

LAURENCE FOX ON DEVASTATING BREAK-UP FROM BILLIE PIPER

EXCLUSIVE
BY SHARON FEINSTEIN

NURSING a beer in a London bar, Laurence Fox opens up about rehearsals for a new film and the darkest six months of his life.

The actor – best known for his role as Detective Sergeant Hathaway in hit ITV series *Lewis* – is hoping this new British movie venture will help to heal the pain he has suffered this year.

The actor admits to having suffered hugely since his actress wife, Billie Piper, called time on their eight-year-marriage. Charming and witty, Laurence exists on adrenaline, cigarettes and brutal exercise to get him through.

He barely sleeps, suffers anxiety attacks, and has been on a six-month therapy course.

Today the star has made the brave step of speaking out in an attempt to raise awareness of mental ill health.

The Sunday Mirror has long battled, through our Time to Change campaign, to end the stigma.

Laurence is now a week into filming in deepest Devon, spending the longest time so far away from his two sons Winston, seven, and four-year-old Eugene. But the work with fellow actors Anna Calder-Marshall, Sinead Matthews, and Greg Hicks, is already helping him enormously.

This *Family*, about a dysfunctional family gathered round their dying mother's bed, means Laurence will take home the same minimum wage as every member of cast and crew, because he believes this is a way to revive good British film.

EMOTIONAL

He said: "In this new piece my character has been the mender of his family's problems all his life, having known his mother was having lovers, his childhood was destroyed by watching what his mother did.

"I have to do a lot of screaming, shouting, emoting and it will be good for me to get it all out, after everything I've been through this year. It's like my own family, highly emotional, lots of shouting, getting over it, lots of love. But absolutely no sulking ever. If you want to talk about class, that for me is a big one, people with no class sulk."

Remarkably honest, and unashamedly emotional, one of Britain's most popular actors described his shock, sadness and the trauma of divorce.

Chain-smoking, 38-year-old Laurence said: "The physical symptoms of trauma and suffering are profound panic attacks for an extended period of time, and I've never had a panic attack in my life before last year.

"It's like being plugged into an electric socket where you go mental. I've learnt to put on my running shoes and sprint as fast as I can until I can't move any more, then there's something else distracting me and the endorphins kick in and you start to feel better. Thankfully they're getting less all the time.

"I haven't slept for six months, even with sleeping pills. I go to bed the same time, same bed as the kids and just lie awake, sleeping two or three hours. My mind's whirring round.

"I'm seeing an amazing therapist. I love her. You've got to seek help, from your family, a therapist, a fitness trainer, whatever it is.

"Family and friends might be the best people for this stuff but they've got their own lives. My brother, Robin, has saved me in this whole situation. He saw it all, what I didn't see, knew what was coming and tried to tell me about it.

"I shouted and got angry with him. But I am my brother's keeper and will

I haven't slept for six months, I've had panic attacks. This has hit me very hard

never be able to thank him for how wonderful he's been to me. He sent me a personal trainer, Darren, three times a week, as a divorce present, and the other two days I train myself.

"I kept going to my marriage guidance counsellor even when we stopped, and she said, 'You know all the money you've got saved for a rainy day? Well it's f***ing pouring, so use it!'

"So I live that way at the moment, spending whatever I need to get me through.

"I think mental health is much undiscussed in this country, men especially are scared of it, but it's

good to talk about feelings. There's only so much room in the cupboard to store them up."

Brought up by parents who have remained married for 43 years, actor James Fox and Mary Elizabeth Piper, Laurence is a believer in keeping promises for richer or poorer, so divorce has left him completely derailed.

He says, chokingly: "You make a promise and should stand by that. If you just can't work it out, then go about it with love and thought, not by foisting it on someone.

"We should cherish the things that really matter and the big promises we make, and try to talk through our problems. This

CHAT With journalist Sharon

has knocked me very hard, it would only so much room in the cupboard to store them up."

"But other people have a phase in their life where they're married to this person, that person, and that's OK, I'm not knocking it. I'm just boringly traditional.

