Like Raimond Gaita's *Romulus, My Father*, Magda's memoir centres on her relationship with her father. The thing is, the man who was Magda's father, the man who mowed the lawn, joined the local tennis club, wore shorts and long socks, wasn't your regular suburbanite.

He was an assassin.

You know, the usual story.

A migrant's daughter's memoir, *Reckoning* is at once light and dark, the way we ourselves are light and dark. It is the work of a writer whose own family's story led her further and further into a past that was complex and strange, dangerous and surprising, and of her own story which led her out into the spotlight.

Ace says

5 stars

Another for my Read Harder challenge, something I would normally not pick up without the nudge. I really enjoyed Magda's writing, she is brutally honest and funny. However, the story of her family history is a sad and horrible tale, embroiled in Polish and Irish political violence.

The slow progression of her comedy background through Australian TV's big comedy boom when I was a teenager was so great to read about and I think that knowing the venues, the comedians and the skits being discussed was a great advantage to me, otherwise this may have seemed a bit too long. She must have another book in her yet, she has certainly had a long career and influenced Australian TV.

Overall, a great read.

Judy says

Oh. Tears fill my eyes.

I have just finished and still feel the emotion of the last few chapters. If you have never until now indulged in reading an audio book, treat yourself and read this one with the author reading her own story. It, I feel, adds a dimension you will not get from the printed page. Saying that however, I am quite certain I may revisit this book a second time into the future via the written word.

I am not going to detail the story here as it has been reviewed fully by many others. I am merely going to highlight a couple of stand-out incredible portions.

I have read this a week after Australia FINALLY legislated in favour of equal marriage rights for all so the

timing is exquisite. It is amazing to read of the growing thread of courage in Magda's life as she grew towards "coming out". It was poignant to catch the little sentence at the end of the telling her parents she is gay and her saying "we knew yes there could be children maybe for me, but not marriage, never marriage" This is as much her family story as her own and the detailing of where each branch of her family comes from, their history and especially the war experiences of her father will rock you profoundly. Experiences my mind can barely comprehend.

And as part of that researching back into a truly traumatic family history her understanding of the deep trans-generational trauma that is passed on through our DNA. Something that scientific research is now studying, publishing and bringing into mainstream awareness. This is something that every colonised and brutalised culture carries forward, meaning the next generation and the next and the next carry a burden (I am loath to use the word handicap because of interpretation others may place) forward from the moment of birth.

An impressive book by an impressive lady. Definitely in the AWESOME class.

Janelle Collins says

I would give this book 10 stars out of 5 if I could. There has never been a better memoir than this one. Magda has the most amazingly poetic vocabulary, and is so aware of her feelings, describing them eloquently. I listened to Magda narrate this autobiography, which was a pleasure to listen to, especially as she can recreate both her parents' accents so accurately. I laughed out loud sometimes, and sobbed my heart out just as many times, as the story of her life thus far unfolded. If you ever read this, Magda, thank you SO much for baring your beautiful soul to the world. You're a national treasure that all Aussies can be so proud of calling our own.

Ellen says

A beautiful biography told through the framework of family. It's a rare thing to find a comedian who can make you cry – Szubanski is something special.

KerryH says

I have to say upfront that I am not a fan of autobiographies, bios yes. Having said that, and from my limited experience in reading the genre, I would say that this book is an excellent example. Honest, heart-warming and a very well-written glimpse into the life of one of Australia's favourite people. And mine as well. Who could ever forget the scarlet rash covering Sharon's face (Kath and Kim) after her pash session? Hysterical. A minor quibble is that I thought there was an over-emphasis on her father to the detriment of her mother, but obviously he was a major influence in her life, and I did identify with her love/ hate relationship with him in her teenage years. Another is that Magda is wrong when she writes that Poland was the only country where its citizens were executed during WWII for hiding Jews, the practice was widespread.

Fantastic opening hook!

Text Publishing says

The book blurb for *Reckoning*, Magda Szubanski's memoir, promises that it will 'touch the lives of its readers' and that it 'announces the arrival of a fearless writer and natural storyteller'. Both statements could not be truer. It's only increased our awe for this incredibly talented and beloved performer.

Here's the powerful first chapter. Nothing you know about Magda Szubanski will prepare you for what is revealed in *Reckoning*

'A brave and tender book about everything that matters most in life.'

Cate Blanchett

'This is a remarkable memoir, that weaves the tragedy of twentieth century history into a personal narrative of coming to terms with family and self, and manages to honour both stories. The writing is assured and controlled, the storytelling expert and thoughtful, the language eloquent and moving. The writing, the story, the voice—all of it is beautiful.'

