

**Y**ou wouldn't know it from our photos, but Demi Lovato loathes having her picture taken. As professional as the 19-year-old singer is at striking a pose, her relief is palpable once it's over.

"I felt uncomfortable today," she admits. "Knowing I have bad angles and the photographer can take a bad shot makes me insecure. But I'm a lot better than I used to be. In my first shoot after having treatment, I went into meltdown and ran away from the studio. So I've made progress."

That's a major understatement. This is the girl, after all, who first found fame as an American TV actress when she was just seven years old. By 15 she was a pop star, billed as Disney's successor to Miley Cyrus' teen-queen crown.

Yet behind the beaming smile and beautiful voice, Demi, like so many child stars before her, was self-destructing.

Bulimia – which she'd suffered from since the age of 12 – ravaged her body, and then there was the drink, reported cocaine abuse, depression and self-harm.

Then, in November 2010, she had a very public meltdown. After punching a backing dancer on a plane during a tour, Demi was admitted to rehab for three months. There followed a further six months when she was so disillusioned by the industry, she considered quitting.

Only now, as her third album, *Unbroken*, is released, does she feel ready to return to the limelight – and speak out about the brutal Hollywood culture that almost destroyed her.

"I'm not saying I'm perfect, or fixed, but I am learning to love and accept myself. My outlook is more positive and I am happy," she says.

Surrounded by a security guard and half a dozen Topshop bags from a whirlwind shopping splurge, Albuquerque-born Demi is cautious but candid, and refreshingly free of the psycho-babble you would expect from a celeb who has spent three months in rehab.

Any scars from her self-harming are hidden by tattoos on her wrists, which say "Stay" and "Strong" – a tribute to her fans for supporting her.

Demi hit screens in 2005, playing Angela in children's series *Barney & Friends*. At 14, she landed roles in Disney

film *Camp Rock* and television show *Sonny With A Chance*.

She was part of an exclusive group of teen actors, including the Jonas Brothers, Selena Gomez and Miley Cyrus, who – like Britney and Christina before them – had the good looks and squeaky-clean personalities required by the Disney machine.

But as stardom beckoned, so did bullies at her school in Dallas, Texas.

"They called me a whore and told me I was fat and ugly. I shouldn't have listened, but I took it to heart and it hurt. I thought maybe I didn't have friends because I was too fat," she remembers.

So she starved herself, and anything she *did* eat, she threw up again. Within six months she had lost over 2st and weighed 6st 4lb – unhealthy for her 5ft 2in height.

"I'd make myself sick up to six times a day," she says. "My mum was worried, but because I was going through puberty I was having growth spurts so she assumed that was why I was thinner."

### Downward SPIRAL

**W**hen skinniness didn't provide her with the friends or happiness she yearned for, Demi sought solace in drugs. It was reported that she was snorting cocaine, but Demi – aware of the influence on her young fan base – is reluctant to go into detail.

"It's something I don't really want to talk about," she says apologetically. "What I can say is that I was depressed. I would come off stage in front of 18,000 people and suddenly be alone in a hotel room. I'd come crashing down and would try to find a way to recreate that feeling, to stay 'up'."

Being based in Hollywood made it easier to get access to illegal substances.

"Promoters gave me drugs and alcohol in restaurants or clubs. They wanted me to come back so I would be seen there. They were basically kissing my ass," she says, a flash of anger briefly interrupting her sunny demeanour.

"I thought they were my friends. I thought I was having fun. Being a celebrity can be dangerous. Nobody says 'no'. That's why so many end up overdosing and dying. It could definitely have happened to me."

When the drugs didn't block out



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her pain, she cut herself. "It started with my wrists. People saw that, so I cut in places they couldn't see," she says. "You do it because you feel so bad inside. You don't know how to take it out other than on yourself."

Demi – whose mother Dianna, a former cheerleader, divorced her father Patrick when Demi was just two – felt



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unable to confide in her parents.

