

MARK HAYES



Mark Hayes, 28, right, is an author, DJ and stand-up comedian, pursuing his dream of writing the next big TV sitcom. Born in Rochestown, Cork, he lives in West Hollywood, LA

My days fluctuate. It all depends on what I've been doing the night before. If I am DJ-ing the night before, I don't get up until ten or eleven the next morning. LA is a great place to live because you can work on your own schedule. There are two sides to life here. There are the managers and agents, and they're up really early because they're in a complete rat race. Then you've got the people who are trying to create stuff, and they work the hours which work best for them. A lot of people here work at night.

I used to share an apartment with two female models and it was mighty at the start, but they smoked and that got to me. All they ate was ice cream, but they were skinny as rakes. Now I have a new flatmate. He works in real estate. When I get up in the morning, he's gone to work, so I have the apartment to myself. You usually hear the birds singing in the morning and there are a few squirrels trying to get in my window. I live next to two cats and they like to scream. I don't know what they're doing to each other, but they usually wake me up. It's roasting in the mornings, so I often go and lie down by the pool or take a swim. I've been here two years. It's brilliant. Having the sun almost every day of the year changes your whole humour. You

can't be in a bad mood. Unless I have a meeting, I wear shorts during the day.

The healthy way of life here is great because everyone is doing it and you don't feel like a weirdo. Every morning I eat my porridge and my protein shake and I'm good to go.

At the moment I have a few jobs. I'm writing. My first book *RanDumb – The Adventures of an Irish Guy in LA* was published last year and I'm working on another one now. I do stand-up comedy in the evenings and I'm also a DJ. My goal is to write a sitcom, but it takes time. A lot of people don't grasp that. It's not like *Pop Idol* or *The X Factor* where one season on TV and you've made it.

I did a degree in commerce and German in UCC and then I went on and did a masters. After that I worked as a translator. I was watching a lot of shows like *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and *Seinfeld* and I thought that I'd like to write a show like that. So I tried writing scripts. I sent them into RTE but I had no luck and they said that I didn't have the credentials. So I decided to go to LA and get credentials. Because I'm starting late at this whole business, I thought that if I was going to break in, I'd start at the top and go global from the offset. When I moved to LA two years ago, I was pretty clueless. I knew nobody in LA. I rented a car and then I spent the first night in a

restaurant car park, asleep in my car. I had some savings from doing translations, so I used that to find an apartment. I didn't know where to live and I was googling all the time, but even with that you can get it wrong. I was lucky that I chose West Hollywood. It's mostly a gay neighbourhood and it's nice and safe. It's got a dash of good-looking women and some celebrities as well.

Soon after I arrived, the self-doubt kicked in. I thought, 'What am I doing here?' I didn't know anybody and I was going out a lot and going out on your own is a bit awkward. People were big fans of my Irish accent, so suddenly everyone is your best buddy.

In LA you have to have a body of work behind you. At the moment I have a few scripts and my book and I want to do more. I live next to a writer and he started giving me advice. He suggested that I do open mic in a comedy club. Initially I was horrendous. They couldn't understand my accent, they'd laugh at the wrong part of the joke and the crowd would be full of other comedians, so everybody would be competitive. No one would laugh. But I kept at it and it has got better. Now I do a 15-minute slot twice a week. My act is narcissistic. It's mostly about me and my adventures, so I'm laughing at myself as opposed to anyone else. When it's good, it's really

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good, but when it's bad, your insides just shrivel up to a black hole and your mouth gets dry and you're thinking, 'Get me off the stage.'

If you go away to another country and you want to do something, being on your own is huge. You can't just sit in and stare at the walls and expect things to come to you. I've done acting classes here. If I was at home I would have been sneering at them and cynical, but when you're away you're out of your comfort zone, so you try to do as much as you can. LA has been brilliant for me. If I was back in Ireland I'd be watching TV, flicking through the channels and convincing myself that I'd have to watch at least six episodes of *Lost*. But in LA, one thing leads to another. I started out doing DJ in a gay gym because one day I complained to the manager that the music there was so bad. He said, 'Are you a DJ?' and even though I'd never done anything more than a playlist on my iPod, I told him that I was and I offered to do it. Now I have other DJ-ing gigs.

LA is like a bubble. Everyone is productive and hungry and you see that and you think, 'I could do more,' and it drives you on. It's the driven people who are clued in and getting ahead. They didn't just show up and sleep in a car park on a first night and then an agent picked them up. You hear those stories, but you know there's a lot of work behind them. It's like the way it takes 10 years to become an overnight success.

Sometimes life can be so unstable here. I freak out and think, 'This is not how I planned it.' The lows are definitely lower but then the highs are so much higher than I could ever have experienced if I had stayed in Ireland. People think that I don't work because I'm always out, but I'm actually very disciplined. I'm writing every day and even when I'm out, I'm always on. Every couple of weeks I ask myself, 'What have I done?' I'm making sure that I'm ticking stuff off. So many friends in Ireland have told me to cop on. They say, 'Who are you fooling?' You can get annoyed when someone doubts you or you can smile it off and then deliver something. Some nights I will do stand up and then DJ-ing afterwards. When I come home I am buzzing so that's a good time to write. When I go to bed, I dream, but then I wake up and I'm in a dream. It's non-stop. ■

In conversation with Ciara Dwyer

'RanDumb – The Adventures of an Irish Guy in LA', by Mark Hayes, is published by Liberties Press. Mark blogs at <http://trickaduu.com>