THE MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO MENTAL HEALTH

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EXCLUSIVE

STRICTLY DIANNE

Romance, recovery, and role models – there's no holds barred with pro dancer **Dianne Buswell**

Challenge your perspective

Alice Liveing on realising her true strength

Find your peace of mind

Decluttering isn't just for your closet

Gut stuff

Not too cool for **stool**

PLUS+

39 hacks to unlock your potential

THE SEX EDIT

- Keep it kinky – no shame here
- What is polyamory?
- Rediscovering your sexual self, post-trauma

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Photography | David Hurley

“Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall

– F SCOTT FITZGERALD, *THE GREAT GATSBY*







Grow your own way

Do you remember back as a child when your legs would ache, stretching themselves? “Growing pains,” my mum would say. “It’s just your body taking you to new heights.” Since then, the idea that progress can be painful has really stuck with me...

It’s through accepting who we were, and what our experiences have taught us, that we can unlock the future – but we shouldn’t feel chained to the past. Whatever we’ve been through may be a part of our story, but in the immortal words of Natasha Bedingfield: “The rest is still unwritten.”

And that’s what this issue is all about – growth. Where we were a year ago, isn’t necessarily the same place we are at now. And in another five years, who knows where we might be?

We want you to read this issue and be inspired by your own potential. To see the possibilities of stepping out of your comfort zone, and into a new space that serves you better.

The incredible, and hilarious, *Strictly Come Dancing* professional Dianne Buswell is radiant on our cover, as she reveals her past excessive exercising, and trying to be the dancing role model she never had when she was growing up.

We explore embracing your sexual desires, and how the conversation around body acceptance needs to expand to include everyone’s perspectives. And fitness guru Alice Liveing shares why she’s opening up about her domestic abuse experience to help others.



As NR Narayana Murthy once said: “Growth is painful. Change is painful. But, nothing is as painful as staying stuck where you do not belong.”

Happy reading,



REBECCA THAIR | EDITOR

*We **love** hearing from you, get in touch:*

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EXPERT PANEL

Meet the team of experts who have come together to deliver information, guidance, and insight throughout this issue



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If you are in crisis and are concerned for your own safety, call **999**, or go to **A&E**

Call Samaritans on **116 123** or email them on **jo@samaritans.org**

GENERAL LISTENING LINES

SANEline
SANEline offers support and information from 4.30pm–10.30pm: **0300 304 7000**

Mind
Mind offers advice Mon–Fri 9am–6pm, except bank holidays: **0300 123 3393.** Or email: **info@mind.org.uk**

CALM
The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is a line for men, and is open from 5pm–midnight: **0800 58 58 58**

Switchboard
Switchboard is a line for LGBT+ support. Open from 10am–10pm: **0300 330 0630.** You can email: **chris@switchboard.lgbt**

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Visit **anxietyuk.org.uk** to find out more about the most common forms of anxiety, and read about others' experiences.

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The Survivors Trust provides free, confidential support for women, men, and children who have experienced sexual assault. Call their advice line on **08088 010 818**, or visit **thesurvivorstrust.org**

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For advice on everything related to OCD, OCD UK offers a huge library of information on their website **ocduk.org**, as well as a support line you can call on **03332 127 890**

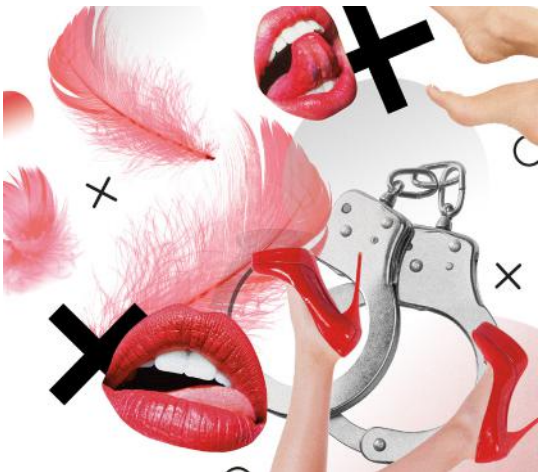
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Created to support those in grieving, Cruse Bereavement Care connects you with services at **cruse.org.uk**, and offers a free helpline on **0808 808 1677**

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Browse hundreds of therapy services, from acupuncture and massage, to reflexology. Head to **therapy-directory.org.uk** to discover complementary therapists in your area.



Head to happiful.com for more services and support









The Uplift

ARTS

At last, ballerinas of colour can buy shoes to match their skin

Ballet shoes in colours that match Asian and black skin tones are being made for the first time in the UK. Dance shoe manufacturer Freed of London, Ballet Black founder and artistic director, Cassa Pancho MBE, and senior artist, Cira Robinson, have teamed up to create the range.

Highlighted in UK grime artist Stormzy's Glastonbury set earlier this year, when Ballet Black performers joined him on stage, dancers can now purchase shoes to match their skin tones. Historically, ballet shoes have only been available in white and peachy-pink, meaning dancers of colour had to customise their shoes themselves in order to match their skin tone.

Following more than a year of development, bronze and brown ballet shoes have now been added to Freed of London's core collection.

"I am beyond delighted that Freed have launched these two new colours," Ballet Black founder Cassa said. "Although it may seem like a very small change to the outside world, I believe this is a historic moment in British ballet, and another step forward for culturally diverse dancers across the globe."

Writing | Bonnie Evie Gifford



HEALTH

Pathologist releases colouring exercises that celebrate *you*

Drawings show everything from brain cells to the flu virus

Pathology, the study of disease, may not be the first place you look when you need a body confidence boost. But now, scientist-turned-artist Dr Lizzie Burns from the Royal College of Pathologists, has launched *Incredible You*, a colouring series that reveals the beauty inside our bodies.

"The biological structures that make up life are truly awe-inspiring," said Professor Jo Martin, president of the Royal College of Pathologists. "Starting at a molecular level, *Incredible You* shows life in all its complexity. Exploring the science behind our 17 pathology specialities, the illustrations open up a world that is rarely seen."

Offering a selection of drawings based on real specimens, the series combines the mindfulness of colouring, with a celebration of the things that make us who we are – something that is at the heart of Dr Burns' work.

"Working with people in hospital, I saw first-hand how much colouring-in can be enjoyed to help combat anxiety, loneliness, and boredom," she explains. "Your body is amazing, and I hope these images will excite curiosity, learning, and delight, with beautiful patterns emerging through colour."

Taking time to release stress, and celebrate the power of our bodies? That's just what the doctor ordered!

To download the illustrations, head to rcpath.org and search 'Incredible You'.

Writing | Kathryn Wheeler

EDUCATION

Students in Oregon, USA, are now legally able to take mental health days

After a successful campaign lead by four students, the American state of Oregon now allows pupils up to five days off every three months for mental health reasons. Before now, the state was only legally obliged to allow time off for physical illness.

One of the campaigners, 18-year-old Hailey Hardcastle, says their aim is to challenge the stigma around mental health, and encourage young people to speak out when they're struggling.

Alongside fellow campaigners – Sam Adamson, Lori Riddle, and Derek Evans – Hailey says the new legislation means that students will no longer have to pretend to be physically unwell when they need to take a mental health day.

"Why should we encourage lying to our parents and teachers? Being open to adults about our mental health promotes positive dialogue that could help kids get the support they need," says Hailey.

Here in the UK, conversations are happening about mental health days, especially within businesses. However, currently there is no law in place that recognises mental health as a valid cause for absence. Here's hoping this small step in America leads to strides taking place worldwide.

Writing | Kat Nicholls


We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future
– FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT



FAMILY

More than 6,500 dads come together in supportive Facebook group

Harnessing the power of social media, dad of four, Paul Barnes, decided it was about time that dads stood by one another when, in 2017, he founded a private Facebook group called Dadventures.

Created with the aim of bringing dads together to chat about everything from adventures to have with their kids, to the specific pressures of fatherhood, the group quickly took off, and now has more than 6,500 members.

"I think dads have a hard time opening up and asking for support, as there is still a stigma that makes men feel they need to 'man up', and just get on with things, rather than letting their emotions out," Paul tells *Happiful*.

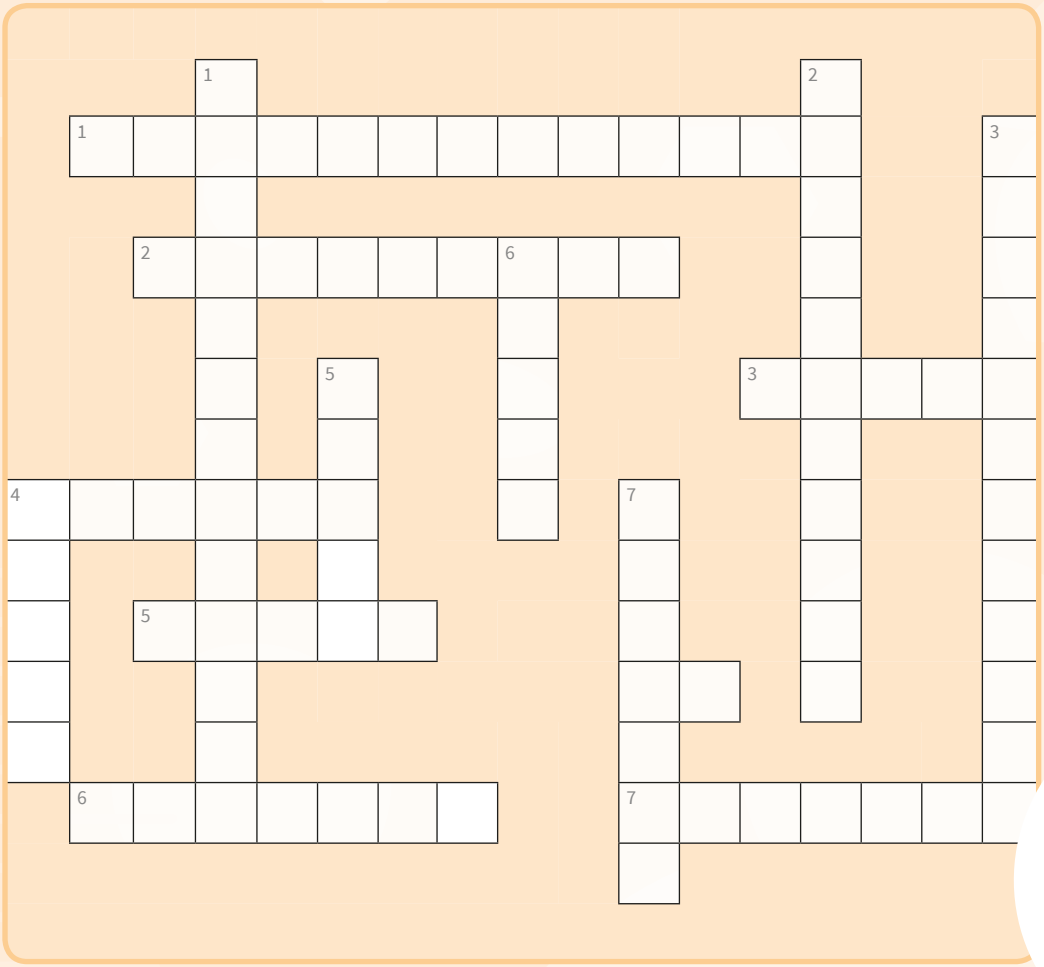
But the impact of this digital safe-space is now being felt in the real world, as the group has sparked regular meet-ups across the country. Paul shares how one member even managed to work through a drinking problem by posting daily updates in the group – falling back on the support of the members.

For Paul, who himself lives with depression and social anxiety, groups like this are the future of connection, and another step towards a kinder, more accepting world.

Search Dadventures UK on Facebook to find out more. *Writing | Kathryn Wheeler*

Take 5

Sit down, put your feet up, and relax, as we put your mental cogs in motion with this month's puzzling fun



Crossword

Crack the clues to solve the crossword
Hint: theme is 2019

How did you do? Search 'freebies' at *shop.happiful.com* to find the answers, and more!

ACROSS:

1. Animal, believed to be extinct for 100 years, spotted in the Galapagos in February (5,8)
2. Event in January with a record-breaking 250,000 sign-ups (9)
3. 24/7 crisis text line for MH (5)
4. Prince Harry and Megan's baby (6)
5. New judge on *Strictly Come Dancing* (5)
6. European country who legalised same-sex marriage in January (7)
7. Fastest film to gross $2bn, *Avengers* (7)

DOWN:

1. HBO series that ended after eight seasons (4,2,7)
2. *Happiful's* January cover star (5,6)
3. The name of Kate Middleton's mental health themed Chelsea Flower Show garden (4,2,6)
4. First image of a black hole captured in what month? (5)
5. 350 million planted in one day in India (5)
6. Female winner of Love Island 2019 (5)
7. World Cup sport England's men's team won (7)

The wellbeing wrap

Going up

Purr-fect news! Scientists develop a vaccine that may stop cat allergies

Swiss students have created a **stair-climbing wheelchair**

Red wine contains a compound that helps control stress – study finds

Mental illness was the #1 reason for **1 million sick notes** in Yorkshire in 2018

Three or more cups of coffee a day increases migraine risk

Going down

Icons | *shutterstock.com*, Font Awesome: *fontawesome.com*

The green, green grass of home

Would you be-leaf it? Our Earth is 5% greener than it was 20 years ago, according to a study by Nasa. The space agency found that around a third of this is thanks to tree-planting schemes in India and China.

James Harrison, 81, from Sydney, Australia, has blood containing a very rare antibody used in medications. This year he reached the maximum age to donate blood, but he has donated every week for 60 years! His donations have helped to save more than 2.4 million babies.

DANCING IN THE DARK

The saying 'dance like nobody's watching' might be more meaningful than you'd think! An Australian study of nearly 1,200 participants attending 'No Lights, No Lycra' dance groups found that as well as a great way to get active, with no inhibitions, 97% of people agreed that it improved their mental health, too.

GLOBE-TROTTER? PRONE TO A PAMPER? CAN SNIFF OUT A GOOD DEAL? THAT'S RIGHT, HOTELS.COM IS ADVERTISING A NEW JOB – THEY WANT THE TOP DOG FOR REVIEWS WITH A NEW 'CANINE CRITIC' ROLE, VISITING 10 OF THE WORLD'S MOST DOG-FRIENDLY HOTELS!

FLEX IT

Working from home, more flexible hours? Workplace wellbeing is a hot topic at the moment, and it seems more flexible working options for staff could be a big bonus. A recent study revealed 69% of participants felt flexible working helped their work-life balance, and 39% of those who currently worked flexibly had benefited from better mental health. Promoting productivity, would it work for you?

I'LL HAVE WHAT SHE'S HAVING

An "'O' Face" photobooth popped up in London recently, encouraging people to show their last fake orgasm face! With 64% of surveyed Brits admitting they've faked it in the past, the event hoped to empower us all to shed the self-consciousness and embrace our 'O' face.

'Alexa – donate it'

Amazon are launching a new donations programme encouraging third-party sellers on their site to donate unsold products to charity.

Feeling pumped!

With an estimated 10 million pumpkins grown in the UK each year, and the cold and flu season just around the corner, putting the two together could help squash those worries about the sniffles. While 95% of our pumpkins are used for Halloween lanterns, they're actually packed with vitamins, and great for boosting your immune system! Head to p66 for three delicious recipes to try.

Prosthetic power

An incredible innovation has seen an engineer from De Montfort University, Leicester, create a prosthetic limb socket from recycled plastic bottles.
The first two prototypes have been developed, costing around £10 to produce, compared to the industry average of £5,000!

> **30 million people in low-income countries need prosthetics**

Not only helping to tackle plastic polution, this new, low-cost creation could also be a viable option for amputees in developing countries. With an estimated 30 million people in low-income countries needing prosthetics, these cheaper options with alternative materials could transform lives.

What is polyamory?



Not sure if there's one person out there for you? Got a lot of love to give? We take a closer look at the non-monogamous approach to relationships

Writing | **Kat Nicholls** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

Love stories are almost always told through one narrative. Someone meets their soulmate, fireworks ensue. It all leads to a big white wedding, and a gaggle of children. They live happily ever after.

It's safe to say, even for those of us who fit the heteronormative monogamous stereotype, this story isn't always relatable. Love is complex and, for some, monogamy (being with only one other person in a relationship) doesn't suit the way they want to express it.

Enter, polyamory – from Greek poly, 'many, several', and Latin amor, 'love'. Someone who is polyamorous will either have, or be open to having, more than one romantic relationship at a time, with the understanding and consent of all involved.

Mental health blogger Lindsay Hughes tells us about her own experience: "I became aware of polyamory via someone on social media. The set-up she has with her partner seemed to work well for them, and it was refreshing to see a non-conventional relationship where both partners were supported, and seemed to flourish with each other as well as others."

Lindsay and her partner of five years started discussing polyamory at the start of this year. "It's working for us at the moment. It would be difficult to disengage from it now we've started, but if, in the future, it no longer suits us, then we would transition back to monogamy, or inactive polyamory."

For Lindsay and her partner, polyamory isn't about sex (a common misconception). "We very much value the emotional connection with others, as well as between us as a couple."

SO, CAN YOU REALLY LOVE MORE THAN ONE PERSON AT A TIME?

This question is often asked, and assumes we only have a finite amount of love to give. A lot of people, polyamorous or not, believe this isn't the case. Many in the polyamorous community believe that the more giving you are with your love, the greater your capacity to love becomes.

But being in love doesn't mean relationships are smooth sailing, and isn't an excuse to do whatever you like. Those in polyamorous relationships will often discuss ground rules to ensure everyone is comfortable with what behaviour is OK, and what's not.

WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES?

Taking an approach that's outside of social norms doesn't come without its challenges. According to counsellor Alex Sanderson-Shortt, dealing with other people's opinions can be tricky to negotiate.

> **Many in the polyamorous community believe that the more giving you are with your love, the greater your capacity to love becomes**

"Decisions need to be made about who knows what about your relationship. Living with these kinds of secrets can be stressful for people, and affect relationships."

Jealousy is another issue that can come up. "It's a common misconception that poly people don't get jealous – we do! We learn to manage it with open and regular communication, and often clearly negotiated boundaries," Alex says.

For Lindsay, disengaging from monogamy has been most challenging. "I'm an anxious person, and I've struggled with feelings of guilt. As though I shouldn't be feeling a certain way about someone else, even though we know it's OK."

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF POLYAMORY?

Alongside the challenges, polyamory also offers unique benefits. Lindsay notes: "It's not that my partner and I don't meet each others' needs, but you don't necessarily share everything with one person. I think that relying on one person to meet all your needs may not always be the best idea."

She also says her confidence has been boosted by meeting others. "My partner and I are both quite anxious, so it hasn't always been easy, but there's something lovely about meeting someone completely new and developing a relationship."

For Lindsay, it's this meeting new people, and the self-awareness polyamory facilitates, that helped her tackle her social anxieties, and made her more resilient.

IF YOU'RE THINKING OF TRYING POLYAMORY...

Counsellor Alex reiterates that communication is key. "Managing any form of consensual non-monogamy needs communication. There needs to be resilience and a support network, as it is still considered odd by many. It can be a really positive experience, and should be celebrated as such when everyone feels they have a fully-consensual experience within the relationship."

Lindsay concurs, and adds that taking it slowly and talking about emotions is essential. She also reminds us that it's OK if this approach doesn't feel right for you, and that you should never feel pressured into it: "It only works if you both want to do it."

Stepping outside of societal norms can feel daunting, but for many it's also liberating. Our advice? Educate yourself on your options, keep communicating, and find a way of loving others that feels good to all involved.

Read more about Lindsay and her mental health journey at seedsinthewasteland.co.uk

Dancing Queen

She's the belle of the ballroom, with more than 750,000 Instagram followers, and a YouTube vlog to channel her fun and fiery side. As *Strictly Come Dancing* sensation **Dianne Buswell** enters the competition for her third year, the firecracker of the dancefloor is beyond excited to be back with her pro-dancer family.

But life as a dancer isn't all glitz and glamour, as Dianne shares in this searingly honest interview – opening up about her past obsessions with exercise, romance in the spotlight with social media phenomenon Joe Sugg, and speaking out as the dancing role model she never had...

Interview | **Gemma Calvert** Photography | **Paul Buller**





Shirt & trousers | Chinti & Parker



Jumper | Reserved

At a top secret *Strictly Come Dancing* rehearsal venue in central London, Dianne Buswell bounds up the stairs from the basement hall where launch show preparations have overrun – sparking a mass exodus of familiar faces, including Gorka Márquez, Nadiya Bychkova, Giovanni Pernice, Graziano Di Prima, and Neil Jones.