Christos Tsiolkas

'Reckoning is a riveting, overwhelmingly poignant autobiography by a woman of genius...It is an extraordinary hymn to the tragic heroism at the heart of ordinary life and the soaring moral scrutiny of womankind. Every library should have it, every school should teach it.'

Weekend Australian

'Unlike most autobiographies by famous people, Reckoning has substance beyond the writer's fame...Szubanski's fine memoir, written with great style, adds another layer to our history — another startling migrant story.'

Crikey

'Reckoning is a powerful, exquisitely written account of Szubanski's loves and "lives" thus far.'

West Australian

'With its hints of nostalgia, raw honesty, compassion, and a good amount of bravery, Szubanski's Reckoning reflects on the truths we hide and the realities we cannot ignore as we develop into and through our adult lives.'

Conversation

'Sensitive and searching, colourful and vividly composed...stylish and accomplished.'

Sydney Morning Herald

'Nearly every memoir is described as "brave" these days but Szubanski has earned the word...The result of her efforts is an affecting story of family intimacy – soulfully and sensitively told.'

Saturday Paper

'[Reckoning] reveals [Magda] to be an extraordinarily rare talent — somebody with first-rate emotional and comedic instincts as well as a fierce intellect which would allow her to succeed in any academic task she'd set herself...This is a book which will be good for the soul of anybody who reads it.'

Daily Review

'[Reckoning is] a page-turner...The quality of a memoir depends on how interesting a life the person writing it has had and Szubanski doesn't appear to do dull. She is articulate and likeable as she tries to reconcile herself with the many difficult aspects of her past.'

New Zealand Herald

[Reckoning] untangles intergenerational trauma with intelligence and insight...[Szubanski] declares herself as a sensitive intellectual who is cursed, or blessed, depending on your point of view, with the fervent desire to understand.'

Newtown Review of Books

'Reckoning isn't simply a collection of anecdotes, though – it is so much more. Sharp, beautiful, a must-read.'

Canberra Weekly

'Magda's memoir is a moving exploration of her relationship with her Polish Resistance hero father...Reckoning is a quest and, in a sad but satisfying way, Magda does find what she's seeking.'

Australian Women's Weekly

'Far more than a run-of-the-mill celebrity memoir, this is a beautifully written, heartfelt and illuminating family saga.'

New Daily

'This is an inspiring memoir of a woman who faced her demons, sought treatment for depression and overcame disappointments. She is loved and admired by thousands but, more importantly, she exudes power – the power of being herself.'

Good Reading

'Compelling author, compelling premise, compelling writing.'

Graeme Simsion, Age/Sydney Morning Herald, Best Books of 2015

'I also adored Magda Szubanski's memoir, Reckoning. She has great stories to draw on but it is her very fine writing that makes it such a joy to read.'

Christos Tsiolkas, Age Sydney Morning Herald, Best Books of 2015

'We all knew she was funny, but who knew she could write like this?'

Benjamin Law, Age/Sydney Morning Herald

'Do not, repeat, do not underestimate comedian Magda Szubanski's Reckoning...A powerful piece of writing.'

Courier Mail

'Reckoning is a beautiful and moving story of a serious, thoughtful and complex person.'

Paul Barclay, Radio National Books and Arts, Best Books of 2015

'A fascinating memoir from the much-loved comedian...One of our favourites.'

InDaily

'Magda Szubanski's brave, compassionate — and hilarious — Reckoning may be some sort of masterpiece of the form.'

Australian, Best Books of 2015

'Magda Szubanski blew us away with her writing chops in this remarkable, fearless and deeply personal memoir.'

Booktopia, Books of the Year 2015

'A moving and grave account of how a great comedian plumbed the enigma of her father's activities as a Polish wartime resistance hero.'

Peter Craven, Australian, Best Books of 2015

'[Szubanski] captures wonderfully well the strange dissonance of history.'

Sophie Cunningham, Australian, Best Books of 2015

It is so refreshing to read an autobiography by a skilful character actor who is also in her own, non-stereotypical way, a role model for your average Aussie...The book will endure, just as Szubanski herself has.'

Same Same

'It is impossible not to be moved...Let's hope Szubanski writes more. She shines just as brightly as a serious writer as she does as a comedian.'

Guardian, Best Australian Books of 2015

'Documentary writing of the highest order...Anyone who doesn't adore Magda Szubanski the clown will be awed by Szubanski the A-grade non-fiction writer.'

Age/Sydney Morning Herald

'This memoir uncovers long-held secrets with disarming candour. Not a celebrity exposé as much as a family history, Reckoning is moving and compassionate. That Szubanski can act is a given fact; that she can also write is revelatory.'

