

Marta keeps it real

While filming an emotionally-charged scene of the hit television show *A Place To Call Home*, Marta Dusseldorp briefly lost her grip on reality.

SHANNON MOLLOY reports

FOR a moment, in the midst of filming an emotionally-charged scene of *A Place To Call Home*, actor Marta Dusseldorp admits she lost her grip on reality and “took things too far”.

Merely talking about it is enough to bring the star to tears, even several months later. Such is the heavy weight of the plot line and her deep investment in her character, Sarah.

Adding to the mental juggling act is the fact that her real-life husband, Ben Winspear, plays her on-screen one, Rene.

Fans of the hit Foxtel period drama were left reeling when Rene suddenly died while recovering from brain surgery.

It was while making that powerful episode that the line between fact and fiction became temporarily blurred for Dusseldorp.

“I did one take where I thought it crossed over (into reality) and I went too far,” she recalls



FAMILY AFFAIR: *A Place To Call Home* star Marta Dusseldorp, above, and left with real-life husband Ben Winspear, who played on-screen husband Rene.

“I just really grieved, overly so, personally, I guess. I took (the performance) too far. There were extras around me on set who were quite confused and concerned.”

They didn’t realise that the scripted couple was played by an actual one, Dusseldorp

explains. “I had to tell them that he’s my husband in real life and that I’d just gotten a bit upset. But then they were even more worried and it was like, it’s OK – it’s just pretend!”

Ordinarily, the seasoned performer relies on carefully-

about Rene – with whom Sarah only recently reunited after years of believing he had died in the war – Dusseldorp unconsciously slips back into her character’s shoes.

“Losing him twice was really hard,” she says, before correcting herself. “Sorry, I didn’t lose him – she did.”

She describes working with Winspear as a “special” experience that’s without doubt one of the highlights of her long career.

But killing off Rene was good for the show and its continuing story – however difficult it might be for her character and loyal fans of the couple.

“The robustness of season three gave us the opportunity to go further, to go much deeper with the characters, and that was thoroughly rewarding,” Dusseldorp says.

In that vein, the cliff-hanger season finale, which airs tonight, doesn’t disappoint. The winds of change blow through Ash Park and there are more than a few lives on the line.

“The (writers and producers) always had in mind that there was another season, given Foxtel committed to making two, and that’s different to what we’ve ever done because we had certainty.”

A PLACE TO CALL HOME SEASON FINALE

SUNDAY, 8.30PM, SOHO

honed techniques to keep things in check, but she admits they sometimes go out the window.

“You have to be careful ... you have to have barriers. But when you’re working really long weeks and in the midst of it, it can be difficult to maintain the separation.

“I even sometimes dream I’m in a scene, with lighting rigs around me and a microphone on.”

Even now, while talking

SETTLING IN TO NEW HOME AFTER RESCUE

BRIAN Walsh, Foxtel’s director of television, is the man responsible for saving *A Place To Call Home* from Channel Seven’s programming scrap-heap last year.

The free-to-air network is said to have swung the axe after deciding that the almost one million weekly viewers were too old and not a prime advertising demographic.

Fans revolted, launching a social media campaign pleading with someone to save their show.

Foxtel figured at least a few devotees would follow it to its new home. And so they have.

“We’ve significantly lifted our subscribers ... in the drama tier, and that’s being driven by *A Place To Call Home*,” Walsh says.

“It’s more than exceeded our expectations. It will go down as one of the great Australian TV success stories. We’re over the moon.”

In industry terms, the comeback story is a unique one. A network making new episodes of its dumped show for a rival, with a purchase commitment of two seasons to boot, is unheard of.

“It’s quite a ground-breaking partnership,” Walsh says.

“It was a big gamble and I was nervous, no question, but the gamble has paid off.”

Since launching, it has attracted an audience of nearly 500,000 each week and is the third most-watched drama ever on Foxtel, behind *Game of Thrones* and *Wentworth*.