"I'm so sorry I'm late," smiles Dianne, offering an introductory handshake, which blends into a hug as I reassure her that it's absolutely fine. In fact, the 15 minutes spent eavesdropping on the dance professionals' training session was enthralling. Between musical blasts of 'New York, New York', there's an impromptu rendition of 'Happy Birthday', before enthusiastic cheers and goodbye banter – a brief gander behind the scenes of Britain's biggest and best loved TV show, in which Australian ballroom star Dianne has made waves since being recruited in 2017.

"I literally went from this bright, bubbly person to a really low-energy Dianne"

Her debut season was disappointingly short-lived. Partnered with Reverend Richard Coles, the pair were voted off in week two. But last year she realised her dream in double measures.

Dianne, 30, and former thatcher-turned-YouTube phenomenon Joe Sugg, 28, finished runners up, before going public with news of a relationship, which had blossomed during three-months of all-consuming training. Now she's here, on an unusually blustery evening in August, gearing up for her third ride on the *Strictly* juggernaut and feeling – in her words, as we meander along the street in search of coffee – "so excited" to be back with her pro-dancer family.

We settle into a corner booth, and Dianne orders an Americano. It's gone 6pm, but after rehearsing her socks off for nine hours, caffeine consumption rules, presumably, go out the window. In any case, she takes her health seriously. Her diet is full of the good stuff – lean proteins, fruit, vegetables, grains, and healthy snacks rich in energy and taste. She eats often, a mixture of light and plentiful, especially during the gruelling *Strictly* schedule. For the lengthy period of live shows, the professionals work seven days a week, because not even Sunday – the one day to choreograph the following week's routines – is available for rest.

"As a dancer, it's so important to know about nutrition, because what you put into your body reflects what you bring out in your performance," declares Dianne. "I can go, and go, and go! I don't physically get to a point where I'm exhausted, so I can dance all day, from 9am until 10pm, and still feel OK at the end of it."

Vivacious inside and out, Dianne, who starred in the 2015 series of Australia's *Dancing With The Stars*, says *Strictly* bosses were bowled over by her on-stage spirit when they first clapped eyes on her performing in Giovanni Pernice's touring show, *Dance Is Life*, in early 2017. An invitation to audition followed. She breezed it.

Although Dianne's success is indicative of her lifelong passion for dance, and determination to be the best version of herself in every performance, her career once came close to collapse. Nine years ago, aged 21, after working her way up from a small dance school in her hometown of Bunbury, western Australia, to joining a prestigious national dance company, she embarked on a global tour, which sparked a frightening and dangerous period of controlled eating and excessive exercise.

"I was so used to being top dog in a little dance school. Suddenly I had to up my game," says Dianne, an accomplished hairdresser who closed down her salon to dedicate her all to dance.

"Everyone in that company was the best at what they did – they were all hard-core. It was very competitive. I wanted to be the best on stage, to look the best."

Appearance, she quickly discovered, was a "constant conversation" among her peers. Women would judge others' weight, and their own. Being scrutinised by theatre-goers also contributed to Dianne's predicament.

"You'd hear comments from the audience like, 'her body's amazing', and I'd think: 'I need to get a better body to stand out on stage.' We didn't have social media back then. My pressure was, simply, my environment." >>>



And so it began. Out of sight of her Italian mother, Rina, and dad, Mark, who had raised Dianne and brothers, Andrew – a three-time Australian ballroom champion – and Brendon, in a healthy home environment rich in "family, love and celebration with beautiful food", she began a strict regime to shrink her body.

"I tried everything. Sometimes I did three shows a day and I'd go to the gym in between," says Dianne. "I was exercising excessively, and cut out so many meals. If I [ended up] off that schedule, it would really throw me. It was an addiction, I guess."

Her weight plummeted, and over the course of a year, the impact on her health was huge. Depleted energy caused her vitality to waste away, and Dianne's dance partner at the time observed her breathing becoming increasingly laboured. At her worst, climbing a flight of stairs was a challenge, and her periods stopped.

Dianne looks apologetic when she admits she was "quite happy" with her smaller frame, because she "felt more like a dancer, visually", but on the inside it was a different story. She was frightened by her misery and dysfunction, and felt like a shadow of her former self.

"I literally went from this bright, bubbly person to a really low-energy Dianne, who'd wake up at one in the afternoon because I was so tired," she says. "Energy has to come from somewhere, and I was getting none of it. It got to the point where I had no physical energy to do the show or other things.

"Anxiety came with it, because I didn't feel well enough to perform, and had to every night. The anxiety

Jacket & trousers | Scotch & Soda, shoes | Jimmy Choo

"He brings out the absolute best in me, and he loves my personality"

stemmed from worrying whether I'd get through it. I was dancing the show thinking: 'I don't think I can do this.' It was a very vicious circle. Thank God I caught it when I did."

Dianne vividly remembers flying home from America at the end of the tour, and into the arms of her mother who was "beside herself" with worry about her daughter, and rushed her to the doctor. After a series of routine blood tests, Dianne was driving home with Rina when the doctor phoned to say she was suffering from iron deficiency anaemia, and required immediate hospital treatment.

"I'll never forget the moment I had the iron transfusion. The feeling was like no other," smiles Dianne. "They pumped iron into me and after I went home, for the fun of it because I felt so good, I went for a run. I didn't feel puffed, I didn't feel ill, I just felt alive again. That was the best feeling."

As she talks through the litany of events, tables surrounding our corner spot fill, and at one point there's a momentary lull in background music, which prompts Dianne to hush her voice. Ironically, this is the bit that should be shouted from the rooftops.

"Since that point, it was a massive turning point for me. I realised I'd 100% put my career on the line, and I never wanted to return to that state, ever," says Dianne.



Jumpsuit | Mango

She took "two or three months" off work to "get herself sorted", where she surrounded herself with loved ones, and educated herself on nutrition by reading books. She's never regressed, and remains inspired to stay healthy in body and mind because of how close she came to losing her dream.

Dianne, who made her foray into ballroom dancing aged four, says that as a fledgling dancer she never had a role model, and would have benefited from hearing a professional dancer talk about the science of nutrition. She adds that young girls and boys starting out in dance should also be offered compulsory counselling to give them the emotional tools to cope with being judged physically.

Since joining *Strictly*, and romancing a vlogger who boasts 27 million followers across various social channels, public interest in Dianne has intensified – something she's "definitely" noticed. Fan forums dissect the minutiae of her relationship, photographs from the couple's recent holiday to Mykonos appeared on websites galore, and then came media speculation about an impending pregnancy. As it goes, a baby is on the way – Dianne and Joe's first ever national variety tour, *The Joe & Dianne Show*, which kicks off next March. They're currently penning scripts and choreographing dance routines, which Joe – bless him – practises every morning. >>>



Styling | Krishan Parmar
Hair & Makeup | Amanda Clarke for Joy Goodman using Paul Mitchell and Beauty Kitchen

The couple manage public interest by staying in control of what they feed – and don't feed – via Joe's YouTube channel, which he launched in 2013 and has eight million subscribers, and their joint cookery channel, In the Pan with Joe and Dianne, now followed by more than 217,000 people. Dianne has no qualms about living her relationship with Joe in the spotlight.

"If we weren't happy, I would feel the pressure, but because we are so happy, it doesn't feel like there is any pressure," she says. "It's all so natural."

Dianne, who split from her ex, *Emmerdale* actor Anthony Quinlan, last October, commends Joe for being the reason she feels "so happy and content" with life.

"He brings out the absolute best in me and he loves my personality, which makes me feel even better about everything because he loves my humour," she chuckles. "Nothing, for him, is ever too stupid!"

Still, it works both ways. Over the past 12 months, Joe has blossomed, too. He's spoken openly about his own issues with body image and about struggling to gain weight, insisting it isn't through lack of trying. Dianne, Joe's first girlfriend, says his self-esteem has noticeably increased.

"He says he feels completely confident now, and it's the best he's ever felt, which is amazing," she beams. "He is a thin boy and it's hard for him to put weight on, which can be a difficult thing for a guy. He was actually quite a shy person [when we started dancing], and then seeing him at the end of it, I saw him blossom."

For the record, the couple just announced they are going to "officially" move in together, but they aren't engaged ("definitely not, not yet. It's early days"), and although Dianne is wholly focused on advancing her career, children are "100%" the long-term plan. She believes Joe will eventually make a "brilliant" dad.

"He'd be like that dad that dresses up for them – he'd play characters every day, he'd be a lot of fun, he'd be just like a kid!" she giggles.

"You get successful for the person you are, not for the way you look. If you feel good, you can conquer the world"

There's no disputing that Dianne and Joe are well-matched. Neither take life too seriously, and both are strongly career-driven. Fortunately, because Joe's been-there-done-that, he also understands the time Dianne must invest into the third series on *Strictly*, which neatly leads us to the subject of the so-called '*Strictly* curse', which has been blamed for a number of relationship break-ups over the years after contestants have got close to their dance partners.

"Joe has 1,000% trust in me, as I do in him. I don't see there being any problems at all," says Dianne. "I've danced with boys since I was four years old, so it's a natural thing for us to do. People think 'you get so close!' but we're trained to do that!"

One person Dianne has become close to is Joe's globally famous sister Zoe, aka Zoella, who business magazine *Forbes* declares is the No1 beauty influencer on the planet.

"I'm really close with her. I absolutely love her. She's such a great girl, and has done so well," says Dianne, adding that she and Zoella, 29, who has spoken widely about her ongoing battle with anxiety, have had heart-to-hearts about their experiences of mental health.

"I have discussed anxiety with her a fair bit, because she's very open about it, which is great because so many girls now have it," says Dianne. "It's nice to know that they're not on their own."

Having shared the truth about the darkest days of her dancing past, the same can be said of Dianne. Before she goes, does she have a message for any youngsters who feel under pressure to look a certain way, either because of a job, their peers, or social media? Stepping into the shoes of the role model she never had, Dianne nods.

"You get successful for the person that you are, not for the way you look. If you feel good, you can conquer the world, so you need to feel right inside. The minute you have all these insecurities, you get anxiety, and it stops you from doing things. I would never have achieved what I've achieved now if I hadn't sorted myself out from the inside. It's all about who I am, not the way I look."

'Strictly Come Dancing' is on BBC1, Saturday evenings from 21 September. Find out more about Dianne and Joe's upcoming tour at thejoeanddianneshow.co.uk
Follow Dianne on Instagram @DianneBuswell

How to overcome your fears and phobias

Whether it's spiders, heights, bees, or knees, we all have something that sparks dread in the pit of our stomachs. The good news is you don't need to let fear continue to hold you back...

Writing | **Wendy Gregory** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

Many people have irrational fears, and while most of us can control them, for some this fear can spiral out of control and cause severe anxiety – which is completely overwhelming, and not related to any real danger.

Fear becomes a phobia when it interferes with everyday life, and the more common phobias you'll probably recognise include the fear of spiders, germs and diseases, flying, injections, or the dentist. Symptoms can include feeling dizzy, a racing heart, overwhelming panic, tingling, feeling sick, and an intense desire to escape.

When people are exposed to the feared object or situation, rationally they know that they are not in danger, but still they feel unable to manage their terror. However, you can break free from your fears and stop them from holding you back; once you understand them, it is possible to overcome irrational fears and phobias. Here are six essential ideas to keep in mind...

1 DON'T PANIC!

Irrational fears develop when our brain forms a connection between an object or event and a threat, so it prepares us for 'fight or flight'. This can manifest as a full-blown panic attack, which is caused by over breathing or hyper-ventilating (taking large breaths in and short breaths out). By deliberately reversing that type of breathing, so that we breathe out more than in, we can calm down very quickly, and even start to feel relaxed.

Try breathing in for a count of seven, and out for a count of 11, for at least two minutes. Practise this several times a day, especially when you think about your feared situation.

2 AVOID AVOIDING

When we avoid the feared object or situation, initially we feel relief, but the fear returns the next time we are exposed to it, and may become worse. In this way we set up a 'cycle of avoidance'. Because we never test out whether we really are in danger, we don't allow our brain to form a new association. The aim is to reset that connection, forming a link between the feared thing and feeling relaxed. It is impossible to feel anxious and relaxed at the same time. So how do we do this?

3 REALITY TESTING

When we experience an irrational fear, we tend to catastrophise, or imagine the worst possible outcome. By asking ourselves, 'What is the worst that can happen?' and 'Just how likely is that to happen?', we give our fears less power over us. We need to remind ourselves that the fear is unrealistic, and that we are perfectly safe.

4 BUILD YOUR FEAR LADDER AND MOVE UP IT

By gradually exposing ourselves to the fear, in a controlled and safe manner, it loses its grip on us. If you're afraid of spiders, firstly look at a picture of a very small spider

while doing your breathing exercise, until you feel calm. Next, look at a larger picture, then a video. When you feel comfortable, try looking at a real spider in a box at a distance, bringing it gradually closer. Eventually let the spider out (ask someone to help if needed). Even if you have a strong urge to run, don't. Keep doing your breathing. You are in control of the phobia, instead of the phobia controlling you.

5 USE YOUR BODY

When we feel intense fear, our brain floods our body with chemicals such as cortisol and noradrenaline, speeding up our heart rate, and preparing us for action. Distract yourself by engaging your senses, and moving your body. Any sort of exercise will help by lowering those chemical levels, but particularly something outside. Be aware of situations that trigger your fear, and when in one, start moving! Alternatively do something creative: play an instrument, sing, draw, bake, or any activity that requires your full attention.

6 WHEN THERAPY CAN HELP

If you have tried all of the above and are still having problems, or if you conquer your fear of one situation, but find it transfers to another, it may be an idea to seek expert support. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or hypnosis can be really helpful for addressing phobias – visit *counselling-directory.org.uk*, or *hypnotherapy-directory.org.uk* to find a qualified therapist in your area.

Wendy Gregory is a counselling psychologist and writer, as well as a regular guest psychologist on BBC Talk Radio.



"We need to remind ourselves that the fear is unrealistic, and that we are perfectly safe

Rediscovering your sexual self, post-trauma *with Grace*

Raw and real, trainee counsellor, author and self-belief boss, **Grace Victory**, explores tough topics and shares her personal insight each month

I wanted this piece to be empowering, and maybe even uplifting, because writing this stuff makes me sad – and at times resisting sadness is my default way of protecting myself.

Delving into your past is never easy, whether you're yet to process it, or you've healed. So when I decided to talk about sex after sexual trauma, I definitely wanted to skim the surface, in the hopes I wouldn't *feel* while writing. But that goes against everything I believe in, and sometimes speaking the vulnerable, raw, and ugly truth, is exactly what you need to release parts of the pain.

So this is my sadness.

But this is also my strength.

Although I'd experienced abuse of power and control for pretty much my entire childhood, there is one pivotal moment, from when I was 16, that changed my life forever. This incident took away the very little voice I had, and it confirmed to me all the intrusive thoughts I believed about myself.

I would tell myself over and over that I was damaged goods, that I wasn't worthy of anything but abuse, and that I deserved it. At one point I even convinced myself that it didn't happen; I had made it all up in my head. My rape broke an already shattered young girl, and has shaped pretty much all of my sexual experiences since.

Disassociating is something I often did during sex. It was a way for me to zone out but look like I was participating, and maybe even enjoying myself. I'd see myself on a cloud, or a beach, or as another life form. It's funny to write this now, but once I saw myself as an alien!

When I'd disassociate, I'd feel floaty, light, and calm. I would lose all feeling physically and emotionally, which would result in faking an orgasm, and not really knowing what had just happened. It's only in the past year or so that I am remembering many of my sexual experiences and, if I'm honest, a lot of my life in general.

As a child and a teenager, I learned how to forget my memories, so I wasn't reminded of the pain. But with therapy, I am learning how to not only honour my feelings, but to actually remember what I've experienced, and integrate those memories.

I would love to say that healing my issues with intimacy and sex has been easy, but honestly, doing this work has been the hardest fucking thing of my life.

There are some parts of healing that are pretty empowering and fun. Things like learning how high my sex drive is, and wanting to hump my boyfriend every day, feeling heard and safe while having sex, and asking for what I want without feeling guilty.

All of these things make me so proud, and remind me of how far I've come. But, as we all know, healing isn't linear...

Before I could stop zoning out and disassociating, I had to visit so much of my pain with my therapist. Telling him my fears, my memories, and my pain evoked unimaginable shame. I cried and cried, and I think I'm still crying now. I've cried for my 16-year-old self. I've cried for blaming her, and I've cried for how long she kept it a secret. I've been learning how to be present in life, so when I have sex now, I can be in the moment.

Personally, it's also been about unlearning misogyny, and letting go of the notion that sexual pleasure is only for men. That you don't need to perform during sex, or pretend to be a porn star (you can but it's not a requirement). You can be yourself, and show up regardless of your past, body size, or anything else that you believe makes you less than.

I've had to face my fears and recognise my projections in order to become self-aware. Accepting my experience has enabled me to begin to move past it, and understand that what happened to me, doesn't define me.



"I would love to say that healing my issues with intimacy and sex has been easy, but honestly, doing this work has been the hardest fucking thing of my life



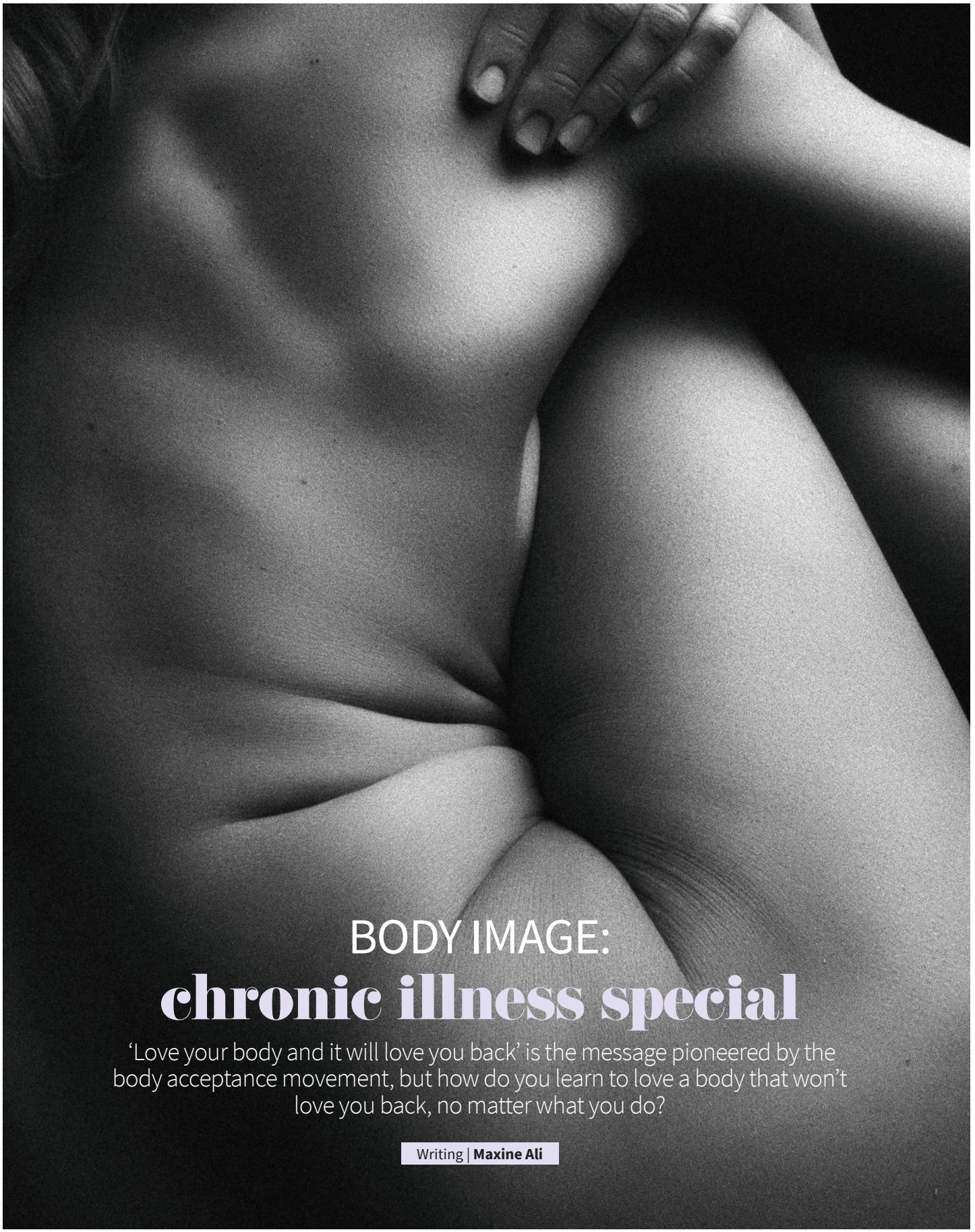
Photography (black and white) | Paul Buller

Trauma and sexual trauma often affect our attachments, identity, sense of self, and stress receptors – to name just a few. And all of these things can impact our sex lives, so re-learning how to engage our sexual self in a way that is individually healthy, can take years. Patience, compassion, and kindness make the process, and journey, a lot easier.