Best Books of 2016, Sydney Morning Herald

'Packed full of humour, drama and insights from a warm and hugely intelligent woman.'

Book Bag

'Utterly superb, an eye-opening book...profound and delicately entertaining.'

G Scene

A deeply personal read—sometimes uncomfortably so—but Magda is an honest, forthright guide, and her love for her parents (and her siblings, especially older sister Barbara) shine through. This is not a sentimental read, nor is it a self-pitying one, but it's a warm, intelligent, brave and occasionally eye-opening one. I found it utterly captivating and came away from it feeling as if Magda had somehow exonerated the ghosts of her family's past—or at least come to terms with them.'

Reading Matters

Vanessa says

A fantastic memoir, that digs below the surface of a persona we all know and love. A rich account of her

polish and Scottish backgrounds and predominantly focusing on her fathers story and what a story is it....a compelling read and not the usual celebrity fluff, a worthy read that will take you on a journey that leaves a lasting impression

Marianne says

“...humour was the life line. It had got people through famines and clearances and clan wars. Humour. The life force”

Reckoning: A Memoir is the first book by English-born Australian actress, comedian, television presenter, radio host and author, Magda Szubanski. In it, she reveals just what has made her into the woman she is today, what the major influences in her life have been. She bravely exposes her weaknesses, explores her family history and details her successes and failures. In a memoir that includes sharpies, tennis tournaments, spelling bees, convent school, Poles, Scots (ah, that's why her “Wee Mary MacGregor was so accomplished!), sexual confusion and much more, Szubanski proves that she has a talent for storytelling and descriptive prose. “The Irish Sea is furrowed with the wake of my ancestors’ boats as they plied back and forth over the centuries, fleeing the wrath of the Protestant clans”

Immigrants to Australia will immediately recognise the environment so skilfully evoked: “In the distance the rolling hills were rarely green. Mostly they were sundried beyond brown or even yellow. Dried to white or burned black. Far away, on the other side of the highway, long-dead gum trees stood waist deep in the bony grass, their arms outstretched, their twiggy fingers splayed” and “In the height of summer the winds blew down from the centre of the continent where they gathered up the dry desert heat before unleashing it on us. The heat was unrelenting and everything felt combustible. Your fingers throbbed and swelled with your own boiling blood and you feared that if you brushed them against the tinder-dry flakes of a paperbark tree the brush would burst into flame. Deadly brown snakes twined themselves through the hot, singing grass; their shed skins lay in the long grass like used prophylactics” are just two examples.

Her depictions of the people in her life, too, are wonderful, as “With walking sticks and wheel-chairs and titanium hips, these stately old Poles sail into the church like a sagging fleet of tall ships, and I feel a pang of nostalgia. They will never make them like that again: that style, that attention to detail, that level of craftsmanship” and “In the front pew my mother is bearing up, but she looks diminished, as if some of her bones have been removed” and “...George is a man with one foot in the future. A nutty professor with sprigs of wiry grey hair bursting out of his skull like tendrils of excess thought, he exudes a childlike curiosity and generosity” demonstrate.

From the myriad of roles that Szubanski has played, and the apparent ease with which she had played them, it should be obvious that there is much depth to this interesting personality. What is not so apparent is the tragedy and anguish that underlies it all. She tells us: “I had begun to ‘balloon’, as people so charmingly put it. I was becoming a fat person. I watched with relief and despair as my flesh armour thickened. I crawled deep into the folds of myself and hid there”.

Her conclusion: “...the journey towards acceptance and understanding is a long and arduous one.....we needed to find our own courage, in our own way. We who are not lions. The trembling sheep, the frightened horses, the impala at the watering hole – we had to take this next step. And in our own faltering way, we did” shows just how far this remarkable woman has come. A compelling read.

4.5★s

Kimbofo says

If you had met my father you would never, not for an instant, have thought he was an assassin.

So begins Magda Szubanski's extraordinary memoir *Reckoning*, which is as much a love letter to her dad as it is an autobiography of her own life.

Most British readers will know Magda from the Australian sit-com *Kath & Kim*, where she plays the sports-obsessed unlucky-in-love Sharon Strzelecki. But she also starred in the 1995 Hollywood film *Babe*, the story of a pig who wants to be a sheepdog, and appeared in a slew of comedy shows from the late 1980s onwards. She first came to my attention in 1986 when she was in *The D Generation*, a comedy sketch show created and written by a group of Melbourne University students, and later *Fast-Forward*, another comedy sketch show that went on to become Australia's highest rating TV production of that type.

That aside, you don't need to know who Magda is to appreciate this book. It may be billed as a memoir, but it's so much more than that. Yes, it tells the story of Magda's life, but it's got an intellectual rigour to it that you don't often find in your usual run-of-the-mill celebrity autobiography.