"I'd just get scolded if they found out," she says. "They were worried, but I knew they wouldn't understand. I had a hard time opening up to friends. People were there for me but I didn't utilise them. Do I wish I had? Yes."

Instead, she threw herself into her work. Demi's first album, *Don't Forget*, was

released in 2008. The following year she starred in the Disney film, *Princess Protection Program*, and released her second album, *Here We Go Again*. It shot to No.1 in the US charts.

"I went from movie to album to touring to television and back," she says. "Being in the limelight wasn't the root of my problems, but it →

*She was the clean-cut Disney star set for a glittering career. But DEMI LOVATO ended up in rehab after spiralling into self-destruction*

BY **ANTONIA HOYLE**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
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didn't help. I never took more than two weeks off in four years and it caught up with me."

*The hardest THING*

**A**fter Demi punched backing dancer Alex Welch in November 2010, allegedly because she believed Alex had told tour managers she'd been behaving inappropriately, her family and management finally recognised the extent of her problems and sent her to rehab.

"It wasn't my idea, but I didn't fight it," says Demi.

She spent the next three months at the Timberline Knolls facility in Illinois.

"It was really, really hard and scary," she says. "I was homesick and lonely and several times I thought f\*\*\* it, I'm leaving. But my mum told me I would regret it. This was my only chance."

Slowly, she started to recover.

"I had 14 hours of therapy a day. I listened to music and learned to knit. When I finally left, it was like being let out of prison."

After her release last January, she took six months off, and enjoyed it so much she considered staying out of the limelight for good.

"I didn't know if I'd be able to go back to work, but I knew I would get so bored. I couldn't see myself going to college or working nine-to-five."

Last September, she returned to the stage at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York. "It was awesome," she says. "Although there is a lot of temptation, I'd learned to cope."

The songs on her new album reflect

*'Club promoters gave me DRUGS and alcohol in CLUBS'*

her heartache, and include *For The Love Of A Daughter*, about the rift between Demi and her father after he – seemingly keen to cash in on his daughter's notoriety – did a series of interviews about her.

The betrayal is still raw, and she says she has no interest in rebuilding a relationship with him.

*A long ROAD*

**N**or does Demi plan to resume acting until she is fully confident. "I need to be secure in my body before I go back in front of the camera. Anyone in recovery from an eating disorder would find that triggering, and I'm not ready," she says.

She admits her stunning new size 10-12 body is taking some getting used to: "After so long being thin, it was terrifying being heavier. But I am a naturally curvy Hispanic girl. I don't deprive myself – I had a Kit Kat last night, but I don't eat s\*\*\* every day. I have a meal service that brings my food to my home so I don't have to think about being healthy."

Although she no longer drinks, Demi admits that she has self-harmed and made herself throw up since leaving rehab. "I've slipped up a few times, but each time I have learned from it, and it's



become further apart," she says.

She's still BFFs with Miley Cyrus, and has found an unlikely ally in Cheryl Cole, who, after watching a recent MTV documentary about Demi's troubles, tweeted her support. "I was so excited. I'd love to meet her," Demi says.

Currently single, her exes include Joe Jonas, 22, and actor Wilder Valderrama, 32.

"I'm not dating at all. I love having a boyfriend but need to be secure on my own first," she says.

Despite Demi having had a lifetime of troubles before she's even 20, she insists she has no regrets.

"There were times I wish I'd been a normal teenager so I could make mistakes and not be scrutinised. But I don't mourn the childhood I never had. I'd rather have been travelling the world and making albums than at high school."

And as for the bullies who made her life hell? "I don't think or care about them," she says. "I wouldn't change what I went through. I've learned from it and it's made me stronger." **f**

● *Demi's single Give Your Heart A Break is out May 14. Her album Unbroken is out now.*



With fellow teen stars Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez



She's replaced her self-harm scars with tattoos



Looking thin before rehab

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