My voyage of sex after sexual trauma isn't over. Some days it's an uphill climb, and some days I am flying, but no matter what, I will remain in my power and trust this process. I am truly thankful that from my greatest sadness came my greatest strength.

Love Grace x





BODY IMAGE:
chronic illness special

'Love your body and it will love you back' is the message pioneered by the body acceptance movement, but how do you learn to love a body that won't love you back, no matter what you do?

Writing | **Maxine Ali**

The rise of body acceptance delivers a sorely needed antidote to a body image crisis wreaking havoc on the mental health of society, with a movement encouraging us to cultivate a loving relationship with our bodies. But for people affected by chronic illness, mantras of 'embracing the skin you're in' can dismiss the reality of living with a long-term health condition – creating yet another inaccessible space for bodies that depart from an unattainable ideal.

When you live with a chronic illness, the narrative of loving your body can serve as a reminder that sometimes your body can be an obstacle. Sometimes, it can be the very thing that prevents you from getting where you want to be. It steals your time and energy, and creates an unwelcome imposition you have to navigate your whole life around. Loving your body doesn't come so easily when it feels like your body won't love you back, no matter what you do.

Body dissatisfaction affects everyone, but the relationship between chronic health conditions and negative body image is a critical issue, too often overlooked. A meta-analysis of more than 300 studies published in the journal *Body Image* found body dissatisfaction to be more prevalent among young people with chronic illnesses than in their 'healthy' peers. The amalgamation of physical symptoms, mobility restrictions, aggressive treatments, side-effects, surgery, and scars means that people with chronic illnesses often feel out of control in their bodies, leading to feelings of shame, anxiety, and depression.

Yet body image counselling is rarely incorporated into chronic illness treatment programmes, and there is relatively little information available to assist those with long-term health conditions experiencing negative feelings towards their bodies. People with chronic illnesses aren't receiving the mental health support needed to help come to terms with a body in turmoil.

For those trying to navigate self-compassion and acceptance amidst the turbulence of relapses and flare-ups, unconditional body love can feel like an impossible pursuit. Loving your body won't overcome its restrictions. Loving your body won't conquer the spiralling worries of financial strain, diminished independence, and the stigma forced on bodies that don't conform to ideals.

So, how do you cultivate a positive relationship with a body you are constantly fighting against, a body that doesn't always cooperate? How do you learn to love something that treats you like an enemy?

IT'S OK TO MOURN

Whatever you feel towards your body – denial, anger, resentment, sadness, alienation – know that it's OK. It's OK to mourn the body you used to have, or yearn for one less unpredictable. It's OK to feel a sense of loss or betrayal. Grief for health is completely normal and valid when you've been diagnosed with a chronic illness. Just because you feel anguished by your body at times, doesn't mean that you've failed.

Body acceptance also means acknowledging its reality, and yes, sometimes it can be painful and frustrating. Rather than seeing these feelings as negative and acting against positive body image, reflect on them with compassion. Remember, it's OK not to be OK.

LEARN YOUR LIMITS

When you feel at odds with your body, the impulse to work harder and push on until you triumph is overwhelming. We live in a culture that promotes a 'no pain no gain' approach to life, teaching us that the only way to succeed is to grit our teeth and persevere, even when our minds and bodies are begging us to slow down.

I've never met a person with a chronic illness who wasn't determined as hell, but the one thing we're often not so great at is learning our limits. However, the more you try to push through and wage a war on your chronic illness, the more conflict you create between yourself and your body. It's important to know when to slow down and give yourself a break. Sometimes, this is the most powerful thing you can do for your mental and physical health.

> **It's important to know when to slow down and give yourself a break**

CHALLENGE COMPARISON

It may be a cliché, but the old saying still rings truer than ever: comparison is the thief of joy. With social media acting as a hub for public expressions of body-love, it's hard not to tap into others' journeys. Though seeing >>>

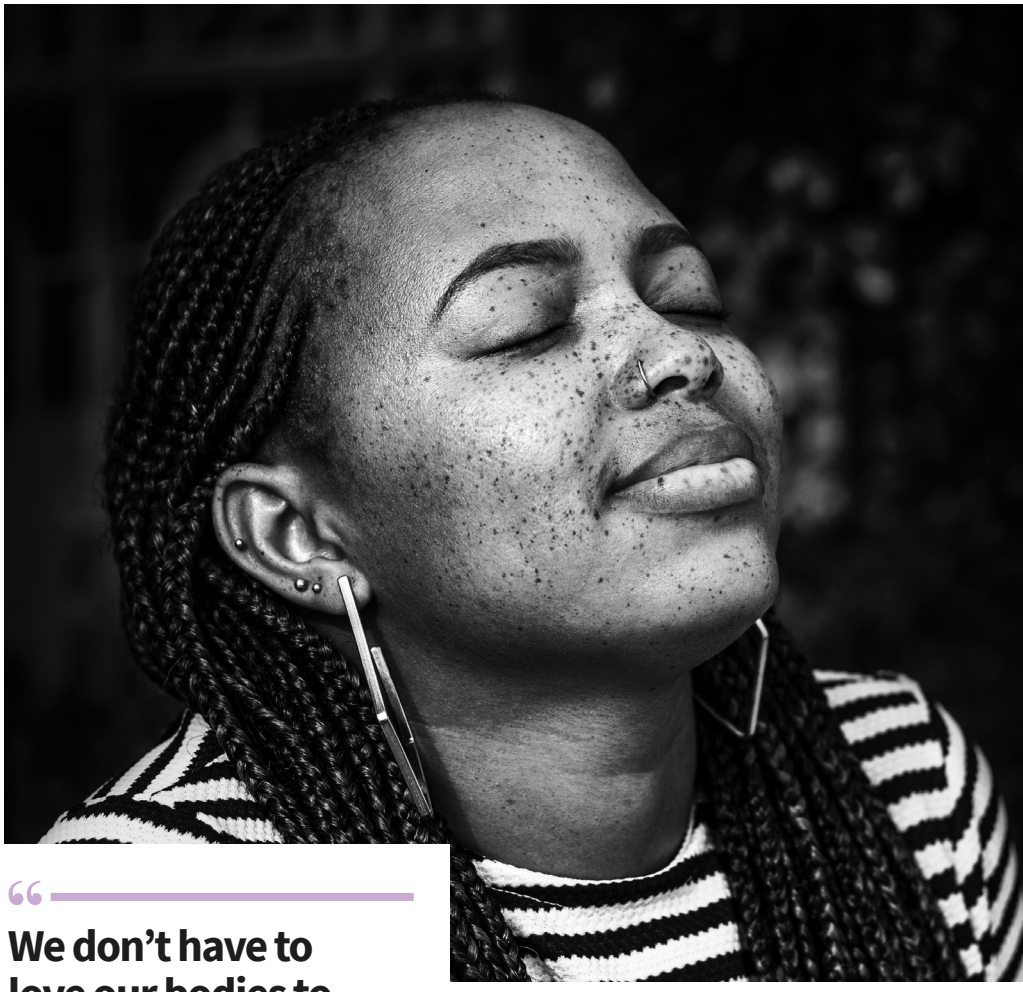
body confidence through the lens of another might provide an empowering example for some, it can also catch us in a dangerous comparison trap, especially when certain activities are off-bounds with a chronic illness.

Comparison serves no good. It's a fragile basis for self-esteem. Remember, you're on a different journey, with a different body, and different experiences to make peace with. This doesn't mean you can't take steps towards improving your body image. It will just look and feel a little different. So, stay focused on your own progress, mute guidance that makes you feel like you aren't doing enough, and leave the voice of comparison behind.

REDEFINE WHAT HEALTH MEANS TO YOU

Our society puts so much emphasis on one version of health – a version that's in its physical prime, that's energetic and attractive by the superficial standards. But no body is static. Bodies age, change, and there's no evading their ephemeral essence. At some point in all our lives, we won't always have peak health. But why should this mean we're definitively 'unhealthy?'

Rather than seeing health as an elusive state of optimum wellbeing, think of it as an action, the ways we take care of ourselves. Engaging in activities that support your physical, mental or social health, like taking medication as instructed, resting when needed, saying no when commitments get overwhelming, are all healthy, and whether or not you embody some arbitrary picture of health should not diminish the importance of what you do to look after yourself.



> **We don't have to love our bodies to improve our body image. We can simply learn to accept them as they are**

STRIVE FOR NEUTRALITY

Though relentless unconditional body love is a wonderful idea in theory, let's be honest, it's not realistic to expect to love our bodies all the time. Chronic illness is frustrating, unpredictable and terrifying. Just when you've found stability, a flare-up can make you feel like you're back at square one.

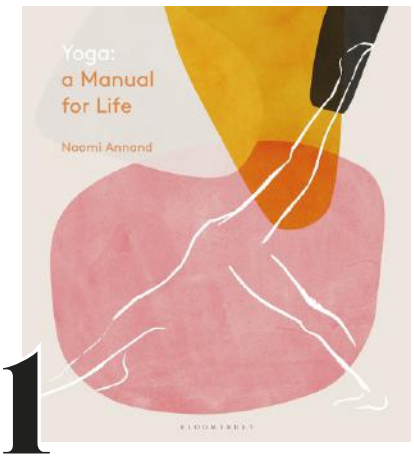
For a lot of people, body neutrality feels more attainable. Relinquishing expectations of amity, and accepting 'this is the body I have; it's not perfect, but it's not so bad either' is less of a reach. We don't have to love our bodies to improve our body image. We can simply learn to accept them as they are, and recognise that our worth is not defined by our bodies, nor our capacity to love them.

Of course, this doesn't mean you can't love your body with a chronic illness, but it gives us room to build a more flexible relationship with our bodies that works for us.

Maxine Ali is a health and science writer, and linguist specialising in body talk and body image. Follow Maxine @maxineali or visit her website maxineali.com

HAPPIFUL TOP 10 October

This October, embrace your inner yogi with the ultimate coffee table book, experience the wonder of showbiz with the film that explores the life of Judy Garland, and drift off with a soothing blend that's sure to send you on your way to dreamland



1 PAGE-TURNERS

Yoga: A Manual for Life by Naomi Annand

In this beautiful hardback edition, be guided through yoga sequences by former ballet dancer, and founder of Yoga on the Lane yoga studio, Naomi Annand. Using simple, modern movement, and including everything you need to discover a balanced life, this read seeks to soothe anxious minds, and leave you inspired.

(31 October, Bloomsbury Sport, £20)

2 OUT AND ABOUT

Vegtoberfest 2019

Bringing together the festivity of Oktoberfest with tasty 100% vegan beers, wines, and street food, head to Camden Town this month for live music, comedy, and an absolute treat for your tastebuds.

(12 & 19 October, tickets £10–15, visit vegtoberfest.co.uk)

3 PUT ON A SHOW

Birmingham Comedy Festival

Get your giggle on at the annual 10-day celebration of comedy that brings together some of the biggest names around, as well as the stars of tomorrow, in free and ticketed performances. With a side-splitting line-up, featuring the likes of James Acaster, Josh Widdicombe, Henning Wehn, and many more, it's guaranteed to be a barrel of laughs.

(4–13 October, for information and tickets head to bhamcomfest.co.uk)

4 PLUGGED-IN

Esther the Wonder Pig

Steve Jenkins and Derek Walter's lives were turned upside down when they adopted Esther, the supposed micro-pig who turned out to be not-so-micro. Today, Esther – now a whopping 650 pounds – and her dads share their lives on Instagram as they work towards their mission to give unwanted animals a home at the Happily Ever Esther Farm.

(Follow their journey on Instagram @estherthewonderpig)





5 TECH TIP-OFFS

Garden Answers

Become a horticultural hero with this app that helps you identify plants. Simply open the app and take a photo of the plant you would like to identify. The app will then suggest possible matches for the plant, as well as offering information on its growing habits.

(Available from the App Store and Google Play Store)

Images | Vegtoberfest: *vegtoberfest.co.uk*, Wonder Pig: Instagram *@estherthewonderpig*

Continues >>>



Photography | Chris Blonk

“Have patience with all things, but first with yourself

– SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

HAPPIFUL TOP 10 October

6 LEND US YOUR EARS

'Griefcast with Cariad Lloyd'

Death isn't an easy topic, but in this award-winning podcast – hosted by comedian Cariad Lloyd, and featuring a new guest in each episode – no subject is off the table, as they work through the pain, loss, and challenges that come from losing someone.

(Available on iTunes and Acast)

7 SQUARE EYES

Judy

In the film that stars Renée Zellweger – and tells the story of the heartbreak and obstacles that Judy Garland faced 30 years after *The Wizard of Oz* – get ready to be immersed in the world of showbiz, and a mother's plight to do the right thing for her children.

(In cinemas 4 October)



8 THE CONVERSATION

#HelloYellow

Raise awareness for young people's mental health by taking part in charity Young Mind's #HelloYellow campaign on World Mental Health Day. Don your brightest piece of yellow clothing, and challenge the stigma that young people face when seeking support.

(10 October, visit youngminds.org.uk to find out more.)



9 GET GOING

13 Tors Challenge 2019

Take on the wilds of Dartmoor, in aid of Marie Curie, as you head on a 14-mile trek through the rugged landscape that inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Armed with a map and a checkpoint card, get set for the adventure that gives back.

(6 October, £30 registration fee, find out more mariecurie.org.uk)



10 TREAT YOURSELF

Pukka Herbs Night Time Organic Latte

With a soothing blend of organic herbs, oats, and nutty carob bean – this malty drink is the perfect thing to sip on before slipping into bed. Best added to a milk of your choice, let go of the day's stresses, and indulge in the gentle power of natural herbs.

(Available in stores and online, £4.99)



WIN!

WIN a packet of Night Time Organic Latte and a Pukka reusable travel cup!
Teabags were originally made from what? **a)** Paper, **b)** Cotton, **c)** Silk
To enter, email your answer to ***competitions@happiful.com***
UK mainland only, entries close 17 October.

Images | #Helloyellow: Young Minds, *Judy*: BBC Films, Calamity Films, Pathe UK, Twentieth Century Fox, Tors Challenge: *mariecurie.co.uk*

Ask the experts



Nutritional therapist **Beanie Robinson** answers your questions on eating for mental health

Read more about Beanie on **nutritionist-resource.org.uk**

INFLAMATION



Q What should I be eating during my period to balance my mood, and restore energy?

A Include plenty of magnesium-rich foods, such as leafy greens, avocado, edamame, and pumpkin seeds. Known as 'nature's valium', magnesium is an effective muscle relaxant when experiencing uterine cramping. Thought to help reduce feelings of anxiety, magnesium also contributes to energy production.

Period pains are indicative of inflammation in the body, so try anti-inflammatory foods such as berries, sweet potatoes, rosemary, and turmeric. It's equally important to get enough good quality sleep during your period, as 90% of our immune system is involved in menses, and therefore it's vital to create a nourishing and restful environment.

ENERGY

Q Even after a good night's sleep, I'm tired and lacking energy. It's making me miserable. What can you suggest I eat for breakfast to ensure I'm energised throughout the day?

A Start the day with a pint of warm water. You can add half a lemon, and/or grated ginger for flavour. Rehydrating your body first thing will cleanse your digestive system, while boosting energy, and regulating your appetite. Take time to explore different breakfast options and find one that suits you best; something digestible, sustaining, and tasty.

"Rehydrating your body first thing will cleanse your digestive system"

If you prefer something sweet, then bircher muesli with grated apple, rolled oats, berries, chia, flax, oatmilk, and a pinch of cinnamon, is a naturally sweet and fibrous start to the day. If you prefer savoury, try egg and avocado with fresh spinach on toasted rye bread for a high protein, rich-in-healthy-fats option.

ANXIETY



Q I have anxiety, and I've heard that what we eat can have a huge impact on our mental wellbeing. Is there anything in particular I should be eating to help manage my anxiety?

A Establish a routine that allows you to keep regular meal times, as this helps to prevent blood sugar dips and spikes, which may exacerbate anxiety.

We all respond differently to specific foods, meaning there is no prototype for the perfect anti-anxiety diet. Keeping a food diary for two weeks will help you identify foods that positively and negatively affect your anxiety.

A largely plant-based diet, including fruits and vegetables, wholegrains, legumes, nuts and seeds, with well-sourced animal or oily fish protein (if desired), is likely to support positive mental wellbeing. Alcohol, caffeine, fizzy drinks, refined sugars, processed and fried foods, may trigger anxiety, so be mindful of these.

"Establish a routine that allows you to keep regular meal times"

BRAIN HEALTH

Q How can I maintain my blood sugar levels, and does this affect brain health?

A Sustain blood sugar levels with a diet high in fibre, unprocessed carbohydrates, and healthy fats. Satiating wholegrains, vegetables, and healthy fats can provide the foundations of a balanced diet, helping curb cravings for sweet convenience foods that most of us get tempted by. Eating little and often during the day, keeping well-hydrated, and exercising portion control, may also help to stabilise your blood sugar levels.

Additionally, maintaining blood sugar levels promotes brain health, reducing blood sugar fluctuations that can impact your mood. Unstable blood sugars can negatively affect brain function, and for individuals with anxiety, depression, and panic disorders, maintaining blood sugar levels will be hugely beneficial to mental wellbeing.

How to deal with online trolls

Who hasn't read, or received, nasty messages online? From comments on YouTube videos, or replies to a tweet, trolls are no longer lurking under a fairytale bridge – they've gone hi-tech and are invading our personal lives. But that doesn't have to be the end of the story

Writing | **Kat Nicholls** Illustrating | **Rosan Magar**

When I was younger, trolls were cute dolls with wild hair; now they're distinctly less cute. A 'troll' is someone who makes nasty comments online to anger and upset others.

The word 'trolling' actually comes from fishing – it's a technique where you cast out bait to get fish. This is, essentially, what trolls do. They send hurtful comments as bait, hoping you'll respond. Before you know it, you're in a tug of war situation, where no one wins.

This behaviour is made easy by the anonymity of the internet, where trolls feel able to say things they wouldn't in real life. The reasons why they troll are complex, but, like bullies in real life, sometimes they're struggling with their own pain.

If you're on the receiving end, this may not soften the blow. But having a plan of action can help you to keep calm and maintain control. Here are some steps to take if you encounter trolling, and ways to heal after an attack.

1 PAUSE – THINK FIRST

When a troll makes a nasty comment, it's natural to want to defend ourselves. But think about the likely outcome. Will they aplogise and move on, or continue to lash out?

Often, trolls do what they do to get a response. If you believe they're looking to learn, you may want to respond. However, be aware that some people don't want their minds changed.

2 SAVE EVIDENCE

If you're being trolled on a regular basis by the same person (or group of people), take screenshots of the comments or messages. Saving evidence can help if you decide to take legal action against them.

3 TAKE ACTION

Being attacked by a troll can feel like a violation. One way to gain control is to take action. This usually means deleting comments, blocking, and reporting the user. This lets the platform know that someone is harassing others online, and they can explore the matter further.

4 CHECK YOUR SETTINGS

Make sure your social profiles are a safe environment – remember that *you* choose who you interact with. Check your privacy settings and have an audit – go through the people you're following, and consider how their content affects your mental health. If they make you feel bad about yourself, hit unfollow.

You can also mute certain words or phrases. Check the settings on the social media site you're using, or speak to someone in its help team to support you with this.

5 TELL SOMEONE

As trolling happens online, it often takes place behind closed doors – especially if the troll is direct messaging you. If you're feeling affected by it, tell someone what's going on. Outside perspectives can help you to recognise that their behaviour is unacceptable.

AFTER THE ATTACK...

Once you've carried out the practical steps of dealing with a troll, it's time to consider the emotional implications. Here are some tips to help you recover.

Give your feelings some space. It's OK to feel angry and upset. Be honest with those around you, allow yourself to feel sad, and be supported.

Step away from technology. Taking a break from the online world can be incredibly beneficial, especially after experiencing trolling. Take a day or two to reconnect with your offline life, and enjoy the break.