It covers some very hard-hitting topics including relationships between fathers and daughters, what it is to be an immigrant (Magda was born in Liverpool, England, to a Scottish mother and Polish father, and they immigrated to Australia when she was five years old), intergenerational guilt, survivor's guilt and "genetic memory", the Holocaust and the Polish resistance, politics, feminism, mental health and repressed sexuality.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

Steve lovell says

'Is there anyone left who isn't totally in love with Magda Szubanski?' Well, yes in fact. Me. It is not that I dislike her. How could anyone do that after reading 'Reckoning'? It's just that, apart from her role as Sharon in the beloved 'Kath and Kim', she hasn't been on my radar much. I have never seen 'Babe', nor her various shows ('The D Generation', 'Fast Forward', 'Big Girl's Blouse') on the small screen. And yes, before you ask, I have nothing against females who make their living by making us laugh in one way or another. I very much love Kitty Flanagan, Fiona O'Loughlin, Denise Scott, Hannah Gadsby, Celia Pacquola - the list goes on. But later, in a review I found on-line, is the following statement, 'Anyone who doesn't adore Magda Szubanski the clown will be awed by Szubanski the A-grade non-fiction writer.' Well, again I wouldn't perhaps use the word 'awed' in this context, but there's no doubt her memoir is totally deserving of all the accolades it has garnered to date. This lady has decided literary chops. But I am in 'awe' of her for another reason. It's for her bravery, a few years back, when she came out on 'The Project'. To do so was all class - and the supportive reaction of the bulk of the Australian public shows that we, as a nation, are ready for the next step. Come on Mr Turnbull.

I also suspect, given time, the striking initial line to her memoir will be recognised as one of the best opening hooks in Aussie lit. 'If you had met my father you would never, not for an instant, have thought he was an assassin.' Her father, indeed, casts a giant shadow over this tome, as he does the author's life. And he was a good man - a good man carrying the burden of memory. As a Polish freedom fighter he did back to the Nazis what they did in spades to everyone else.

Yep, some of the stuff in 'Reckoning' is pretty grim, but overall the book's tone is uplifting - even inspiring in places. Magda's spirit shines through, even when it seems the odds are stacked against her. And she has had some real battles to wage too - failed projects, her weight issues, her sexuality. Maybe the latter two shouldn't be such, but sadly, in today's media climate, they are - particularly for those in the spotlight. All are elaborated on frankly, but there are tales of levity as well. There is much of interest for this particular reader in her recallings - the contrast in her twin visits to Warsaw between pre the end of the Cold War and post. I enjoyed her taking us behind the scenes of 'Who Do You Think You Are?' - I have often wondered about the mechanics of putting together that wonderful show. But it's the concluding chapters that are the most intensely moving of the whole exercise - especially the description of her final unpacking of what made her father tick.

For a first-timer 'Reckoning' is an achievement. It holds interest throughout and is a book this scribe looked forward to returning to after daily impediments intruded. And I concur with the final sentence of that aforementioned on-line review, 'Let's hope the books keep coming.'

Catherine Davison says

I wasn't expecting to enjoy this book as much as I did: I'm not a fan of biographies and especially as Magda is my contemporary I initially thought it was a bit odd to be writing a memoir in one's early fifties. As it turned out it was the fact that so much of her life and her life experiences mirrored my own that I really enjoyed it plus the fact that she writes really well....there you go, a good convent education pays off in some ways! I was moved by her coming out story, especially to her family, so much which resonated for me. I was also thoroughly entertained by her charting of her comedy success. I remember every single show and all those sketches which mirrored our own Aussie characters. It's a good read, I only left off one star because I think she overdid the focus on her father's possible wartime heroism or crimes, she kept coming back to his story and then to her grandfather Luke's story whereas I would have preferred reading less of these men's lives and more of her mother's and grandmothers'.

Fiona says

Absolutely unputdownable, Magda Szubanski's memoir outlines her life and the survivor guilt she inherited from her father, as well as her realisation about her sexuality. I loved this and have kept reading it long after I should have gone to sleep, or put the book down to do other tasks. This is my memoir of 2015.

Ryan Buckby says

actual rating: 4.5

i listened to this one via audiobook while on the plane and i have loved Magda's work on various comedy

sketch shows and playing Sharon on the Australian comedy show 'Kath and Kim' which is still one of my favourite shows to date.

this story had a lot of her childhood and beginnings of her story and i really enjoyed learning more about her life and what she went through in her life. I loved how Magda did her own audiobook which was a brilliant idea because i like when the author does their own audiobook.

if you want a fun, heartbreaking, joyous journey of a life journey this book would be for you!
