



Stain-busters are spot on

Got a dirty mark on your new white top? Here's the solution, **Karen Hardy** writes

One of the best bits of this job is the opportunity to use what you're writing about for personal gain. This would probably make more sense if I was writing in the financial pages and knew what stocks to buy or sell, or in the political area so I'd have a better understanding of where my vote should actually go. But no. My life is very mundane. I'm so terribly excited by this interview I can barely contain myself.

Jennifer Fleming is one half of the *Spotless* phenomenon. Along with Shannon Lush, the pair have never met a stain they couldn't bust. I have a whole washing-basket-load of questions to ask. My husband's shorts, splattered with grease from the barbecue, texta all over the kids' school shirts, the tablecloth with goodness knows what collection of stains, from chocolate topping to dried and crusty bolognese sauce.

Fleming happily answers them all. One of her favourite solutions is the grease-beating one.

"One of the best things here is dishwashing liquid," she says. "You put a couple of drops on your finger, rub it in so it emulsifies the fat and out the stain comes. You must use your fingers to rub it into the fabric though."

And it's not too late to try this, even if you've washed the item of clothing already. She's a godsend.

Fleming was producing James Valentine's afternoon ABC Radio show in 2004 and he had a section where "he'd reinvented household handy hint talkback", Fleming says. "Someone would ring in with a problem and we'd ask for callers to ring in with solutions. Shannon was one of those people. I remember answering her call and asking her which problem she could help us with - we had a few lined up, red wine on the carpet, soot around the fireplace - and she said all of them. And she did solve them all too.

"She'd called up a couple of times and James and I are, like, who's this woman who knows all this stuff. We invited her to be a regular guest and every time she was on the phone, lines would just

light up. There'd be so many people with questions."

It was Fleming's idea to put it all in a book and *Spotless* was published in late 2005. The initial print run sold out within weeks; it has now sold more than 500,000 copies. But people were still looking for stain solutions, had different problems, needed more advice. "*Spotless* was never meant to be comprehensive," Fleming says. "It was meant to be a general overview of the house and how to remove different stains.

"But people would keep calling in saying they had problems which they couldn't find answers to in the first book. We kept collecting all of this information and it became book two."

Fleming says she can see why the idea of *Spotless* has caught on.

"These are skills that used to be passed on mother to daughter and that kind of stopped," she says. "I was pretty clueless before all of this. It's pretty straightforward once you learn it, once you get down to the chemistry of it."

Rather than go for an all-purpose stain removal solution, which "usually ends up making things worse", Fleming says to do a bit of stain diagnosis. "We have that chapter in the book, 'Formulas'. Ask yourself, is it a fat stain, is it a protein stain, is it a carbohydrate stain, is it an ink stain, and then you've got different techniques you can go through to beat it. "Once you understand it it's easy to think, okay it's a protein stain, it has to be cold water and soap otherwise you set the stain. I used to think, why does blood never come out, and it was because I was using hot water. Something as simple as that meant I was not being successful. It's a basic skill most of us don't learn, skills that weren't valued any more.

"We thought it had all been lost but we found it all inside of Shannon's head."

Fleming is never surprised at how keen people are to air their dirty laundry, so to speak. "We have these stain clinics around the place and people bring their stains along for us to try and remove.

One woman brought a whole load of washing and was going through it bit by bit. Do people share intimate details? I suppose the way in which you get a stain can sometimes be personal."

Spotless 2 is also a fun read because it is set out in a question and answer format. Some of the questions are quite personal. "I know this is unusual but how do you remove lipstick from a resuscitation dummy?", "My girlfriend went away and left me to do the washing. But I didn't get to it for a few days and when I did, there were mould spots on her lightly coloured lingerie. Please help me!", "How do I remove dog diarrhoea from light-bone-coloured carpet?" are just a few of the questions answered.

One of the more unusual techniques is the "rotten milk technique". Leave milk in the sun until it forms solids and use it to remove ballpoint-pen ink stains. Lush picked this one up from her grandmother. You have to wonder, I put to Fleming, what led that first person to rub rotten milk on an ink stain. How did some of the more unusual techniques originate?

"I think in a lot of cases it was a combination of trial and error and basic chemistry," she says. "People probably discovered a lot of them accidentally. Shannon discovered that black tea is really good at cleaning aluminium. She drinks a load of tea and I think she spilt a cup on something that was aluminium and it cleaned it up."

Fleming says Lush has never been stumped by a stain.

"This is one of her claims to fame. Shannon was a fine arts restorer by trade so she's worked across all different mediums, breaking things down and putting them back together. I'm shocked by how much I've learned through all of this. I'm her apprentice in a way. I've got my 24/7 stain-busting hotline." And now I've got mine.

■ *Spotless 2. More stains and solutions to domestic disasters.* By Shannon Lush and Jennifer Fleming. ABC Books. 376pp. \$19.95.



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Lush treatment

Australia's Queen of Clean, Shannon Lush, is taking her incredible knowledge from the radio to television. In her new series, *Lush House*, she will combine her unique know-how with a mission to instil domestic wellbeing and happiness – she wants nothing more than to transform the homes of the nation. Each week one household receives the Shannon Lush treatment. These are people who need her help to get their lives and homes in order. They are literally in a mess. *Lush House* is no snap-your-fingers make-over show. The household has to make the transformation themselves – Lush is there as mentor and font of all knowledge. Over 10 episodes Lush will help all types of Australian households change the way they live. Her simple, non-toxic approach to cleaning and household management will enable viewers to discover everything they ever wanted to know about remedying domestic disasters and deliver valuable take-away tips that will save time, money and the planet. If you are in search of domestic bliss, if you long for a house, and a life, that is clean, tidy and calm, but haven't got the time, knowledge, family support or the organisational skills, this series will have the solution.

■ *Lush House* premieres on the Lifestyle Channel at 7.30pm on Monday April 27.

Quick stain removal guide for fabrics

Barbecue sauce

Wipe with a little white vinegar, wash normally and hang in the sunshine to dry.

Beer (including dark beer)

Paint a paste of NapiSan OxyAction MAX and water on the stain and leave for 15 minutes, then wash normally.

Blood

Rub the stain out with cold water and a cake of bathroom soap then wash normally on the cold setting. If you can't put it through the wash, use a thin paste of cornflour and cold water to draw out the stain. Allow to dry and brush away. For old blood stains, use cold water and a cake of bathroom soap and vigorously rub the stain against itself.

Carrot

Wipe with a little white vinegar and hang in



Jennifer Fleming, above, is one half of the *Spotless* phenomenon, along with Shannon Lush, top right

the sun. Carrot stains respond to UV rays.

Chewing gum

Harden the gum with an ice-cube and cut as much off as possible with scissors or a blade. Then apply a little tea tree oil with a rolled up pair of pantyhose and work the remaining gum out by rubbing it in circles. White spirits also works.

■ from *Spotless2*, Shannon Lush and Jennifer Fleming, ABC Books.