Focus on positive engagement instead. Social media can be a dark place sometimes, but it can also be beautiful. Try to focus on the positive engagement you get from social media, and keep screenshots of positive or funny moments you want to remember.

Look after yourself. After a troll attack, your mental health may feel more vulnerable. Focus on self-care, and if you need professional support, get in touch with a counsellor.

Harassment and bullying are never OK, no matter what form they take. Remember this, and know you're not alone. If we all work harder to be kind online, one day, trolls will join us.



> **Before you know it, you're in a tug of war situation, where no one wins**

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

In the UK there are a number of laws that can be applied to cyberbullying or harassment, including the Defamation Act 2013, and the Protection of Harassment Act 1997. Visit *citizensadvice.org.uk* to find out more.



Photography | Aleksandr Ledogorov

“There are no mistakes. Only new paths to explore

– GREGORY DAVID ROBERTS

My friend left me a legacy: to fight



It was the death of a loved one that finally gave Stacey the strength and determination to face – and embrace – the OCD and mental health challenges that had plagued her since childhood

Writing | **Stacey Barber**

It was an afternoon in October, 1998. I was five, and standing in the playground at school, when a voice inside my head spoke. It told me that if I didn't pick up the leaves, then something bad would happen to my mum. This was the moment when OCD joined me.

The reason why I needed to keep my mum safe was because we were both being abused at home. I changed overnight and became an anxious child who had panic attacks every morning before school, and when I got there I would cry for most of the morning.

My life became a whirlwind of obsessions and compulsions. I had to keep the doors locked, in case an intruder got in. I had to lie still in bed, in case the sheets became untucked.

When I was 12, my mum and I moved out for a week to my nan's house to get away. But I didn't get away from anything, as images kept me awake, and all I could think about was keeping mum safe.

When I started secondary school, I only lasted three days before I refused to go. My OCD was plaguing me with thoughts about my mum being dead, and I was scared to be away from home.

Growing up in a household like that was hard, and it took its toll on my mental health. In 2012, when I was 18, and after a breakdown, I was formally diagnosed with PTSD and OCD.

It was a horrible time, and I had begun self-harming as a way to cope. I didn't disagree with the diagnoses. My mind was plagued with images of things that had happened in the past, and they were scaring me. I felt like a failure and a fraud for being as ill as I was. Then I hit a low point, and started having thoughts about ending it all. I took comfort in the thought that if it got any worse I could end it.

I started therapy in 2013 and it helped me up to a point. I had some tools to help when the OCD was bad, and grounding techniques for the flashbacks. But I wasn't happy.

I found myself full of anger that these things happened to me, and left me mentally ill. The fact that I had these issues, and I was on medication, made me bitter. I spent the next six years in and out of therapy, doing nothing but being angry and ill.

Then my life took another turn. It was very early on 6 January 2018 when I took the call that my husband's step-mother, my friend, had >>>

died. In the weeks that followed I didn't know if I was crying because she was gone, or for the memories that were left behind.

Ruth, my friend, had been there for me since we first met, and we would talk for hours every week. We related on so many things, and as much as I helped her, she never knew how much she helped me.



'I found myself full of anger that these things happened to me'



Stacey's first experience of OCD was when she was just five years old

Grief hit me hard, and I struggled every day with images of saying goodbye. It affected my mental health and made me feel numb to everything. This was the first time I had ever lost someone, let alone someone so close – and it scared me.

I started worrying about everyone around me dying, and found myself looking for warning signs. My OCD had latched on to death, and I felt a doom around me – that everyone I loved was going to die. I spent a month watching people, thinking about what death would be like, and trying to put things in place to make sure people didn't get ill.

I bought people vitamins, and tried to encourage everyone to eat healthily. I went to the doctor to make sure I was well enough, and insisted that others do the same.

I had made the decision that I wanted to speak at Ruth's funeral, something that filled me with anxiety, but I had to do it. I stood up and told everyone how special she was. This was the last moment I would ever have in her presence, and that is when it hit me: Ruth is gone and I'm wasting my life being sad and angry.

> **I looked at myself in the mirror, and for the first time I saw a warrior, not an ill person**

I was holding myself back from life and needed to change. I looked at myself in the mirror, and for the first time I saw a warrior, not an ill person. I began to embrace the fact that I had OCD and PTSD, and that they made me think and act a little differently from the average person.

The power of losing someone made me realise that I was taking for granted all the good

things I have now. Yes, my childhood wasn't perfect, and growing up was hard, but I'm not that little girl any more.

Flashbacks were scary, but for the first time in my life I allowed them to come and then let them go. I didn't sit there and think 'why me?' or allow myself to be mad at the fact that I had one. I stopped allowing my brain to hold me back, and it was liberating. I started to do all the things I wanted to do, big or small.

When I look back at my life now, I have no anger at anything. It happened for a reason – so I could help people. I still have OCD and PTSD, and I always will, and that is OK. I have them but I'm not defined by them. I'm not going to say it's been easy to get to the point where I embrace my disorders, but I do, and I wear them with pride.

You might think that is a strange thing to say but it's helped me massively. I have a job now which I love, and I'm free of the guilt for having a bad day. I still take antidepressants, and I have to remind myself that my OCD is wrong. But I'm not angry, sad, or embarrassed by my mental health; life's just too short.

I miss my friend every day, and it is still painful, but I hold on to the good times and memories. It's been nearly a year, and it's still raw, and sometimes I can't believe it.

My friend Ruth left me a legacy – to fight. And I did just that. Mental illness is scary and hard, but it's nothing to be ashamed of. Embracing the fact you have issues is the most powerful tool to beat them.



Ruth's legacy left Stacey with the determination to move forward

> **Yes, my childhood wasn't perfect, and growing up was hard, but I'm not that little girl any more**

OUR EXPERT SAYS

Stacey first encountered OCD at just five years old and, over the years, it became overwhelming. She attended therapy, but found her flashbacks extremely difficult. While a close friend's death initially triggered her anxiety, she came to a turning point. She realised that she could change how she saw her OCD, and value the positive parts of her life – a practice we can all use. Although Stacey is realistic about her mental illness – acknowledging the difficult days and feelings – she doesn't allow it to negate the good parts of her life.



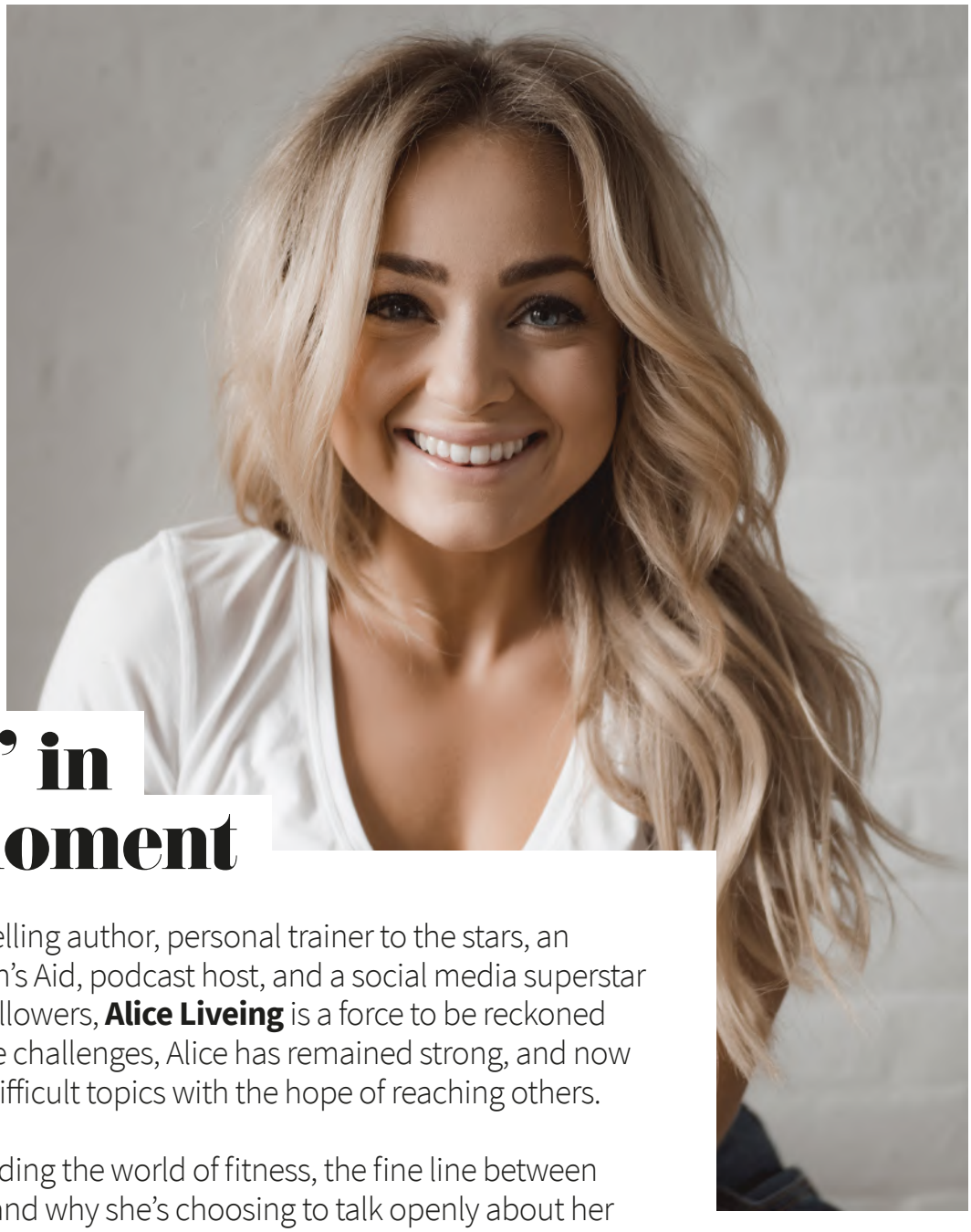
Graeme Orr | *MBACP (Accred) UKRCP Reg Ind counsellor*



Photography | Drew Colins

“Why walk when you can dance

– ELLEN VAN DAM



‘Liveing’ in the moment

As a three-times best-selling author, personal trainer to the stars, an ambassador for Women’s Aid, podcast host, and a social media superstar with more than 600K followers, **Alice Liveing** is a force to be reckoned with. Through immense challenges, Alice has remained strong, and now she’s speaking out on difficult topics with the hope of reaching others.

Here, we discuss expanding the world of fitness, the fine line between health and obsession, and why she’s choosing to talk openly about her experience with domestic abuse

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

Alice, you’ve achieved so much, and you’re only 25! Do you ever take a moment to let that sink in?

I think the only time it sinks in is when you have that dinner party moment, where you sit down, and someone says: ‘So what do you do?’ Day-to-day, I don’t really! I think it’s because I’ve gone at a million miles an hour with everything I’ve done, and it’s only now that I can look back and think, wow I really did do quite a bit!

So, what does the fitness routine of one of the UK’s top PTs look like?

I tend to strength-train around four times a week, and my split will be an upper and lower body. But then along with that, >>>

I just try to be active. There's a lot of research supporting a thing called NEAT, which is non-exercise activity thermogenesis. It's not about going to the gym in the morning and killing it, but then sitting down for the rest of the day – it's about maybe going to the gym for half an hour, and then throughout the day getting 10,000 steps in. It focuses on all of that energy that you burn when you're doing everyday things. Does that make sense?

Absolutely! And something like NEAT must make exercise a lot more accessible?

Yeah, exactly! If you're a busy mum, and you're kicking yourself because you can't get to the gym, hang on a second – and this is something I say to my clients – because how long are you standing on your feet throughout the day? Most mothers will say it's all day for them. I think it's really important that we don't try to put exercise in boxes. I don't care how you do it, I just want you to move, and move well.

You speak online about a time when food and exercise became an overwhelming obsession. What did that look like for you?

There's that whole confirmation bias, and a funnel of people all doing the same as you, so you think that what you're doing is correct – that's where I found myself three years ago. My objective was good health, but the reality was disordered eating, and over-exercising. It was very hard to separate the two because in my head I was like: 'But I'm being healthy!' But there are so many different factors that go into good health. I was so focused on two parts, that I completely neglected the rest, meaning that I was probably at my unhealthiest when I thought I was at my healthiest.

How were you able to recognise that?

I realised I wasn't living freely, and I think that started to push me to question a lot of the things I was doing. It's a really tricky place to find yourself in, and I feel guilty because I look back and I'm sure that people were copying what I was doing. I find that a really difficult emotion to sit with. It's only now that I've learned loads about weight stigma, and what really constitutes health, that I have the perspective to be like: 'That was wrong. Let me show you why, and let me show you how to step away from that.'

Do you have any tips for cultivating a healthy social media feed?

If you're scrolling through and something doesn't serve you, make you feel positive, inform you, or enlighten you, then there's no need for you to consume that. Sometimes I mute people, because it can be a little bit uncomfortable to unfollow someone you know. But you really have to protect your space.

You recently opened up about your experience with domestic abuse. Was going public a difficult decision?

It was difficult in the sense that I still have this horrible fear that he's going to come round the corner and be there, or he'll read something and come to find me.





> **If you're scrolling through and something doesn't serve you, make you feel positive, inform you, or enlighten you, then there's no need for you to consume that**



> **I think it's really important that we don't try to put exercise in boxes**

But I spoke a lot with Women's Aid, and we went through everything that could happen. I was very anxious, but ultimately I knew that my experience was going to help others. I knew that no matter how scared I was, there were thousands more women who were also scared, and still in those relationships. I can't tell you how many messages I get from people who have read about my experience, and then realised that they need help.

Have you sought help for the things you've been through?

Off the back of that abusive relationship when I was 16, I would have terrible panic attacks that were quite debilitating for a while. Then I grew out of them, and I had some therapy, and moved on. But in the last two years, I realised that I had suppressed a lot of that, and I find that I do really struggle with anxiety, and it's something that I find I have to manage every day. It's frustrating because it's so unpredictable. I was on the Tube last week, and I started having a panic attack. I was like: 'Why am I having this? I felt fine this morning!' But I'm very open, I talk to anyone and everyone about it. I'm very pro everyone speaking openly about their mental health.



You're a huge inspiration for your followers, but what makes you feel inspired?

My biggest love is the theatre, so that's my ultimate feel-good night! But beyond that, I love yoga, I train, I see friends, I like having a bath, and putting on music. Really simple things, but they make me feel good.

If you had to pick one highlight from your career so far, what would it be?

I think some of the stuff I've spoken about recently is where I felt most proud, because it has been stuff that has felt difficult to open up about. There's always that fear when you open up about stuff, that people are going to turn against you, or unfollow you. It's felt like I can really take my time to get my head around talking about it, so I think that's what I'm most proud of.

For more from Alice, follow her on Instagram @aliceliveing

Could kink-shame be affecting your relationships?

It's official: Brits are having less sex. Is technology and stress really to blame, or is our lack of self-acceptance at the core of our problems?

Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford** Artwork | **Charlotte Reynell**

It's not something we really talk about, but let's be honest: sex is great, isn't it? It's good for your heart, acts as a stress buster, and keeps tension at bay – what's not to love? Yet according to findings published in the *British Medical Journal* earlier this year, nearly a third of us haven't had sex in the past month. That's… not so great.

We're at a point in history where it feels like, for the most part, we've got more freedom to be open about what (and who) we love than ever before. Yet for some of us, getting over that first hurdle – accepting ourselves, and what we enjoy – feels like the hardest.

Despite kink-based novels and films making mainstream headlines for nearly a decade, many of us can still struggle with our desires. Love it or hate it, *Fifty Shades of Grey* sparked debate, and brought rarely-discussed sexual desires into the eye of mainstream commentary. Yet beneath the best-sellers and star-studded cast, and past mainstream publications focusing on 'weird extreme' fetishes, sits actual individuals facing a whole host of issues and worries.

Recognising you have sexual urges outside of what society considers 'normal' is just the first step. Sure, there may be a community, ready and waiting with open arms – but self-acceptance isn't always that easy. Do you 'come out' as kinky, or keep things firmly behind closed doors? How do you balance sharing with oversharing? Do you risk shutting loved ones out of an entire part of your life by keeping your desires secret?

Sounds complicated. We asked members of the fetish community to share their thoughts on how they came to accept their inner desires.

COMING OUT AS KINKY

Will, a programmer approaching his mid-30s, shares his experiences with us as an 'out and proud' member of the fetish community. First realising his fetishes as a teen, Will spent years going through binge and purge cycles with his desires, before he felt ready to open up and speak out.

"I struggled with my attractions. Many in the community describe binge and purge cycles before they found acceptance. Because an inclination to kink is often considered perverse, I feel it can naturally make people hide this part of themselves.

"I remember throwing everything away, furiously deleting my internet history and bookmarks, only to start buying kinky items and browsing the same forums a few months later. It was only after many years of this that I decided to take the plunge and meet people.

"Speaking with people face-to-face, actually talking about and understanding their nonchalant attitudes to their kinks, allowed me to accept mine, and accept this part of myself. I struggled most with hiding parts of my life from close friends and family. I developed a real fear of what would happen if they found out.

"While I've not told them specific details, I've explained that I'm

openly part of the community, that I'm happy and safe. Although many don't truly understand what that means, I feel that it's a far more healthy, comfortable ground that I had before. Being able to say, 'I'm seeing some kink friends this weekend' makes me feel so much better than coming up with lies or excuses."

Will acknowledges that he feels lucky with how quickly his loved ones came to accept and understand this part of his life that he had previously hidden. "I opened up without any really adverse consequences or backlash, however, I think worries are entirely justified when faced with the decision to 'come out'. >>>



Because an inclination to kink is often considered perverse, I feel it can naturally make people hide this part of themselves

"How much do you divulge? And there's the potential risk of intensifying those feelings of shame... I've learnt that I'm not quite as unique as I thought. Speaking with others who share my kinks, and seeing the growing awareness of the kink community, has been reassuring."

OPENING UP CONVERSATIONS

Single mother Ruth was in her late 30s when she first discovered her kinky side. Under her writing persona, Ruby Kiddell, she went on to give erotic writers and bloggers a way to hone their craft with the launch of Eroticon.

"I found my kink through the process of writing and talking with other people, discovering which ideas turned me on, and which I wanted to play with. The whole process was about discovering who I was sexually – not something I'd spent any particular time thinking about when I was single in my 20s. So not only was it about discovering kink, it was about discovering who I was.

"My community has always been via social media, and then once I started organising Eroticon, it was through the people I met there. What I've actually built over the past 10 years is a community of friends who just happen to be kinky as well .

"The acceptance in the erotic reading and writing community of people's kinks and desires was really freeing. There's no judgement around what you personally do, just how hot your writing is, and it opens up a lot of conversations around sex, desire, and kink.

What are kinks and fetishes?

Kinks or fetishes are terms often used for non-mainstream sexual desires or preferences, such as impact play, role-play, bondage, lingerie, sensory deprivation, and orgasm control.



"The whole process was about discovering who I was sexually. Not only was it about discovering kink, it was about discovering me"

"When I started planning the first Eroticon, I made a conscious decision to be open about my writing and the conference; one of my goals was to increase the conversation around sex. If we can talk about sex and relationships more easily, we'll have better sex and relationships, so it felt important that I was open about my work.

"Being open and living my self-acceptance has been incredibly important to me. In a small way, it



allows me to push boundaries and start difficult conversations."

WHY DO WE FEEL ASHAMED OF OUR SEXUAL DESIRES?

When it comes to speaking candidly about sex, could our lack of self-acceptance be creating barriers? Sex-positive relationship counseller, Alex Sanderson-Shortt, shares his thoughts.

"We live in a complicated world when it comes to sex. On one hand, we're bombarded with sexualised images and ideas. On the other, our sexualities, bodies, and relationships are examined, commented on, and judged.

"Many clients feel shame about their sexual desires because there is still a strong message passed down through generations about sex: what it is, when we should have it, and who with.

"Often talking about sex is hard for couples in therapy, because they never talk about it at home – they lack the basic language needed. Words about sex can be seen as vulgar, childish, or too medical.

"Finding a common language is the first step to overcoming these issues. This helps to normalise talking about sex, giving permission to think and talk in new ways. Crucially, it helps them start to reconsider the ideas they have about sex, and hopefully move to a new 'sex-positive' way of thinking and acting."

WORKING TOWARDS SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Developing the language we need to speak about how we're feeling, what we need, and who we are, may be the first step, but what comes next? How can we continue to move towards embracing every part of ourselves? Gender, sexuality and relationship diverse counsellor, Karen Pollock, shares her advice.

