

BOOKS

Brett Wilson

The former *Dragons' Den* star joins us for a candid chat about his life's highs and lows

You may know him as the *Dragons' Den* star with the big heart, the driven Calgary investment banker who was a self-made mogul at 40 or the passionate philanthropist who throws himself into a wide range of causes – but there's more to Brett Wilson's story.

The engaging 55-year-old TV star has travelled a rough road to get where he is in life. After battling the impulse to work long hours, being treated for addiction, enduring a divorce and beating prostate cancer, Brett had an awakening, one that he shares in his new book, *Redefining Success*. "I didn't begin to find enduring success until I learned to define success, not by the size of my wallet, my car, my vacation, my home or my office, but rather by the size of my smile and the smiles of those closest to me – the happiness factor," he writes.

The single father of three set about reinventing his life, and more than a decade later, you're more likely to find him building homes for the needy in Mexico or wandering the globe with his children than at the office. Here, Brett opens up to *Hello!* about his journey to find balance.

You share so much of yourself in this book. Tell us about the crisis that led you to rethink your life. The last year of my marriage was 1999. I had been to an addiction treatment centre and, although I didn't know it at the time, I was clinically depressed. The ducks weren't lining up very

well in my real life. But in business, the ducks couldn't have lined up better. I was making more money in weeks than I'd ever made in a year; there were accolades, recognition. I had this huge gap between the success of my business life and the failure of my personal life.

'I had this huge gap between the success of my business life and the failure of my personal life'

What made you so driven? Everything I did was based on the belief that I was doing it for my family. Growing up, the only time I ever heard my parents fight was over money. So,

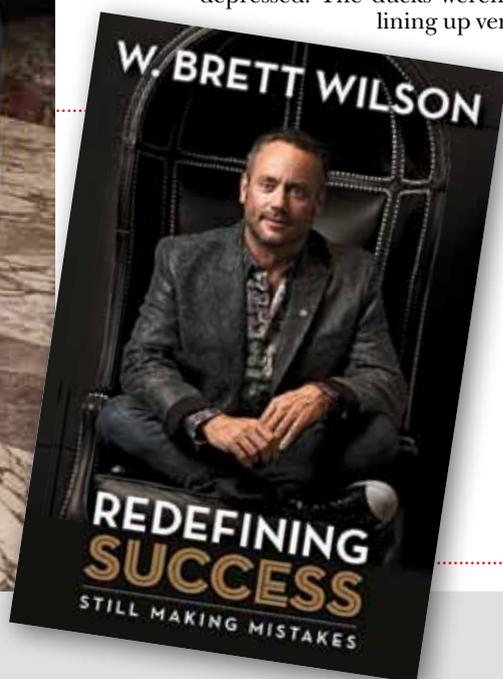
my assumption was that if I made a lot of money, everything else would be fine.

How did you go about changing your life?

After the divorce, I had my children 50 per cent of the time. I stopped going into the office at 6:30 a.m. I went home for supper. I wanted the kids to understand that I was here for them. So, I was home. I didn't travel; I didn't go to charity events. If I had the kids, that was sacred. I went from zero to 60 in a week in terms of building a relationship with the kids. Then I was diagnosed with cancer two years later; that really accelerated [the process]. It was scary because I was very much alone at the time. But cancer may have saved my life. It forced me to look at everything and just say no. If not for that, I may have worked myself to death. So, I changed my priorities. If you don't have your health, you've got nothing.

In addition to spending more time with family, you've also dedicated yourself to charity efforts. Who's been your inspiration in this? My mom was a social worker, my dad sold cars – a pretty ordinary background. But with the benefit of hindsight, I really appreciate how much my parents did for the community. They were extraordinary. They weren't socialites in any way, shape or form; they just did the jobs, went door-to-door for causes and participated. They did it with us, so it was very much ingrained. Last night, I sat with 25 kids at a recovery centre until 1 in the morning. There were a lot of tears chatting with them. We talked about how you only get one life. There was a kid that had overdosed and was just out of the hospital. I spent time with him. Let's just say those 10 minutes justified the entire evening. **H**

REPORT: TARA HENLEY



Brett's new business book, *Redefining Success*, is as deeply personal as it is inspiring.