"Let's get married and stay married forever. That's what I grew up watching, so this has derailed me, but I am starting to feel back on track even this week acting with people, because on a TV show it's more broken up. This is much more human-centric.

"I don't feel like a failure, I've got two amazing children. But it's definitely tempered my belief in fireworks between two people, the big spark. "I wish divorce was like Brexit, I will

trigger article 50 after six months, will you just calm the f*** down a bit."

And Laurence admits Billie's continuing friendship with her ex Chris Evans was hard for him.

He measures his words when talking about the volatile ginger-haired presenter, but admits: "I don't think I was super tolerant of having him around.

DYNASTY

"I was just more naive than I should have been. Chris Evans' job is to observe people, interview them and be interested in them so that's what he does for better or worse."

With Lewis on hold, Laurence is starring in "an ensemble" and taking home the same pay as make-up artist and boom swinger.

"It's not because I come from a privileged background that I am able to and believe in a project like this, that's



HAUNTINGLY HONEST
Laurence nurses a pint before talking about split



HAPPIER DAYS
Billie and Laurence on a big night out

“I wasn't super tolerant of Chris Evans. I was more naive than I should have been

LAURENCE FOX ON BREAK-UP WITH WIFE BILLIE



STILL CLOSE Chris Evans with Billie when they were together

and I said, 'Should we do it again?', and he just muttered. So I said, 'What if you just turn up and do a couple of days on it and I visit you on your golf course and ask for advice?'. He said, 'Maybe'.

"I'm sure something will happen but Kevin's got stuff on his plate right now, and he's worked really hard hasn't he, so he deserves a break.

"I love him and don't miss him because I see him loads. Do I miss Lewis? I miss the people I work with but do I miss getting up at 5 in the morning, going in and interviewing people in a police station, maybe not that much.

"So encouraging that so many viewers love Lewis and I'm very protective of that audience because they're a bunch of people who want to be stimulated in a laconic, calm and thoughtful way, rather than stimulated for its own sake. Kev and I were

a good combination because we're great friends. He's been a real support to me through my divorce, and gave me very good advice.

"I did Lewis for over a quarter of my life and consistently earned good money and wasn't a lavish spender apart from motor-bikes. We lived in the country and our mortgage was less than £1,000 a month. Now it's a whole different ball game. But I could easily not have money and be OK.

"Do I look like I'd ever do Hollywood? I've got two children to look after.

"Even being minimally famous myself I can tell you it's boring. Nothing good comes from it, you just keep getting dodgy looks across the bar."

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BY JAMES WALKER



It's customer DIS-service we need to stand up against now

Ever been asked to pay extra to jump a queue for a flight or to skip the line at a theme park?

Or watched new customers get cheaper subscriptions, leaving loyalty unrewarded?

What about being given a huge discount to tempt you into signing up for a deal, only for the renewal price to rocket?

These are all examples of what I call customer dis-service - and it has to stop. We should never have to pay extra for things that should be a right, not just an option.

So how do we stop it? Well, together we can. We have to challenge it each and every time. Here are my tips how.

THREATEN TO LEAVE If you've been a long-term customer but new sign-ups are getting discounts, complain - hard. Say you're going to leave unless you are given the same deal.

No brand wants a large churn in customers. They will generally have a Retention Team who will do all they can to keep your custom and loyalty.

DON'T GIVE TACIT APPROVAL Each time you accept customer dis-service without speaking out, you give silent approval.

Call it out every time. Use resolver.co.uk to raise the issue and escalate it to the boss.

The more who speak out, the more likely it is things will change.

SHOP AROUND AND HAGGLE Often you're sent a high renewal price and you just keep paying.

But you're wasting money. Use a site like moneysavingexpert.com to check the best deals, then use Resolver to complain. You may even find a better quote with the same firm you can use to push them down.

SEEK OUT EMERGING COMPETITORS Customer dis-service is no business model.

The rules are being re-written by smaller "challenger brands".

So why not give them your business? Help them grow - and see how quickly the old ways go.

■ Let James help you complain via Twitter @resolvercouk or visit website resolver.co.uk