"One of the first things I do when working with clients who are struggling with their sexual desires or kinks is to unpick what they think is 'normal'. We all absorb our messages about sex from a number of sources: culture, peer groups, family, friends, faith groups. It can be helpful to see where these messages are coming from, and why we might be giving them weight.

> **"If we can talk about sex and relationships more easily, we will have better sex and relationships"**

"The most important thing is to understand that there is no normal. More prevalent does not mean morally better; after all, it used to be a common belief that women should not enjoy sex."

Self-acceptance isn't always easy. But as with the best parts of our lives, it's the things we have to work on that are most rewarding. Opening up isn't a guarantee that our partners will share our desires, but it can bring us one step closer to creating healthier, happier relationships with others – and ourselves.

Alex Sanderson-Shortt is a sex-positive relationship counsellor (kascounsellingservices.org), and Karen Pollock is a gender, sexuality, and relationship diverse counsellor (counsellinginnorthumberland.com).

For more information on psychosexual therapy and relationship counselling, visit counselling-directory.org.uk


“Believe in your heart that you’re meant to live a life full of passion, purpose, magic and miracles
– ROY T BENNETT, *THE LIGHT IN THE HEART*
Photography | Joao Silas

Being ethical just got fashionable

Keen to support a good cause, and look good doing it? Check out these responsible fashion brands and get shopping – absolutely guilt-free!

Writing | **Kat Nicholls**

1 Pickle London

Inspired by a mutual love of rainbow colours, a good slogan sweatshirt, and a desire to 'give back', friends Alison (aka Pickle) and Frances created Pickle London. The duo sell ethically made tees and sweatshirts, with a core aim of making their customers smile. They donate £5 from every sweatshirt and £2.50 from every tee in their Happy Collection to mental health charity Mind, to support the brilliant work it does. *Shop pieces from the Happy Collection at picklelondon.com*



1

2 Mantra Jewellery

If you're a fan of affirmations and mantras, this is the brand for you. Each piece is inscribed with a positive mantra, and customers are encouraged to take a few minutes during the day to hold the piece, and repeat the mantra as needed. Created with sustainability in mind (the packaging is recyclable and it's signed up to a paper off-setting initiative), the brand supports a number of charities, including Bullying UK and Breast Cancer Haven. *Shop at mantrajewellery.co.uk*



2

3 Maison de Choup

According to founder and mental health activist George Hodgson, the Maison de Choup brand was born out of anxiety, and a restless necessity to create. Today the brand sells ethically-sourced unisex tees and sweatshirts, with 25% of all proceeds from their Words Fail Me T-shirt going to charity Young Minds. *Shop the Words Fail Me tee at maisondechoup.co.uk*



3

4 Zuela

Sustainable lingerie designer Steff Pitman combines healing crystals with a self-love message to create beautiful underwear that 'stretches with every breath you take'. Struggling with panic disorder and depression herself, Steff found comfort in crystals. Each piece comes with a pocket full of crystals, so you can take their healing energy wherever you go – plus 5% of its net profits are donated to Mind. *Shop pieces online at zuela.co.uk*


4

5 Origin

Selling ethical, unisex sweatshirts, T-shirts and accessories, Origin is a 100% not-for-profit fashion brand where all profits go to humanitarian projects in African communities. Origin has a rigorous checklist to ensure the projects it supports are locally led, sustainable for locals, and have a selected social impact goal. *Shop Origin clothing at originafrica.co.uk*


5

How EMDR helped to recover my self-worth



When Kerry found herself in a deep depression, she felt hopeless, and lost her self-worth. But exploring EMDR unlocked her in new ways, and returned the happy memories that had been hidden behind the trauma

Writing | **Kerry Hill**

It was January 2018. I pulled my hood up, took a deep breath, and stepped into the road. I felt worthless. So worthless that I felt I didn't have the right to walk on the same pavement as the people around me, and maybe – just maybe – it was my lucky day, and I'd get hit by a car.

No matter how many people loved me, praised me, encouraged me, were proud of me, I felt numb. I literally couldn't feel a thing. Of course if you looked at me, you wouldn't have noticed anything unusual; you'd see the all-singing, all-dancing, mask-wearing, middle-aged woman.

Loving husband? Tick. Beautiful children? Tick. Good job? Tick. Decent house? Tick... On paper I should be happy right? But happy doesn't make you want to end your life, and happy most definitely isn't hugging your children and feeling absolutely nothing.

The little black cloud that had permanently followed me around for so many years since my early 20s, suddenly became a full blown hurricane after a catalogue of painful events occurred in the past five years – including miscarriages, postnatal depression, the death of my dad, and a serious car accident, to name but a few. The black hole I was living in was becoming deeper and darker. For the first time in my life I felt I had no future, and if I had no future what would that mean for my two young daughters?

That same day I stepped into the road, I took a big step another way, and asked for help. Sobbing, I rang my work's confidential helpline, and very quickly found myself sitting in front of a psychiatrist. "Do you often have suicidal thoughts?" She gently prodded. "I don't deserve to be here," I whispered.

After my assessment, medication, alongside a therapy called eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), was recommended. I'd never heard of this before, but she explained that EMDR had primarily been used to treat soldiers experiencing from PTSD, but due to its success rate was now being used to treat those experiencing long-term depression.

EMDR has been proven to unlock deep-rooted traumas by using the patient's rapid rhythmic eye movements. Psychologist Francine Shapiro developed EMDR in 1989 after noticing that her own negative emotions lessened as her eyes rapidly darted from side to side. She then experimented with her patients, noticing a difference in their distress

levels when they followed her finger with their gaze.

If your brow is deeply furrowed right now, you wouldn't be alone. How can my eyes following a stranger's finger help me? So, in my own non-technical way let me try to explain...

The brain is like a filing cabinet, and the majority of memories throughout your life are filed in sequence, and in the right order. It's believed that traumas or painful memories may have been filed incorrectly, and are buried deep down in the wrong place. Your brain might never have fully processed or made sense of them. EMDR helps to unlock these, and lessen the distress felt when recalling such painful memories.



Kerry with her mum, Doreen



Kerry with her children

On my first session I had to list five of my most painful memories, and it would be these that we'd work on, one by one, as the weeks progressed. The lovely psychologist I'd been referred to would note down the negative connotations I felt around each event – I'm a failure, I feel guilty, I'm a bad mother etc. We'd then write down the positive connotations of what I wanted to feel about myself – I'm worthy, I did the right thing, I'm a good mother.

I'd close my eyes while thinking about one of my painful memories, scan my whole body and say out loud what I was feeling or thinking, and give the level of distress I felt a score. Interestingly, many of my memories impacted my stomach, and often my chest would feel really tight, like something was pressing on it, and my breathing became very fast. I would then open my eyes and follow her finger as it went from side to side, still thinking about the initial event. >>>

> **The black hole I was living in was becoming deeper and darker**



She'd drop her finger again, and I'd say out loud what entered my head (no matter how random), and scan my body.

Naturally there were times when I became very distressed, but we'd keep going until the distress started to lessen, which meant that the memory had been filed in its rightful place. There were times where I thought I would actually vomit, it felt so real. When processing the car accident, I had pain where my injuries had been, and sounds became heightened. When processing the last week of my dad's life, my body remembered the intense fear I'd experienced while lying on the floor next to his bed, Googling 'death rattle', petrified that he might take his last breath on my watch.

I must emphasise that despite reliving such painful life events, I completely and utterly felt safe at all times. During the first session, I had to visualise, document, and store in detail a lovely memory, which involved me sipping wine on a balcony in Cuzco, Peru, as the sun was setting. Even now, just thinking about it makes me break out into a smile. In times when I became distressed in the session, we'd revert back to my wonderful and vibrant memory, and I'd instantly feel calm and relaxed. At no point was I ever left to go home distressed.

"EMDR gave me back my self-worth. The woman who broke down and admitted she didn't deserve to be here had finally recognised her value"

EMDR gave me back my self-worth. The woman who broke down and admitted she didn't deserve to be here had finally recognised her value. It helped me to deal rationally with all my insecurities, as well as arming me with the tools to deal with my constant striving for perfection that had, so far, crippled my life. It gave me back the lovely, funny memories of my dad, instead of dwelling on the traumatic ones associated with watching a loved one die. Most importantly, it gave me an inner peace, which allowed me to hug my children, and for the first time since they were born, be overwhelmed by the intense love I felt for them.

I'd actually go as far as saying that EMDR unlocked so much of me that I'm unrecognisable to myself. To others, I'm probably no different as I'd learnt to fake happiness, but the massive shift I feel is inside me. I know I'm going to be OK, and yes of course it'll be upsetting when life throws me another curve ball, but instead of knocking me off course, I know it'll pass and I'll bounce back.

OUR EXPERT SAYS

Kerry's story is an inspiring and heartwarming example of how working through traumatic experiences can have a positive impact on our wellbeing, self-worth and identity. To an extent, the trauma she had experienced was unknown, due the way it had originally been processed. The use of EMDR therapy has allowed Kerry to reprocess the trauma, and create a new positive meaning that she values and can connect with. It has unlocked an inner peace within Kerry, which is quite remarkable, bringing authenticity and love into her life.



Rav Sekhon | *BA MA MBACP (Accred)*
Counsellor and psychotherapist

MONEY CAN'T BUY *happiness*

Internationally acclaimed author Robert Muchamore reached incredible heights in his career, but in parallel, his mental health hit an all-time low. Here, he candidly opens up about his own story of depression, psychiatric hospitals, group therapy, and isolation at the top



Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford**

If you've got a teenager in the family, or were a young adult growing up between the mid-noughties and now, chances are you've heard of Robert Muchamore. Selling more than 14 million books in 24 languages, he's the man behind the CHERUB and Henderson's Boys series, and the novel *Rock War*.

A prolific writer from a humble background, Robert was inspired to create his CHERUB (Charles Henderson's Espionage Research Unit B) series when his nephew couldn't find anything to read. The rest, as they say, is history.

Behind the glossy covers and seven-figure book deals, Robert's journey has been more turbulent than readers may know.

"At the beginning of 2012, I'd just turned 40 and was struck by depression for the first time," Robert says. "Over the months that followed, it totally engulfed me. >>>

"Initially I had a stereotypically male reaction, seeing the fight against depression as a military campaign. I read that exercise helped, so I got a personal trainer.

"I was fortunate enough to be able to afford a private therapist. When my symptoms became more severe, the therapist introduced me to a psychiatrist, who began by prescribing me antidepressants, before adding other medications.

"By late summer, I had become frustrated that I was doing everything 'right,' while my condition deteriorated. I was convinced the unbearable depression would last as long as I did, and that the only way to stop it was to kill myself."

Worried friends and family convinced Robert to check into a private psychiatric hospital.

"I didn't want to go into hospital because it meant total submission to my illness. But with hindsight, I see that entering a different setting jolted me out of harmful thought patterns, speeded my recovery, and possibly even saved my life."

As part of his stay, Robert undertook group therapy, which can offer a support network, and the opportunity to speak to others with similar experiences. But, for Robert, it also had its downsides.

"Group therapy was beneficial, but it could be hard. It's an experience that depends on the successful interaction between the whole group. Some personalities would dominate a session, some patients could be aggressive and intimidating. The most common problem was that people just didn't feel like talking.

"The biggest lesson I got from group therapy was an understanding of how depression distorts your thought processes. After hearing several depressed patients talk through their problems, I started to recognise patterns of negative thoughts and behaviours, and increasingly found them absurd."

For Robert, this was a breakthrough moment.

"Once I saw how depression works, it seemed less like something that controlled me, and more like an external force that I could constantly challenge."

In the lead-up to his stay in hospital, Robert wrote 20 books in 10 years, spending weeks away from home during tours and events. Soon, it took its toll.

> **"Once I saw how depression works, it seemed less like something that controlled me, and more like an external force that I could constantly challenge"**

"Success can be addictive, and I think succeeding in one area of my life made it very unbalanced.

"I was so engulfed in work, that I didn't have any serious relationships. I let close friends drift away. As the excitement of being a successful author turned into another year, another book, another tour, I realised that I had distanced myself from friends and family in the process."

Robert found his monetary success made it difficult for him to admit he was suffering. Money acted as not only an underlying theme in Robert's recovery, but has gone on to influence his writing, particularly in his latest novel, *Arctic Zoo*.

"Some of the patients in *Arctic Zoo* suffer from financial pressures in the same way as many of the people I was in hospital with; some were super-wealthy, but others had ordinary jobs and private health cover that restricted them to just 14 or 28 days in hospital. One set of desperate parents remortgaged their home to pay for private treatment for their suicidal daughter, because they felt it was their only hope of keeping her alive.

"I was lucky I could afford the best treatment available, and regard it as money well spent. But if you look at the bigger picture, NHS statistics suggest 1.5 million people experience depression at any one time. Everyone with a mental health problem deserves better treatment, but there's no cheap fix."

As our conversation draws to a close, I ask Robert what advice he would share with anyone experiencing mental ill-health.

"I'm reluctant to give advice, because once my friends found out I was depressed it flooded in from all directions. CBT, NLP, yoga, Pilates, swimming, meditation. My local Cancer Research shop ended up with a half-metre stack of books when I finally turfed them all out.





“Everyone with a mental health problem deserves better treatment, but there’s no cheap fix”

“The one thing I will say is that a crucial stage in my recovery was the point where I’d finally been honest with all the important people in my life. Being ashamed of depression, and constantly lying about how I was really feeling, became a huge burden.

“Most people I told were great, a few were a bit rubbish, but being able to walk into any situation and be honest was a massive relief.”

Robert’s latest novel was one that took him years to pin down. As we wrap things up, he shares his thoughts on what he hopes readers will take away from it.

“Most of us experience a narrow view of the world. On the news, you’ll see the same few stories told from an Anglo-American perspective, while social media places us in a comfort zone that reinforces our existing opinions.

‘Arctic Zoo’, by Robert Muchamore is out now (Hot Key Books, £12.99)

“I don’t like to think of my books as having a single message, but I do hope that anyone who reads *Arctic Zoo* will come away thinking about the world in a different way. Whether it’s mental health issues, political corruption, or protest movements.”



HOW TO DECLUTTER YOUR MIND

Most of us are familiar with the benefits of decluttering our physical space, but what if we could declutter our experiences and thoughts in the same way we do with our clothes?

Writing | **Alessia Gandolfo** Artwork | **Charlotte Reynell**

We're continually solicited by people, social media, and society in general, to always keep our minds entertained – but how much of it is intentional, and how much do we do by default?

In my experience as a life coach, I've noticed how lowering the volume of external noise, and nurturing a calmer mind, can help us to feel centred, build self-trust, and make better decisions. Here are five ways you can get started:

1 CREATE WHITE SPACE IN YOUR CALENDAR

Take a look at all the commitments you've made this week. Which ones truly spark joy and add value to your day, and which feel like an obligation? If you reduced them to the bare essentials, which would you keep?

Seeing white space in our calendar may seem scary, but this is often what we need to tap in to our own real desires. With an experience that's intentional and meaningful, the satisfaction is so much higher.

2 PRACTISE GETTING BORED

When was the last time you felt bored, and you didn't reach for a distraction immediately?

Social media is probably the easiest way we fill that void; we spend an average of two hours a day scrolling, staring at a screen.

Next time that you feel the need to reach for your phone, simply observe your craving and stay still. Breathe through the discomfort of not knowing what to do with yourself, and notice your surroundings and the flow of your thoughts.

By sitting with the discomfort for few minutes, you'll notice how the craving and stress gradually decreases. You may use this time to check-in with yourself and with how you feel. You might realise you haven't taken a break in a while and need some fresh air.

3 DO A BRAIN DUMP

Sometimes the clutter in our minds is so loud that it's difficult to fall asleep, or focus on the task at hand. A great tool to use in these cases is to grab a pen and paper, and write down anything crossing our minds. I personally like to write 'brain dump' in the centre of the page, and then let all the thoughts come out in no specific order.

Once you witness the content of your brain, you can decide what's urgent and what you can postpone to when you feel calmer.

4 GET OUT OF YOUR MIND AND INTO YOUR BODY

Moving our attention to the body, and reconnecting to our senses, is probably the quickest way to create space in our mind and gain clarity.

So next time you're confused and unable to think clearly, try one of these tools:

- Get up and take a dance break
- Go for a walk around the block, which is better if close to nature
- Take five deep breaths, and exhale from your mouth
- Exercise, even just for 10 minutes
- Sing out loud
- Open the window and feel the fresh air on your skin

5 FOCUS ON CREATION OVER CONSUMPTION

The amount of information we're exposed to can be incredibly overwhelming to process, while the time spent being creative can lead us back into our natural flow.

Creativity is a central part of being human, and its effects on health have been proven countless times. While I'm not implying that we should all become professional artists, dedicating time to get creative instead of watching TV, can help express our emotions, and find peace in our minds.

In daily life we can be spoiled with opportunities to learn and have new experiences, and that's awesome – but turning down the external volume and tuning in with ourselves can allow you space for a real desire to emerge, and to make our lives more spacious, spontaneous, and intentional.

Alessia Gandolfo is a passion and career coach, Vinyasa yoga teacher, writer and creative. Follow her on Instagram @alessiagandolfocoaching, and read her blog alessiagandolfo.com

Book Review

Furious Thing

Sometimes a girl gets furious because the world is an unfair place

Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford**

I'd like to say I'm not usually an angry person, but... that would be a lie. I rarely go a day browsing Twitter or Reddit without finding some comment that brings about a spark of fury or indignation. Yet when it comes to reading, I'm more likely to encounter a real tear-jerker than something that leaves me truly seething. But Jenny Downham's latest novel, *Furious Thing*, changed all that.

What's it about?

From the acclaimed author of *Before I Die* comes the story of Lex, a girl burning with anger for reasons she can't understand. Told from a young age that bad things happen when she's around, Lex is convinced that her anger makes others see her as a monster.

If only she could stop losing her temper. If only her stepfather would accept her. If only her mother would love her like she used to. If only her stepbrother would declare his love for her. If only, if only, if only.

With troubles at home, poor performance at school, and her mum's upcoming wedding, Lex discovers that pushing down her anger doesn't make it disappear. It's a heart-wrenching novel filled with intense manipulation, struggles with self-identity, and the fight young women have to face to be allowed to express themselves – in all their furious glory.

Modern family dynamics (and failures)

From the outset, readers explore Lex's complex family dynamics, and the knock-on effect this has on her – from her mother seemingly putting her own happy ending ahead of her family's needs, to Lex's envy of her sister, and her not-so-secret crush on her stepbrother, Kass. And while these dynamics are interesting, it's the background elements woven through which build a truly complex picture, and hint at how some of the characters have arrived here today. As Lex navigates these tricky waters, we're taken on the, at times, uncomfortable, and painful journey alongside her.

Lex's lack of a strong female role model, and a reliable adult in her corner, are sure to bring out a complex mixture of emotions in readers. While it's easy to feel strains of sympathy and empathy for many of the characters, it's Lex's situation that leaves us feeling equal parts outraged, angry, and downright heartbroken. Fearless, brave, and out of control, Lex's loyalty shines through in a way that makes you want to shout at those around her who can't see how amazing and, more often than not, selfless she is.

Rage and gender expectations

When you stop to think about it, anger isn't considered a very feminine trait, is it? We're told to get on in life, we need to stand up and be heard – but not to appear overbearing. We need to make an impact, but not rock the boat. We need to be assertive without being bossy.

Seeing the subtle ways those around Lex each try to shape her reactions, and watching

> **For victims of gaslighting and emotional abuse, it can feel like there is nowhere to turn**

her struggle to become a version of herself that can be seen as more acceptable, is truly painful to read; how often do you second-guess yourself before speaking up? Have you ever given in, in the hopes that it will help you fit in more? That if you can just say the right words, it will all be alright?

Lex's struggle to balance her own feelings and the expectations of those around her act as an unexpected reflection of what many of us may have subconsciously experienced, forcing us to question our own actions and motivations under a new light.

Should I read it?

Yes. Yes. 100% yes. This year, I've read books that have made me laugh, cry, and feel inspired, but *Furious Thing* has been the one book that has truly made me angry. Sharing uncomfortable but vital issues around emotional abuse, maternal depression, misdiagnosis, emotional control, and so much more – within the first few chapters, you will be left wanting to hug Lex and tell her everything is going to be OK.

In some ways, physical abuse is easier to prove– there's something tangible that others can witness. When it comes to emotional abuse, things can be so much more insidious. Often hidden behind closed doors, abusers may show one face to the outside world, then another to those who know (or suspect) their secrets. For victims of gaslighting and emotional abuse, it can feel like there is nowhere to turn: who will believe them? Where is the proof?

