

SUCCESS

ON HER OWN TERMS

BY ALEX BEN BLOCK

A FEW WEEKS before the presidential election, Chelsea Handler stopped using her social media accounts except to post promotional items. She consciously avoided reading any of the comments.

Handler was under attack from supporters of Donald Trump, who she had repeatedly put down while actively backing Hillary Clinton. "I'm sure everybody is saying, 'Die, get out of here. Nobody likes you.' So I stopped looking."

On her Netflix show in October, during an interview with Univision anchor Jorge Ramos, Handler declared that she would move to Canada if Trump was elected. She later said she had bought a home in Spain and would move there, adding that she wasn't the only celebrity planning an exodus.

Handler didn't leave, but insists she was sincere. She reversed herself the first day back at work after the election.

"The people that work in my office, mostly Millennials, were saying 'You have to stay,'" recalls Handler. "I said, 'I can't even do a show. I'm leaving.'"

"They said, 'You're our voice. You're the person representing us. We need you now more than ever,'" she added. "If you move to Spain, that's completely irresponsible."

Handler indeed felt a sense of responsibility, adding that, "there are a few million people out there who want to get their information from me." So she elected to remain at Netflix to finish her documentaries and

the first 90-episode season of "Chelsea," a talk show that is a breakthrough in how it is produced, how it is distributed and for its creative purpose.

The Los Angeles Press Club tonight is presenting Handler with the Luminary Award for Career Achievement. It's a recognition of the ground she has broken, the relationship with audiences she has cultivated and the work she continues to do.

There has never been a talk show quite like "Chelsea." A stand-up comic, author, actress and veteran of several previous talk shows, Handler has cut an unprecedented deal that gives her complete creative control.

Three shows a week are posted on Netflix, which is available in about 190 countries. Episodes are generally about half an hour, though some run longer. Her opening monologue is as likely to be about a medical or cultural matter as a comedic joke-fest.

"It's nice to be given that license," said Handler, "to be able to make the show I want and not have them inhibit my creativity. In the beginning I said I want the show to be many different things. Sometimes a dinner party. Sometimes a focus on another country. Some-



Chelsea Handler completing the Warrior Dash in a pre-taped segment from the premiere of "Chelsea." Hugh Jackman and Chelsea Handler snap a photo together as they prepare for the Global Citizen Festival last September.



AUTHOR, COMEDIAN AND TALK-SHOW
HOST CHELSEA HANDLER RECEIVES THE PRESS CLUB'S
LUMINARY AWARD FOR CAREER ACHIEVEMENT

Netflix's female-powered lineup was on display at their first annual Rebels + Rule Breakers Luncheon in Los Angeles.

Sandra Bullock, Jennifer Aniston and Mary McCormack stopped by for an "intervention" during an episode of "Chelsea Lately."



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"I go on vacation and act like an idiot, and I don't have anybody to answer to and it feels nice." —Chelsea Handler

times hilarious. Sometimes serious. Sometimes in the studio. Sometimes not."

During the two years after her landmark deal with Netflix was announced, but before the first show aired this past May, Handler said she was pressured, criticized and endlessly second guessed.

"Everybody looked at me askance," she recalled, "and said, 'It's not going to work. It's not traditional.' And when it was reviewed they said it was like every other talk show, but it's not."

Handler has been in the limelight for years. As a stand-up comedian she drew thousands to huge venues. She is the best-selling author of five books, and hosted "Chelsea Lately" (2007-2014) on E! Entertainment Television. Over time people have come either to love the outspoken Jersey girl almost to the point of obsession, or hate her, which is why she stopped checking social media.

Netflix doesn't release viewership numbers for "Chelsea" (or other shows) but it has been renewed, and Handler said, "They're very happy with it. It spiked in the beginning and then went down a little, but ratings have started to spike a little bit more. We've been on an uptick the last few months."

Through her often-brash comedy, her penchant for unfiltered commentary on almost everything, and her

emotional connection with audiences, Handler has emerged as a quirky, often funny, sometimes angry voice for the younger generation, and those who refuse to grow old.

Handler said the Luminary Award is special to her.

"I've never been a critical darling so it's not like I've gotten a lot of these," she said. "Yes, it's an honor to get any award. I would love to get an Emmy or a Golden Globe, if we qualified. But I've resigned myself to being a person who doesn't get a lot of those, so it's nice."

Her show and her life have nearly merged over the years. She has never married or had children, she obsesses over her weight, and treats her staff (some of whom are longtime friends or relatives) as a big extended family. She remains a self-described "party animal" who likes her cocktails. One of her two rescue dogs, Chunk, goes to work with her and can be seen wandering the set while she interviews a star or an expert on climate change.

She no longer does stand-up and has no plans for another book, but still reads voraciously so she can ask smart questions—and to fill a void.

"I didn't go to college," explained Handler, "so I'm constantly over-compensating for that absence. I want to know as much as I can so when I talk to people, I don't want to feel like an idiot."

Being independent fuels her passions. "I view getting married, settling down and having kids as not appealing to me," said Handler. "It never has been. I look at my friends with kids and love them but don't want to get up in the morning and get a kid ready for school. I want to get up and read the *New York Times* and play with my dog.

"I want my own life and I've got it," added Handler. "I've got tons of friends. I have the most fun. I go on vacation and act like an idiot, and I don't have anybody to answer to and it feels nice."