



LEFT: Leanne with her husband, Marc, and their children, Gabriella and Alexandro, enjoying their Christmas break in KwaZulu-Natal ABOVE: With her 'morning husband', the late Vuyo Mbuli

## MISSING 'SHARP SHARP' VUYO

**T**he sudden death a year ago of her 'morning husband' of nine years, Vuyo Mbuli, shell-shocked Leanne. 'It's one of the most difficult things that's ever happened to me,' she admits. 'We were so close. We were Starsky and Hutch, Regis and Kelly; we had one of the best on-screen relationships, I think, ever. The show was very much about the two of us and how we interacted, and suddenly he wasn't here.'

Vuyo, 46, who'd brought her coffee in the morning for nine years, collapsed on Saturday 18 May last year while watching a rugby match, and later died of a pulmonary embolism at Bloemfontein Medi-Clinic. 'I got the news on Saturday night, and I was broken,' Leanne recalls. On Sunday, she visited his family home, 'and then I got a phone call saying, "You have to be at work on Monday morning." I said, "You're kidding me. Really?" They said, "We need you now more than ever." I just thought, "I have no idea how I'm going to do this."'

On Monday morning, Leanne went to work earlier than usual, got made up and went onto the *Morning Live* set. 'I walked in, and there was his empty chair, and my chair sitting next to his – and I knew that he was never going to walk in again. And then the reality really hit me badly. I completely fell apart. I cried and I cried, and got as much as I could out. It was the best thing I could have done; otherwise I'd

never have gone on air.' She quickly redid her makeup, and *Morning Live* was back on. 'I couldn't even read the Autocue; it was that bad. I nearly broke down but I managed to control myself. I found this inner strength from somewhere.'

The pressure of single-handedly keeping the programme going, along with the hopes of the nation, has weighed on her. 'It's been a very difficult year,' she says frankly. A stress-induced bout of illness followed the loss, but in customary Leanne style, she kept going and pulled through.

From Vuyo, Leanne says she learnt crucial TV-career survival tactics: to cultivate a thick skin to cope with inevitable public criticism; to focus on what's happening on air, not what's going on in your personal life. 'He was an absolute professional. He had lots of problems, but you'd never know anything was wrong,' she says. 'I miss Vuyo every day. He had such a vibrancy about him; he was full of jokes, always smiling, and *naughty!* He made work fun. We always said that we stayed there for so long and put up with all the nonsense just to work with each other. And people loved him. Some people still haven't put the TV back on since the day he died.'

She is especially grateful for husband Marc's support throughout the ordeal. 'There wasn't much he could do for me while I was on air – that truly was the hardest time – but off air he was there. The day of the funeral, when I had to