Lex's journey is an emotional one. It shows how we all have the power to protect ourselves, to stand together, to stand up for what's right – if we embrace our anger and fury, and refuse to let despair and sadness win.



Furious Thing by Jenny Downham
Out 3 October 2019 (David Fickling Books, £12.99)

GREAT FOR...

- Fans of young adult fiction
- Readers interested in complex topics
- Those who enjoy strong female-lead novels

If you liked this, you'll love...

Must Reads



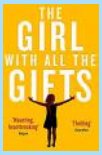
Shrill: Notes from a Loud Woman by Lindy West

Women are told, from birth, that it's our job to be small. Lindy West seeks to obliterate that expectation, sharing her journey from crippling shyness to becoming one of the loudest, most fearless feminists online.



The Power by Naomi Alderman

All over the world, women are discovering they have the power. Suddenly, every man on the planet finds they've lost control. The day of the girls has arrived – but where will it end?



The Girl With All The Gifts by MR Carey

Every morning, Melanie waits in her cell to be collected for class. They keep their guns pointed while strapping her into the wheelchair. Melanie is a very special girl.

Book covers | *amazon.co.uk*

A gut feeling

How much fibre is enough? Is gluten actually bad for us? And what the heck is a microbiome? Founded by DJs and presenters **Lisa** and **Alana Macfarlane** (AKA The Mac Twins), The Gut Stuff offers free, straight-talking advice and resources on everything from the dairy debate to stool charts. And it's right on time

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

"There was a guy, and every Thursday he had really bad digestive issues. He started tracking things, and found he wasn't eating anything different, but realised that his team review was every Thursday morning, and he was really stressed about that," Lisa Macfarlane tells me, as I sit with her and her sister, Alana, at their stylish headquarters in Camden, London. "It was only when he laid it all out, that it made sense."

Raising awareness of the ways that our gut health affects our overall wellbeing is at the heart of what the Mac Twins do with The Gut Stuff. Founded in 2017, the site offers a huge collection of free advice on all things related to gut health, and Lisa and Alana travel around the UK to spread the message that gut health deserves to be taken seriously. It's something that all of us should be taking the time to tune into – and the Mac Twins are here to tell us why.

IT'S NOT ALL IN YOUR HEAD

The day I got together with Lisa and Alana is also the day that they launched their new infographic exploring the link between gut health and anxiety. Working with the charity Anxiety UK, they look at the way that the gut and the brain are chemically connected via neurotransmitters, and how this link is heightened when anxiety is triggered.

"It's difficult for us, as a company, to talk about the gut-brain connection, because the science behind it is still very new," explains Lisa, when I asked what inspired their latest move into mental health. "But what we saw as people not from the wellness industry, is that people have such a warped relationship with food, and there is so much misinformation out there."

"It's a perpetual cycle," adds Alana. "You get anxious about what you eat, and that's affecting what's happening biologically, and then when you're anxious you have gut symptoms. We live in a >>>



'Raising awareness of the ways our gut health affects our overall wellbeing is at the heart of what the Mac Twins do'









constant flight or fight mode, we're all super-stressed all the time – and that isn't good for digestion."

The Mac Twins' campaign comes at a time where there's an increase in interest in the connection between our gut and brain. And while this area of study is still in its infancy, the discovery of such links will bring hope to many who experience the gut-brain connection first-hand.

THE POO TABOO

Of course, akin to the stigma that surrounds mental health, is a feeling of shame when it comes to the subject of gut health. But that's something that the twins face head on.

"We love poo chat," Lisa declares.

And it's a good thing, too. From the branding in their site, to their journals that provide people with a stool chart to track how their toilet trips differ depending on their diet, to do what Lisa and Alana do, you've got to be straight-talking.

"I'm always fascinated about where we stop being open," says Alana. "Because with babies and puppies – we talk about poo all the time, and we congratulate them on it. And kids talk about poo, so at what age do we lose the ability to talk about it? It's one of the only things other than eating and dying that we *all* do. And no one talks about it! But we've always been quite open about our poo habits."

"I think it's part of being a twin – there are just zero filters," Lisa chips in.

"And zero boundaries," Alana finishes.

Of course, a consequence of the majority of us keeping quiet about our gut habits is that it can be hard to know what's normal. And yet, as the twins have found out with their work, the looming taboo appears to be a lot more repressive than it actually is.

"As soon as we started talking about it, you wouldn't believe the number of people who began coming up to us in toilets saying: 'Hiya, I haven't pooed in three days, is that normal?' People are actually very much willing to talk about it, once you've opened the floodgates," Lisa explains.

> **People are actually very much willing to talk about it, once you've opened the floodgates**

OPENING UP THE INDUSTRY

Another part of the challenge that Lisa and Alana want to take on with The Gut Stuff, is improving the accessibility of the wellness industry, something that Alana sees as the "backbone of the business".

"People see health as being ill, and they see wellness as this thing that Gweyneth Paltrow talks about, when actually they're two of the same thing," says Alana. "Where we're from in Scotland, if we knew just a few of these

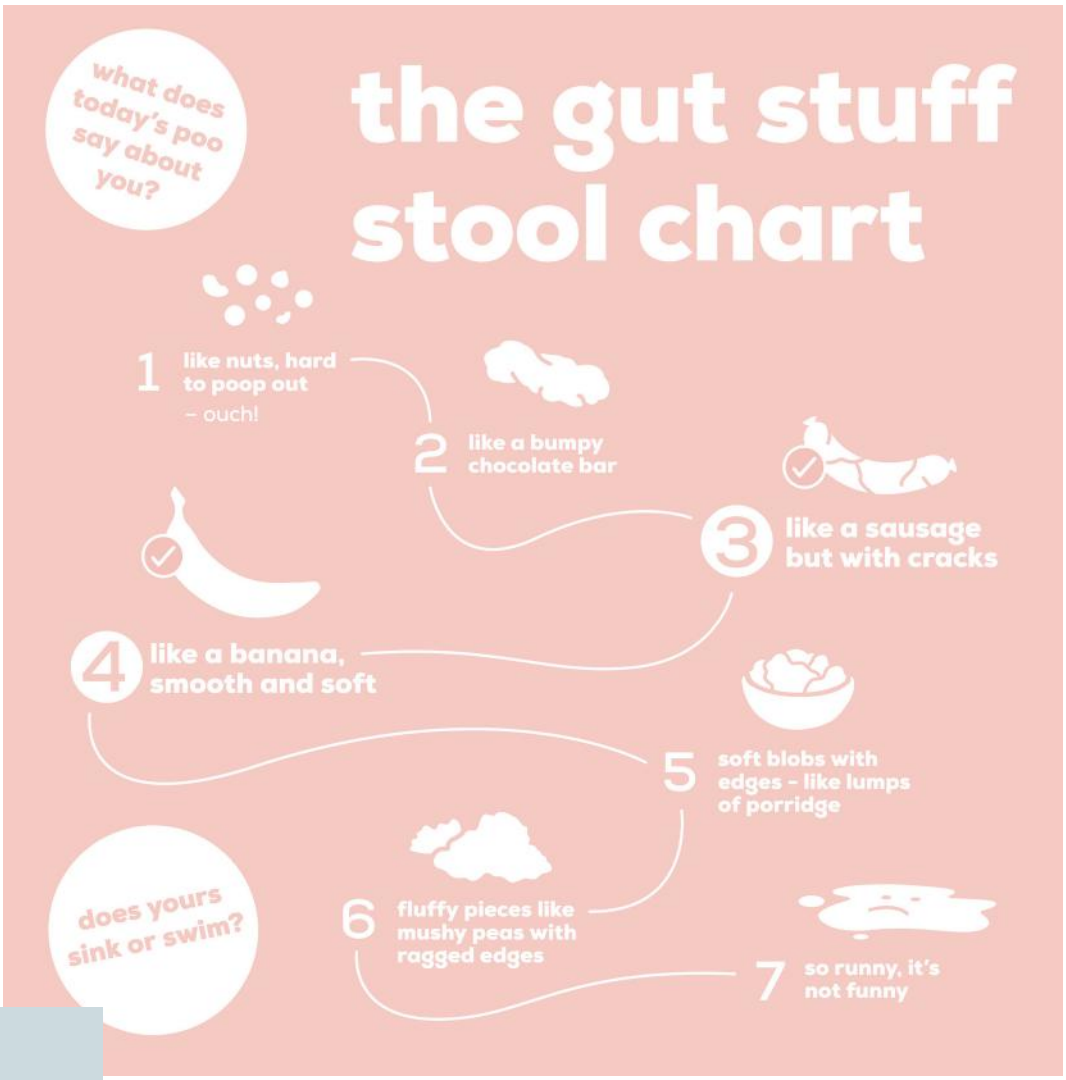
Photography | Rachel King, Graphics | JKR

facts – like you should probably eat just a bit more fibre in your diet – then we would have started to think of our healthcare system in more of a preventative way."

With their free informative videos, blog posts, events, and anonymous ask-a-nutritionist service, the Mac Twins are breaking down the barriers to wellness that so often have kept people from accessing the information they need to better understand their gut health, and avoid misinformation.

"In our early 20s, we did the cabbage soup diet, and all those sorts of fads," says Alana. "It just takes empowering people with the knowledge to change that."

"And it is changing," adds Lisa. "These things are, at best, a bit misleading, and at worst illegal. So it's a question of how can we educate people enough to know that these things are fads."



Spot diet fads

Lisa says… "If they're making broad claims about a cure that 'works for everyone', beware of that, because there just isn't one."

Alana says… "We're big fans of the 80/20 thing – anything that sounds too extreme, and like you have to overhaul your entire life, is probably going to be a fad."

GETTING THE WORD OUT

In a time where we're constantly bombarded with conflicting ideas about what we should and shouldn't be eating, The Gut Stuff is a breath of fresh air – laying the facts on the table, and leaving it up to the individual to decide what works best for them.

The truth is, there's no one-size-fits-all diet that will solve all of our gut issues, but by taking the time to tune in to the way that our body reacts to stress, anxiety, and different foods, it's possible to take back control of our gut health.

"The heart of all this is that everyone should know that gut health is important, and we need to empower people with that," says Lisa. "When everyone knows that, then I think we will have done our job."

Find out more about The Gut Stuff by visiting thegutstuff.com

Autumn Warmers

This October, we want to encourage you to do more with your pumpkins

Writing | **Ellen Hoggard**

When you think of pumpkin, chances are you're thinking of your next carving session, or perhaps even your annual pumpkin spiced latte. But while this spooky tradition is full of fun, many pumpkins are being left out in the cold, without a purpose. Each year, thousands of pumpkins are wasted. So, this October we want to encourage you to do more with your pumpkins.

Once you know how to prepare your pumpkin, the process is pretty simple. Similar to carving a Jack o'Lantern, you scoop out the middle and the hard part is over. They are deliciously sweet, and with the right spices, can be made into the perfect savoury party dish. Ideal for these chilly autumn evenings.

Whether you're roasting, blending, cutting, or carving, we hope you enjoy this new way to celebrate the spooky season.





SMOKY PUMPKIN HUMMUS

12 servings

- 1 small pumpkin (500g)
- 400g chickpeas
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 2 garlic cloves
- ½ lemon, juiced
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp chilli powder
- 1 tbsp honey
- Olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Method

- To prepare the pumpkin, cut the top off and remove the seeds. Scoop the flesh out of the bottom, as you would when carving. Heat the oven to 200 degrees, gas mark 6. Cut the pumpkin into chunks and place in a tin with the garlic and a glug of olive oil, ready to roast.
- Season with salt and pepper and bake for 45 minutes. Leave to cool.
- In a food processor, add the roasted pumpkin, garlic, chickpeas, lemon juice, and tahini paste. Blend. Add the honey, cinnamon, and chilli powder, and blend until a smooth, thick paste. Serve.

SPICY PUMPKIN WEDGES

Serves 6

- 1 small pumpkin
- 1 tsp coriander seeds
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- Chilli flakes
- Salt and pepper

Method

- Preheat oven to 200 degrees, gas mark 6. Prepare the pumpkin and halve. Slice each half into large wedges and place in a roasting tin. Drizzle with olive oil. Crush the fennel and coriander seeds and add to the wedges, seasoning finally with chilli flakes, salt and pepper.
- Roast for 30 minutes, turning halfway through, until tender. Serve.



Find a nutritionist near you at *nutritionist-resource.org.uk*

WARM PUMPKIN SOUP

Serves 4

- 1 small pumpkin
- 2 celery sticks
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp coriander
- 800ml vegetable stock
- 200ml coconut milk
- 1 tbsp pumpkin seeds
- Pepper
- Olive oil

Optional: sourdough bread to serve

Method

- Preheat oven to 200 degrees, gas mark 6. Prepare the pumpkin and cut into chunks. Chop the celery and add to a roasting tin with the pumpkin, garlic and a glug of olive oil. Roast for 30 minutes until tender and leave to cool.
- Add the pumpkin and garlic into a food processor. Blitz for 30 seconds. Add the spices and combine until smooth.
- In a pan, combine the vegetable stock, coconut milk and pumpkin mixture. Bring to the boil, then cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Divide into bowls, garnish with a sprinkling of pumpkin seeds and pepper. Serve with a slice of sourdough bread.

OUR EXPERT SAYS...

Smoky Pumpkin Hummus

A delicious alternative to traditional hummus that really packs a nutritional punch! The pumpkin provides fibre, which will help you feel fuller for longer, while promoting healthy digestion. The chickpeas are a great form of protein, providing not only energy but acting as the building block for enzymes and body tissues. Pumpkin is naturally sweet, so taste the hummus before adding the honey (or agave syrup for a vegan alternative).

Spicy Pumpkin Wedges

This simple alternative to potato wedges is tasty, and full of vitamins and minerals. Cooked pumpkin contains high amounts of potassium, which makes it an amazing source of energy. These wedges could be enjoyed post-workout, as potassium helps balance electrolytes in the body – often needed after exercise.

Warm Pumpkin Soup

This soup is the perfect recipe for batch cooking; soup is a quick but nutritious meal, ideal for those busy evenings. The pumpkin and celery are great sources of fibre, and are rich in vitamin C, great for fighting off those pesky colds. Fresh ginger could also be added to provide further anti-inflammatory and antibacterial benefits.

Rebekah Esdale is a Manchester-based nutritional therapist, health coach, and founder of Wild Roots Nutrition, helping busy women to feel healthy, happy and energised. Find out more at wildrootsnutrition.co.uk





Photography | Samuele Errico

“Adventure is out there

– CHARLES MUNTZ, *UP*

"My mother had this brilliance... but also darkness"

Emma Kennedy, author and *Celebrity Masterchef* winner, opens up to *Happiful* for the first time about her late mum Brenda's battle with mental illness, and why she still feels haunted by the things left unsaid...

Writing | **Gemma Calvert**

Lawyer turned actress and writer, Emma Kennedy was holed up in a central London writing room, when she received the call that shattered her world.

"It was my dad, telling me to come home, and it was really obvious that this was it," she says, recalling the day in May, 2014, when her mum, Brenda, who had endured a decade-long battle with breast cancer, started losing her fight with the disease.

"I was destroyed when I saw the state she was in; I collapsed," she says. "From the moment I clapped eyes on her, I don't think I stopped crying until the moment she died, and then I cried for another five days afterwards. I cried for 11 days without stopping. It was like my body was in control of me."

Following Brenda's death aged 71, Emma was really taken aback by the intensity of her grief.

"Everyone is going to die, but there's something really shocking about being told by a member of the medical profession: 'This is the time frame'," she explains. "Even watching her slow decline, and getting to the point where someone you love is suffering, I was absolutely sideswiped by the extent of the grief I felt."

Ask Emma to describe her mum, and she spontaneously selects adjectives like "brilliant, vivacious, fantastic and intelligent". She describes Brenda warmly as "one of a kind" and it's little wonder why she and dad Tony have "loomed large" in Emma's work, immortalised in her best-selling 2009 novel *The Tent, The Bucket and Me*, and her BBC TV series, *The Kennedys*, based on her childhood growing up on a council estate in 1970s Stevenage. Brenda – whose own mum died of breast cancer at 49 – passed away three weeks before Emma filmed the pilot.

"That was very hard," sighs Emma. "[During] one of our last conversations, she wanted me to read her the script. She stopped me at one point – she could barely speak – and said: 'You're going to have to change that name, your father still sees her in Sainsbury's.'" >>>

> **"From the moment I clapped eyes on her, I don't think I stopped crying until she died, and then I cried for another five days afterwards"**



Family photo of Emma with her mum, Brenda

Emma's book, 'The Things We Left Unsaid' (Century, £12.99), is available now.

Follow Emma on Twitter @EmmaKennedy





Brenda inspired Emma's humour

Emma guffaws at the memory. Brenda inspired her humour, and injected her with a strong work ethic. She is, says Emma, "the reason that I do what I do today, and I will never, ever not be grateful for that."

But there's a but. By her own admission, Emma has only ever injected the "quirky, brilliant" experiences into her work, but today she has decided to unveil a secret about her mum.

"Mum was one of a kind, but she was also the most complicated person I have ever known, and there was no doubt that she had an undiagnosed mental illness," reveals Emma.

"I think she had paranoid personality disorder. When I was born, she had postpartum psychosis – it was 1967, you didn't go to the doctor, and it wasn't talked about. I think she fundamentally changed at that moment."

Only child Emma admits that amidst the abundance of amazing memories from her childhood, there were some very "dark" times.

"When she was good she was very, very good, but when she was bad she was horrid," explains Emma. "She had the capacity to go, in seconds, from absolutely normal to the worst human being you'd ever encountered.

"When you're a child, you don't know how to cope, especially with something you don't understand. I loved her, but I didn't like her, for a long time."

Another incident that troubles Emma happened years later, when her mother was first diagnosed with breast cancer, and told her consultant she had been given cancer by a CIA operative in a book shop in Cambridge.

"She really believed it, [and] what I find extraordinary about that moment [is that] no one said anything," says Emma. "My mother refused to have chemotherapy the first time round, because she genuinely thought it was a ruse, rustled

> I loved her, but I didn't like her, for a long time

up between me, my dad and the hospital, to kill her."

Although Emma and Tony finally persuaded Brenda to have some treatment, she elected not to have mastectomies – treatment that may have saved her life.

Emma admits she is also haunted by the fact that she and her dad never spoke about Brenda's mental health until she died.

"We were such an open family, but there was this one great big elephant in the room that was never discussed."

Emma's reasons were, she reveals, two-fold and complex. Even five years ago, mental health wasn't as commonly discussed. Mostly, though, Emma was petrified of how her mother would react to being confronted about it.

"If I had done that, she wouldn't have accepted it. She'd have pushed me away, and I probably wouldn't have had a relationship with her at all in the last years of her life. It's tricky," sighs Emma.

"I wish I'd had the strength to take her to a doctor and to say 'please can you help her'. I didn't. I am so consumed with sadness now that no one ever asked her, 'What is it that kicks this off? What can we do to help you?'"

This deep anguish for what she never vocalised galvanised the idea for Emma's latest book, *The Things We Left Unsaid*, which sees lead character Rachel mourning her father, then losing her mother. Rachel discovers she never properly knew the people who raised her, and one moving line reads: 'We spend so much time with our parents, it's a shame we don't get to know them.'

It's a theme that will make Emma's readers ponder the depth of their relationship with their own parents. What were they like in their youth? What were their dreams, secrets and mistakes?

Conversation naturally turns to Emma's father Tony, 79, who went into "hibernation" after Brenda's death, to process losing his wife of 47 years.

"He'd been so devoted to her, and she was the boss, [so] he went through a period of needing to work out who he was and how he wanted things to be," says Emma.

How is he now?

"He's doing brilliantly," beams Emma. "He's got a girlfriend, he's moved house, he goes to football every Saturday. He is an absolutely amazing man. I'm in awe of him. He stood by [mum] through thick and thin. He completely loved her, but he had a really difficult time."

Emma's own four-year marriage to talent agent Georgie Gibbon seems equally solid. Before proposing, Georgie sought permission from Emma's mum, two months before she died.

"My mother looked at her and said: 'Well, I hope she says yes.' She was an absolute terror!" says Emma, crumpling into hysterics. "She was like someone you'd never met before, an absolute one off. She had this brilliance, but she also had the darkness."

In one poignant moment of Emma's book, Rachel asks whether losing a parent ever gets easier. What would be Emma's response?

"I can't remember who said it, but it's so true," she replies. "Grief is like a massive ball inside a box. At the start, the ball is completely filling the box and as the years go by, the ball gets a little smaller, but is still bouncing around. Give into it. Roll with it as you would a wave, and be as kind to yourself as possible, for as long as it takes."

IF THINGS ARE LEFT UNSAID...

Psychotherapist Noel McDermott shares his advice:

1

See a grief specialist. The experiences of the people you've lost still exist inside you, and can be accessed with proper help.

2

Talk about your loss and feelings with those around you. Let others into your grief, so you can share the pain.

3

Give yourself the right to grieve in the way that works for you, and not the way that you are 'supposed' to grieve.

4

Time heals, so allow yourself lots of it.

5

Forgive yourself for being human, and whatever failings you feel you had in your relationships.

6

Allow people around you to love you, to hold you, to parent you in your parentless state.

Find out more at noelmcdermott.net

How to break a bad habit – and start more positive ones!

Snoozing your alarm 10 times, biting nails, procrastinating endlessly? It's easy to fall into bad habits, but how do we develop them? And, most importantly, how do we stop?

Writing | **Rebecca Thair** Artwork | **Charlotte Reynell**

We all have bad habits, right? And that's often the problem. It's easy to make excuses to ourselves about the things we do because, well, everyone else is doing them too.

Habits make life easier – it's a pattern of behaviour we can slide in to for a little R&R from constant decision making. But sometimes, we fall into them to make up for something else in our lives – maybe you're snoozing your alarm because you stayed up late reading, and your body is craving rest?

Life Coach Directory member, Rachel Coffey, notes: "Even though the habit might be bad, the intention probably isn't. We need to look at the situation we are trying to avoid, and deal with it. That way we can make a choice that is caring for ourselves."

Maybe you're prone to procrastination, or a sucker for self-depreciation. Whatever the habit you want to break, we've got six tips to get you started, allowing space for more positive behaviours to begin.

1 UNDERSTAND YOUR TRIGGERS

Rachel says: "Instead of feeling bad or punishing yourself, realise that there will have been a logical reason why this started. The question is, does it fit with where you are now?"

Try to be conscious of when your bad habit next rears its head. Keep a notebook, or use the notes feature on your phone, to write down your emotions in this moment, the timing, where you are, and anything that may have just happened.

You might be able to pick up on a pattern, and have a better understanding of what could be triggering your behaviour.

2 TAKE YOUR TIME

Once you're aware of a bad habit, it's incredibly tempting to try to cut it out immediately. But have patience with yourself. Breaking a habit is hard, and you're more likely to maintain long-term results if you work gradually. Start small – if your habit is smoking, try cutting down the number of cigarettes you smoke a day, little by little.

3 FIND A NEW 'PAY-OFF'

Most habits tend to have a pay-off – even if it's not long-term. Rachel explains that the new behaviour has to be worth more to us than the old one.

"Never leave a gap where a pay-off was, as your subconscious brain could find a way back," she says. "Hone in on something that genuinely feels good. Imagine it in your mind (which creates a new neural pathway), and consciously carry out your new habit."

She believes that if you fill that 'reward' void effectively, it will start to work and replace your old habit.

4 HAVE POSITIVE REMINDERS

Particularly helpful if you notice a certain place or time triggers your habit, setting yourself calendar alerts, or leaving a sticky note around your house or desk, could help you to stay on track. Try to frame these messages positively, encouraging yourself – be your own cheerleader for those most-needed moments.

5 KNOW YOUR MOTIVATION

"Never change a habit because you feel you 'should', or for someone else," Rachel says. "Your happiness needs to be at the heart of it. Once you take care of yourself, you will have more time to be there for everyone else."

6 STICK WITH IT

Breaking a habit isn't easy, so don't be too hard on yourself if you slip up. In the long run, if the new habit is worth more than the old one, it will stick. We're all human, so cut yourself some slack, and know that tomorrow is a new day. Let's try again.

Never change a habit because you feel you 'should', or for someone else. Your happiness needs to be at the heart of it



Rachel Coffey is a life coach encouraging confidence and motivation. Find out more at rachelcoffeycoaching.com

A GREAT *escape*

In 2018 it was named Global Luxury Spa Hotel of the Year, but what did **Kathryn Wheeler** make of Galgorm Resort & Spa when she spent two days exploring the grounds, and discovering new treatments, at Northern Ireland's most sought-after wellness destination?

Just a 30-minute drive from Belfast International Airport, at the end of a grand driveway framed by purple rhododendron trees, Galgorm Resort & Spa is truly a sight to behold.

Offering 122 luxury rooms, set within 163 acres of green parkland on the bank of a spectacular cascade waterfall, from the moment you arrive you're struck by the splendour of a historic manor house that appears to be working in total unison with the natural landscape around it.

Here for just one night, I realised I had a challenge before me when I saw the size of the facilities map. Boasting a full spa and thermal village, with riverside hot tubs, indoor and outdoor pools, steam rooms, and saunas – as well as several relaxation rooms, you won't struggle to fill your visit.

While these facilities are all finished to an incredibly high standard, Galgorm stands out from other spa resorts by going the extra mile to offer creative and innovative wellness experiences.

One such example is the Celtic Sauna Infusion, a practice originating in Finland, that seeks to aid breathing and circulation. Galgorm's take on this tradition sees you joined in the sauna by a 'sauna master', who uses a cape to throw heat around the room. What, from the outside, may look like a person dancing around with a plush towel (the sauna master jokingly told us to keep our eyes closed to avoid getting the giggles) is an incredibly intense heat experience – hovering *just* below the line of being completely overwhelming – leaving you feeling serene, yet energised.

Of course, for those not looking to dive into extreme temperatures, the eco-friendly outdoor hot tubs are an absolute treat, and the tranquil orangery is the perfect place to relax with a good book and a cool drink. And after you've taken in the grounds of the spa, Galgorm offers an extensive range of massages and therapies.

During my stay, I was lucky enough to be booked in for the 'Forest Therapy Experience'. Utilising 'Forest Therapy' body oil, the new essential oil blend from Aromatherapy Associates, the indulgent treatment seeks to offer an escape from our busy modern lives by tapping into the scents of nature – and included a full-body and scalp massage, and a grounding mud mask on the hands and feet.

"I want people to feel that they have been transported back into the woodlands," Luke Taylor – master blender at Aromatherapy Associates, and the nose behind 'Forest Therapy' – told me. And in my opinion, he's hit the nail on the head with this invigorating blend containing 22 healing ingredients, including pink pepper, juniper berry, and Mediterranean cypress.

From the moment I walked into the treatment room, I knew I was in the hands, quite literally, of an expert. After talking through what

TRY THIS AT HOME!



'Forest Therapy' bath and shower oil by Aromatherapy Associates, £49, aromatherapyassociates.com

Images | Galgorm Resort & Spa



1 Take in the 163 acres of parkland
2 A Celtic Sauna Infusion in action
3 One of many serene relaxation spots
4 Take a dip in the 20m pool
5 Breathe in the fresh air from the riverside hot tubs

INSIDER TIP

Kept at a cool -10°C, the Snow Cabin makes for a rejuvenating experience like nothing else. Dare yourself to jump inside – you won't regret it.







Find out more at galgorm.com



the treatment would involve, the masseuse taught me a quick, easy breathing exercise to use if my mind began to wonder away from the room. As someone who finds it hard to let go of everyday stress and worries – even on the massage table – this was a game-changer, and the result was possibly the most relaxing, uplifting treatment I've experienced to date.

As my trip came to an end, and I said farewell to Galgorm, I reflected on the most spectacular thing about the spa: its dedication to nature. It's more than just a 'theme', it's etched into the architecture of the resort. From the sauna, where the benches run parallel to a huge sheet of glass offering a panoramic view over the slow movement of the River Maine, to the wood-clad relaxation rooms, and the decadent natural aromas of the essential oils found throughout the hotel and spa, Galgorm indulges all the senses in an ultimate escape to the country.

Feel-good flotation

Set your senses on recharge, as we explore the complementary therapy proven to reduce anxiety and stress...

Writing | **Kat Nicholls**

In today's digital age, where many of us can feel overwhelmed at times, it's perhaps not surprising that flotation therapy is gaining traction. The idea behind this approach is to strip bare, enter a flotation tank (which is full of warm water and epsom salts to keep you afloat), close the lid, turn off the lights and simply... float.

Taking away all sensory stimulation encourages your brain wave patterns to slow, inducing a deep state of relaxation. Research from the Stress Management Society has shown that regular flotation therapy has a positive impact on mental wellbeing, particularly related to anxiety and stress. Sweden is so supportive of the approach that it now offers it as part of the health service.

Happiful's own membership service manager, Jo Fergurson, has recently started flotation therapy, and says it's had a profound effect on her anxiety. "I was completely unprepared for how deeply and positively the experience of floating would affect me."

As she talks me through the process itself, I tell her I'm claustrophobic, and that this has always been a sticking point for me when it comes to getting in a flotation tank.

"Don't immediately be put off if you're concerned about being enclosed in a small space," she's quick to reassure. "There's enough room for me to float in the pod with both arms outstretched without touching the sides. For full sensory restriction you can close the pod lid and switch off the lights, leaving you in complete darkness and silence. But if that sounds a bit daunting, you can always leave an ambient light on, have soothing sounds played, or even keep the pod lid open."

Attempting to articulate the feeling of complete sensory deprivation, Jo tells me it's like being suspended in mid-air with your consciousness separated from your body, and only a vague memory of your limbs and muscles. "I began to experience what I can only describe as being on the edge of dreams – floating images and ideas, drifting past my consciousness, just out of reach."

Expanding on the effects it's had on her mental health (Jo lives with depression and anxiety), she tells me that initially, the idea of being alone with nothing but her thoughts was daunting.

"However, while I inevitably ruminated over the same anxieties and stresses I would have normally, the lack of 'fuel' from external stimuli – coupled with



Find out more about flotation therapy and its benefits at **therapy-directory.org.uk**

the complete relaxation of my strained and weary muscles – actually gave me my first respite from them in a long time."

After floating, Jo says she feels 'indescribable elation', and drives home with a huge smile on her face. She explains that a lack of energy tends to wear down her resilience, making it harder for her to break out of negative thinking cycles, but floating gives her some of that energy back.

"It resets my stress meter by taking me away from triggering stimuli – traffic, people, social media – just long enough to connect with myself again."

Jo goes to Floating Point (floating-point.co.uk) for her therapy. To find a flotation tank in your area, search flotationlocations.com

"Taking away all sensory stimulation encourages your brain wave patterns to slow, inducing a deep state of relaxation"

Is mental health on your company agenda?

We believe mental health first aid training should be given equal importance to physical first aid training in every workplace. If you would like to become a mental health first aider at work, *Happiful* can train you, and we've created this email template to help you explain the benefits to your boss

Dear <<Boss/HR Manager>>,

I'd like to become a mental health first aider for <<your company name>> and I'm hoping you can help.

Here are some of the reasons why <<your company name>> will benefit from offering Mental Health First Aid training to our employees:

1. Build staff confidence to have open conversations around mental health, and break the stigma in the office and in society.
2. Encourage people to access early support when needed. Early intervention means faster recovery.
3. Empower people with a long-term mental health issue or disability to thrive in work, and ensure that we are compliant with legislation in the Equality Act 2010.
4. Promote a mentally healthy environment, and allow people to thrive and become more productive.
5. Embed a long-term, positive culture across the whole organisation, where our employees recognise their mental and physical health are supported as equal parts of the whole person.
6. Proudly share that mental health is on our company agenda, and improve retention as a result of a reduction in staff stress levels.

Happiful offers two-day mental health first aid training courses for individuals across the country for £235 + VAT per person, and they can also offer bespoke courses on-site at our workplace if we have a minimum of eight attendees.

Yours sincerely,

<<a future mental health first aider>>

Did you know that **stress**, **anxiety**, and **depression** are the biggest causes of sickness absence in our society?

Mental ill-health is currently responsible for **91 million** working days lost each year. The cost to UK employers is **£34.9 billion each year**.*

Happiful has partnered with Simpila Healthy Solutions to offer internationally recognised courses and training events in the UK.

Each course is delivered by an **accredited** Mental Health First Aid England instructor and is delivered in a **safe**, **evidence-based** programme.

*Source: MHFA England

happiful

Proudly working with

SIMPILA Healthy Solutions

To register your company's interest or to book an individual place, visit training.happiful.com or drop us an email at training@happiful.com

Body-popping my way back to health



A challenging and disrupted childhood left Vidura lost, failing, and in the depths of depression. But when he discovered street dance, his whole life started moving to a brighter beat

Writing | **Vidura Fonseka**

I have suffered from mental illness and psychological problems since I was a child, struggling with sleep, memory issues, and depression. My brain would have little moments of chaos, during which I would withdraw socially, to let it settle, so that I could deal with the pain.

Looking back now, it is clear that I was never destined to be 'normal'. Back then, though, I didn't know I had a problem.

My life changed dramatically when my parents moved to the UK when I was 12 years old. I found it difficult to adapt to the change – a change I didn't really want.

I faced so many challenges growing up in a foreign country. Trying to adapt to a new culture, new school, and a new society wasn't easy. Not having a support network made things a lot more difficult. The relatives and friends I had known were gone, and eventually I lost all purpose.

Financially things got tough, too. It wasn't long before I was sucked into a depression, from which it would take me almost 10 years to recover.

I constantly broke down during my secondary school years. The depression was a huge weight on my shoulders. I hid it from most people, and dealt with it on my own as best I could. I became suicidal by my mid-teens. My life was a constant battle.

Despite all of this, I still did well in my GCSEs, getting into a really good sixth form. Even after I broke down, I picked up my books and I studied.

As a child, when I couldn't sleep, I would imagine that one day there would be an asteroid heading toward the Earth, and I would be the one who would save the world. So there was still something inside my brain telling me that I could achieve something great. I kept going, but as the years rolled by, I got weaker and weaker.

When I started university in 2007, I had lost my will and was tired of the pain. I then failed every examination. I was lost, looking for a purpose – but soon things would start to change.

One day I was in a bar, and one of my friends did an arm wave dance move. It was cool, and I thought: "Hmm, this is what I need to do to get the girls."

So, I learnt to dance from YouTube, but I was pretty terrible. After my friends laughed at a video I made, I decided I needed professional street dance lessons. I booked in for a class at the Basement Dance Studio in London, not knowing what to expect.

I arrived early for the lesson and waited for the teacher. A guy called Sep walked in. He shook my hand and put on the music to practise while he waited for the rest of the students to arrive. He stood in front of the mirror body-popping, and it blew my mind. I had never seen a professional street artist before, and my life changed from that moment. >>>



Vidura doing what he loves most – dancing (left)

The next two years at university were the path to recovery. I studied hard and danced like there was no tomorrow

Sep also introduced me to break-dancing (B-boying) and, as crazy as it may sound, I made it my goal to win *Britain's Got Talent*. I took a year out of university and trained day and night, both popping and B-boying. I soon met Sep's dance crew, Goodfoot UK, who invited me to train with them.

When I walked in to the studio with Goodfoot for the first time, I was amazed. They were one of the best professional street dance crews in the UK at the time, travelling and performing for big artists. To be in a room with them was intimidating but inspiring. I learnt so much.

The dance ambition gave me a goal in life. It also bought something I did not expect – relief inside my brain. I had received psychiatric therapy to help with my issues, but nothing came close to the cure that dancing brought.

It wasn't a fix, but it helped me so much. I found over the years that exercise was the key to helping me get through.

Once the gap year was over, I was ready to go back to university to recover from my failure. I had two years left and I needed to smash it.

The next two years at university were the path to recovery, and were two of the best years of my life. I studied hard and danced like there was no tomorrow.

Day by day my health got better, and so did my studies. I eventually recovered to graduate with a master's degree in Aerospace Engineering, and my dancing also improved a lot. It was the happiest that I had felt for a long time, and looking back to my darkest teenage days, what I had achieved was unthinkable.

At graduation, I still wasn't good enough to become a professional dancer, so I looked for a job. I eventually landed one at Rolls-Royce as an engineer. My dancing stopped because of relocation and work. I did very well and got promotions, but two years later I felt that my mental health issues were coming back. I needed an active life.

I got back to dancing, trained alongside some of the best dancers in the UK, and within a few years I went on to perform on several big stages – including a performance at UK's Best Dance Act competition at the Glasgow Exhibition Centre. I felt an amazing sense of achievement.

I then left my job to work with children in education and entertainment. Today I work in schools, talking to children about my life and running STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) workshops. So far, they have been a big hit, and I'm really glad to be helping the next generation. But I'm still on a journey, connecting all the dots.



Check out Vidura's website, vidura.co.uk, to hear more from him on dancing, speaking, and STEAM workshops.

My brain is my biggest gift. It's the reason I dream in my own zone when it's painful, and why I continue to move forward

I still struggle with my issues, but the difference is that after everything I've been through, I'm stronger, and I know how to cope. I still have bad moments, but I tell myself I have a lot to give. I wish I had known these things as a teenager.

Today, I have accepted that my brain is my biggest gift. It's the reason I dream in my own zone when it's painful, and why I continue to move forward in life. Without my brain I wouldn't be who I am.

To anyone who struggles with mental illness, or other issues in life, my advice is try to find a positive from it. Learn not to give up, and find a goal to battle towards. If you have a vision it can help you drive through your problems. Find a coping mechanism as a distraction during troubling times; hobbies can be very useful. If you have friends you can trust, talk to them. There will be people who doubt what you can achieve, but you will only know by trying. Failure is certainly not the end.

My path to recovery was a long one, so be patient, because life is always changing. You can't control the future, but you can keep going. Just as I did, you might find that your biggest weakness might actually contribute towards something positive and life-changing.

OUR EXPERT SAYS

Vidura certainly had a lot to deal with during his younger years, especially with the upheaval he experienced when his family moved to the UK. It can be challenging dealing with change, especially if it isn't through choice. Once he was free to make his own decisions, despite the struggles, he was naturally drawn to something that was going to be a positive change and help him through.

Vidura is right in saying that we can't control the future, but we do have the opportunity to make choices today that will create a future that we want. Wherever we are, there is always a way forward.



Rachel Coffey | *BA MA NLP Mstr*
Life coach



HOW TO HAVE A MORE

mindful wedding day

Discover nine ways to build mindful, memorable moments into your special day

Writing | **Bonnie Evie Gifford**

Weddings come with a lot of pressure. On average, we take seven to 12 months planning the 'happiest day of our lives', spending between £15,000 and £32,000, trying on a dozen dresses, and inviting more than 100 of our loved ones to share our big day with us.

And before you know it, the day is over. Months of planning, stress, and tears, done. With so much going on, it can be easy to lose track of what the day is really all about: celebrating your relationship, and starting the next step in your journey as a couple.

After nearly 18 months of planning, my partner and I have realised our wedding is nearly here. Chatting with suppliers and breaking our day down into 30-minute chunks, it has become clear: feeling present in the moment, and taking time out to connect on the day, is going to be a challenge.

With that in mind, here are nine simple ways you can create more mindful moments throughout your wedding day.

1 PLAN A MOMENT FOR YOURSELF

No matter what kind of wedding you have planned, you're bound to have a busy day ahead of you. Build-in time for yourself in the morning, before the hustle and bustle begins. Take this moment to reflect, breathe, and enjoy.

2 BREATHE

Mindful breathing exercises can help to not only quieten your mind, but help you feel more grounded and calm while refocusing your energy. Take a moment to pause; inhale deeply for three seconds. Hold for six. Breathe out for eight. Repeat.

3 EAT SMART

Being mindful of what you eat ahead of your ceremony can help you to feel calmer. Make sure you have enough B and C vitamins by incorporating bananas, dairy products, oranges, or tomatoes in your breakfast, which can help decrease stress levels while boosting your energy. Or, try eating whole grains or Brazil nuts, which can help reduce anxiety and relax your muscles.

If you're concerned nerves may have an impact, share breakfast with your wedding party. This can help you to feel more present in the moment, while creating memories together.

4 TAKE A STEP BACK

Let someone else be in charge on the day. The last thing you want is to be worrying if the seating plan has been laid out perfectly, the centrepieces are just right, or whether the officiant is running behind schedule. Designate one (or more) people to take charge of different aspects of your day, and make it clear to your venue and vendors who to speak to. Setting these boundaries will allow you to focus your attention elsewhere.

5 FORGET PERFECT

You can't control every little detail. Perfection is out of your hands – and is highly overrated. It's those little unexpected moments of humour, emotion, and beauty that will create memories that will stay with you for years to come. Is anyone really going to remember if your main was served medium-well-done instead of medium-rare? By letting go of your need for perfection, and forgetting the what-ifs, you can begin focusing on – and savouring – each moment as it comes.

> **Take a moment to reflect, breathe, and enjoy**

6 MAKE TIME TO BE TOGETHER

Once the ceremony itself is over, many couples face hours of photos and food before the evening festivities kick off; that can be a long time to have all eyes on you. Catching a few moments for just the two of you can help you to connect, savour the moment, and bask in each other's company.

While it can be tempting to split up to cover more groups of friends and family during the reception, time will fly by quicker than you may realise. Ensure you spend time celebrating together, rather than trying to please everyone else.

7 UNPLUG

Leave your phone at home, in your bag, or safely in the hands of a member of your wedding party for the day. Being more than an arm's-length away from our phones can sound daunting, but ask yourself: do you really need it? If someone needs to get in contact, designate a member of your wedding party who will keep their phone on them, and save updating your marital status for the next day.

8 PLAY THE 5-4-3-2-1 GAME

Focus on five things you can see, four you can feel, three you can hear, two you can smell, and one thing you can taste. This helps recentre and ground you, breaking any negative thought patterns that may be making you feel anxious on the day. It can also help you pick up on some of the small details you may otherwise overlook, cementing them in your memory, and allowing you to enjoy the little details.

9 REMEMBER YOUR WHY

Remind yourself what your wedding is all about: getting married is a new step in your relationship. No matter what may happen on your special day, you will have countless more moments to share, and memories to create together, still to come.

For more advice on protecting your wellbeing while wedding planning, and how to beat pre-wedding anxiety, visit happiful.com

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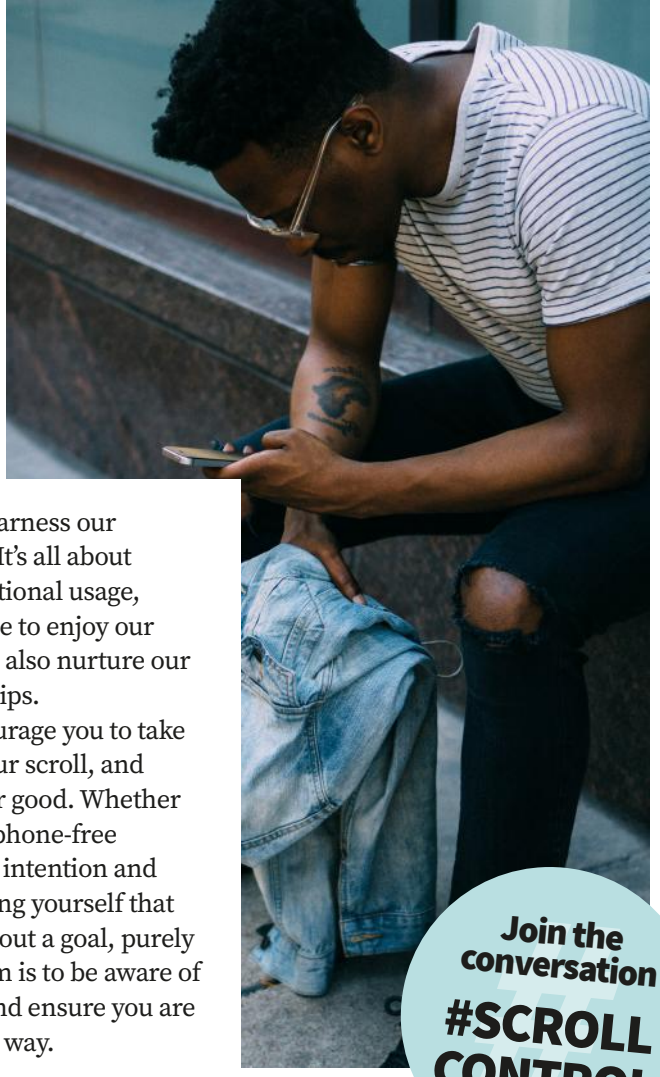
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Tips to use your phone for good

If you're feeling a slave to your smartphone, is it time to look for quality over quantity from your screentime?



Nomophobia: It's the buzzword of the moment, otherwise known as an addiction to our smartphones.

Some people are passionately pro phones, citing them as a brilliant benefit to our lives – from connecting us with friends and family, to helping those with social anxiety, as well as providing a host of apps to support our wellbeing.

But can having the world at our fingertips do more harm than good? Poor phone etiquette is impacting our lives, with real-life friends being snubbed in favour of online conversations, and potentially hours of our day lost down the scroll rabbit hole.

While designed to connect us, in some cases, our reliance on mobiles and social media is pulling us further from reality, which can be detrimental to our health and wellbeing.

#ScrollControl

While we love our phones and the many benefits these little pockets of wisdom can bring us, it's important to take the time to recognise how your phone use affects your life – is it making your life better? Or are you spending too much time scrolling mindlessly?

By being aware of our phone use and focusing on quality over quantity, we can harness our mobiles for good. It's all about mindful and intentional usage, which gives us time to enjoy our digital friends, but also nurture our real-life relationships.

We want to encourage you to take back control of your scroll, and use your phone for good. Whether that's by having a phone-free day, scrolling with intention and purpose, or allowing yourself that hour to scroll without a goal, purely to unwind. The aim is to be aware of your phone use, and ensure you are using it in the best way.

Join the conversation

#SCROLL CONTROL

Get involved!

- **Reassign your time**
  If you think you're spending too much time on your phone, challenge yourself to take time out. Check your current screen time in the settings app on your phone. Then set yourself a new goal and see how you feel. You might enjoy the tech-free moments.

- **Team talk**
  You're probably not the only one who could use your phone better, so get your friends involved. Put phones in a box during events or meal times, and make fun forfeits for those who reach first.

- **Get creative**
  Take yourself back to a time without phones. Pop a notebook in your bag or pocket, so when the temptation to scroll calls, you can write down your thoughts instead. A mindful moment, and a chance to reflect.

- **Sharing is caring**
  There are so many apps out there that require more than simply scrolling. If you use an app to better your mental health, wellbeing or knowledge, we'd love to know! How do you use your phone for good?

Good, clean business

When we're supported and valued, heading to work each day can offer us a sense of purpose and fulfilment that enhances our lives. But this opportunity isn't always afforded to people with disabilities.

The Soap Co. is an award-winning social enterprise where 80% of staff have a disability or long-term health condition, meaning that anyone who can work has the opportunity to. From sensual soaps to indulgent body oils, what's the story behind this luxury brand with a difference?

Writing | **Kathryn Wheeler**

It was 2015, and Camilla Marcus-Dew had just joined the charity Clarity – Employment for Blind People. In a move to revive the organisation, she was tasked with the immense challenge of launching a new brand, and had been given just six months to do it.

Camilla saw that there was a gap in the market for an ethical luxury brand that does good, but that doesn't compromise on the design of the product, or the quality of the ingredients. So she founded Soap Co., a body care brand that employs people who are blind, disabled, or otherwise disadvantaged.

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

"I've got a couple of family members with mental health conditions, and one, in particular, is my niece," Camilla explains, as she reflects on what drove her to found Soap Co. "She has cerebral palsy, and is in a wheelchair. Probably not disconnected from that, she lives with mental health conditions.

"I want to make sure she knows she can be valued through work, but also that it's possible to work for your mental health in a job that doesn't stress you out, and that you don't hate. Feeling that sense of purpose, belonging, independence, and agency over your life comes from, in many cases, work."

Despite this, the employment rate for people with disabilities is just 50.7% – compared to 81.1.% for people without disabilities. Not only are disabled people missing out on a salary (according to Scope, it costs on average £570 more a month to live as a disabled person), but as Camilla highlights, they also miss out on the life-enhancing social and psychological benefits of working in a supportive environment. This is where Soap Co. steps in.

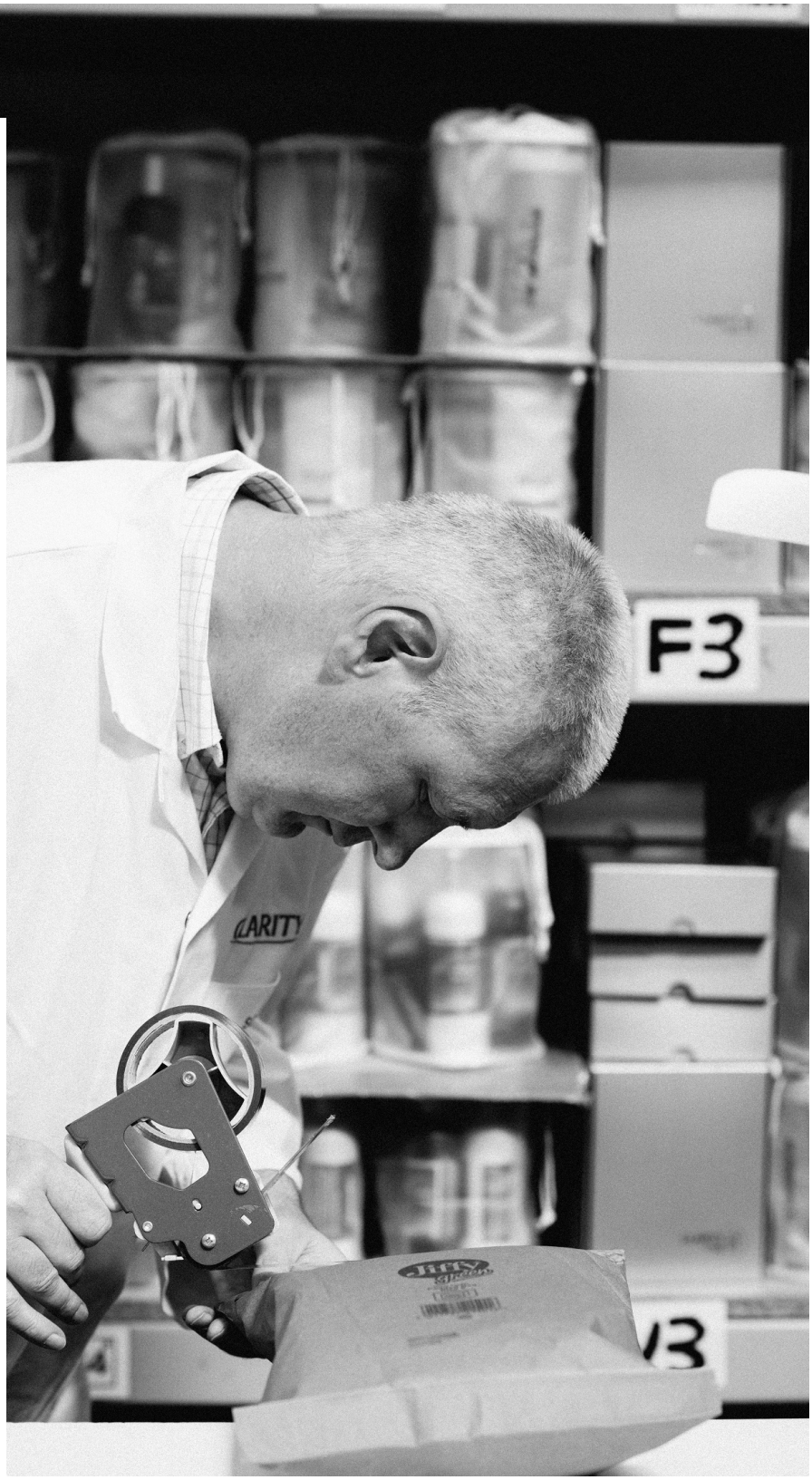
> **Feeling that sense of purpose and belonging, independence, and agency over your life, comes from, in many cases, work**

A HAND UP

Working in partnership with government programmes that support people who have been out of work for a while, as well as disability recruiter Evenbreak, Soap Co. offers both long-term careers, and a first step on the ladder for those for whom these opportunities are rare.

"Once you have a gap of four or five years on your CV, it can be hard to get back in the job market," explains Camilla. "So I love what we're doing here, because we're giving people the boost to say: 'You have this amazing experience, you can be really valuable in an organisation, and help others who are in a similar situation to you, so use your skills.'"

Of course, in an environment where 80% of staff have a disability or long-term health condition, Soap Co. is doing things differently to make their workplace as accessible as possible. >>>



Soap Co. work hard to create an environment where everyone can flourish



Soap Co. share their workplace with three guidedogs who accompany their owners to work each day

> **We're proving that even something as simple as soap has the power to change lives**

"Lots of our staff have visual impairments, so we do tannoy announcements rather than putting signs on the floor," says Camilla. "Everyone is unique, and everyone's got their own needs and barriers, and we support them in every way we can. We have more training and skills development than most organisations would and, in the past, we've had a regular counsellor who has come in to work with members of staff who have needed a bit more support."

No matter how small the gesture is, as Camilla knows, taking the time to put thought into the everyday accessibility of a workplace can make a huge difference – leading to people feeling included, valued, and seen in their job.

"I really believe that any organisation can do this, they can just stop to think about how to help that individual," says Camilla. "We create an environment where everyone supports everyone, and ultimately this is what it should be like in every place of work."

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

But the ethical power of Soap Co. extends further than it's social enterprise structure. Creating ethical, sustainable products is at the core of the work that they do. Using only natural ingredients, their products are paraben and cruelty-free, with their bottles made from recycled milk bottles, and the glue for their labels is biodegradable.



Soap Co. founder, Camilla Marcus-Dew



Soap Co.'s new range is available from October

Find out more, and browse the range at thesoapco.org

In June this year, they took the bold step of reaching out to their followers on social media to crowdfund £7,000 in order to fund product development to introduce new, plastic-free, aluminium bottles for their soaps. And they reached their goal, with time to spare.

For Camilla, this move was in line with the transparency and openness Soap Co. was founded on, but also shows the power we all have to make a change.

"Why shouldn't we encourage consumers to create the future that they want?" Camilla says. "I really want to challenge people to think about what they're buying. Because what we buy is not inconsequential, and we're proving that even something as simple as soap has the power to change lives."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

On one level, Camilla and everyone at Soap Co. have succeeded in proving that even simple products can make a huge difference to the quality of people's lives. But more than that, they're offering the people who make their soaps a bright future, where they're recognised for their skills, and accommodated unquestioningly – and that's an attitude that's sure to have long-lasting effects.

"I love receiving phone calls and emails from people who say things like: 'I've got a daughter, and I didn't think there was an opportunity for her to work, and you've given us hope that there is," says Camilla. "It's not just creating these jobs, but it's inspiring other businesses as well.

"I have the best job in the world. We're making a change, and we're doing so by selling beautiful products. And we only want to make more. If we can grow to 10 times the size, just imagine how many more people we'll be helping."

Mental health matters

After his father was murdered when he was just 12 years old, children's author and podcaster, **Mark Lemon** dedicated his life to helping others. Here he shares his thoughts and advice to support people through their grief



Hear more from Mark on his podcast 'Grief Is My Superpower', and follow him on Instagram @the_dad_author

Mental health matters to me because… it's only in recent years that I have learned how to open up and share my feelings. Traditionally, grief isn't considered as a mental illness, but for many years I wouldn't talk about my grief or open up to my family and friends, and this affected my mental health when I was younger. Mental health matters to me because it enables me to live a happier life with my family.

When I need support I… speak to my wife, family and friends. It's important to know you have a support network that you can rely on during the dark days.

When I need some self-care, I… go swimming, play football, or go for a walk, and listen to music or a podcast. For me it's about focusing on something completely different to what is troubling me in my head. Fresh air is always fantastic for breathing in a new perspective.

The books I turn to time and again… include *Notes On A Nervous Planet* by Matt Haig, which is a fantastic book for remembering what is truly important in life. I also love following Lucy Sheridan on Instagram, who always brings some much needed perspective to my social media.

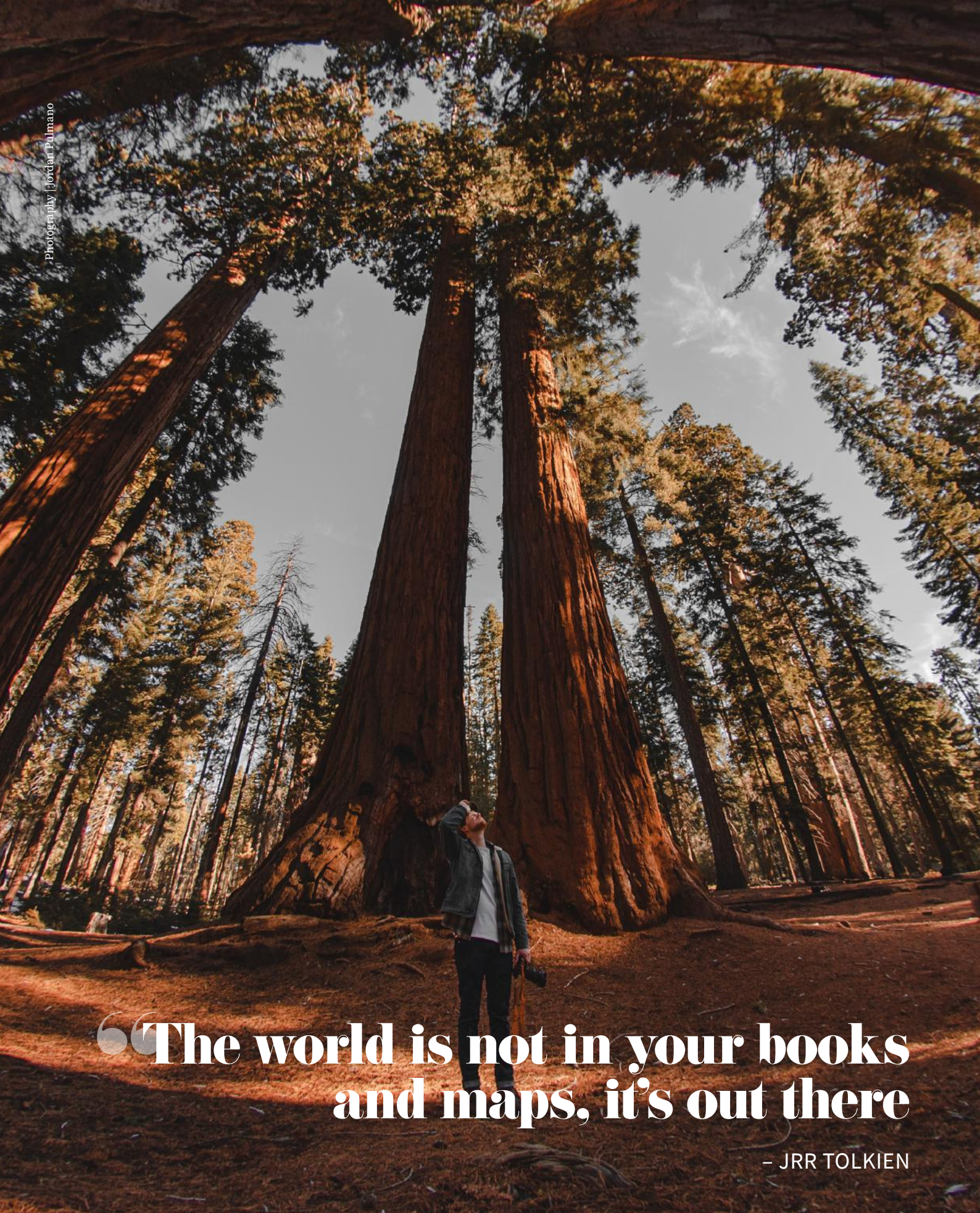
Three things I would say to someone grieving are… as painful as it sounds, you must allow the emotions of grief to come in. The more you share your feelings with others, the easier you will find it when coping with your loss later on in life. Try to use the love you hold for those that are no longer here as a positive energy to achieve your goals in life. Grief is there to remind you how much you love those that are no longer alive.

The moment I felt most proud of myself was… holding my children for the first time. All of my heartache as a child seemed to wash away the moment I held my children in my arms. You simply can't beat the incredible feeling of becoming a father.

The main thing I want people to know about grief is… although you will always miss that special person, you can go on to live a positive life after the death of a loved one.

One thing going through grief has taught me about myself is… that life is a journey and forgiveness is my strength. My podcast has taught me how resilient people can be after the death of a loved one. The bereaved find the ability to harness a superpower that only grief can teach you.

The best lesson I've learned in life is… to take every day as it comes. I learned from a very early age that tomorrow isn't promised. So do what you love, and dream big.



Photography | Jordan Pulmano

“The world is not in your books and maps, it’s out there

– JRR TOLKIEN

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