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life-changing issue

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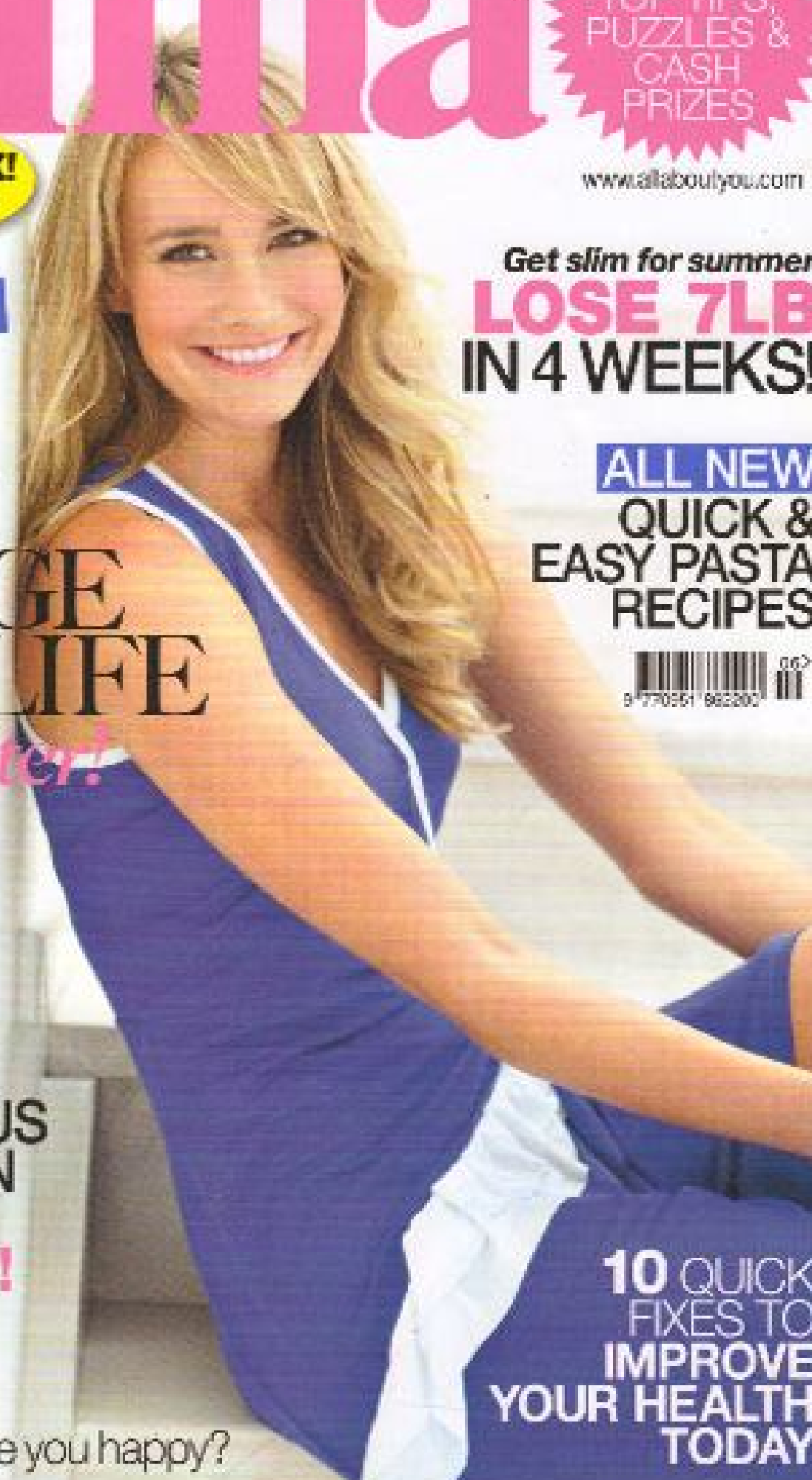
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# We made change work for us — you can too!

If you want a change, you can make it happen. And if you're struggling to cope with the unexpected, you can control what happens next...

**M**aybe your life has fallen into a predictable pattern — you're coasting along in a job that doesn't interest you, or you're bored with being at home. Perhaps you're in the middle of a crisis — a relationship that you thought was for keeps has ended, or redundancy has caused debts to pile up — and you can't see a way out. Here's how changing the way you think can change your future, too.

## Bring it on!

"If you don't have to make changes, it's easy to avoid them forever. But if it's a matter of survival, you'll make decisions fast enough, trust me," says life coach David Allen, author of *Making It All Work* (Piatkus, £12.99). It's a situation that probably sounds familiar. You want to change, but only if you'll be happier or better off, which no one can guarantee. So you find yourself going round in a loop, dreaming of a new start, thinking "yes, but..." and talking yourself out of it.

ending up exactly where you began — only ten years older. The problem is that change is scary, so it's tempting to sit tight until you're forced into it. What you need, says David, is repetition. "Once you identify what you truly love and want to do, you'll be motivated," he says. "You won't settle for anything less." Here's how to start:

## Change your future

Close your eyes and imagine your life in five years' time. Now press an imaginary zoom button to view it in detail. Perhaps you're in a garden, watching children play. Who's in the garden? Whose children are they? Are you playing with them, reading, or drinking? Focusing on the picture helps you work out what you really want.

"Write it all down before the image dissolves, then contact phone, e-mail, magazines and websites to research the vision. Getting used to the idea is important, because your nervous system needs time to feel comfortable with it," says David. Otherwise you'll back away, mulling, "That's not for me". Of course, you may realise it's not your dream after →

## IN MY CASE

**'I moved to the end of the earth'**

**Art teacher Jo Symons, 31, moved from Sussex to the Falkland Islands**

"I've never been interested in change and leaving a job — after two years I applied for a job for a teacher in the Falkland Islands, despite another offer. My husband Miles, 29, was up for an adventure, too, and accepted a two-year contract. Last August, we arrived in the middle of the worst winter for 18 years and thought we'd made a big mistake, but I've grown to love it here as has our family. Mark (10) joined the school and Miles is fascinated by the people, so I'm doing the most and him the least of the people, so I'm doing the most and him the least. I've loved the fish and chips and seen wildlife I'd only have found on DVD. A lot of people have moved at least a few decades. I'll never want!"

**My life lesson:** "I suppose I always wanted to be a teacher. We've just learnt with hard hat and boots through an 11-hour shift."



**'I left my career for his baby'**

**Erin Glegg, 38, runs a design agency in Southwold, Suffolk**

"I've been with my husband Steve, now 42, a year when he was awarded custody of his five-year-old George, then diagnosed with autism."

"I thought she looked over to me and gave me a huge smile that stayed in my heart. I'd had been through a month of needles, a move to live at home with her parents. I'd asked Steve the week after the event of my life to give up my London job and start a new career to look after her. It was a career I could claim I knew what I was in for. I don't have a clue about children with autism, but I realised that would be to make George the best distributed possible. Steve and I were never. We moved to Suffolk and in 2005 I set up the Spring design agency in Southwold, which now employs 10 staff — including Steve. I have a kitten business, a beachside home and a wonderful family including our own baby, William, who was born last year. Being open to change has given me the life I've always wanted. I'll never forget the 30 first steps I saw."

**My life lesson:** "If you follow the right change back in the first and best of the world, you'll be here."



“Change is scary, so it's tempting to sit tight until you're forced into it.”

all, in which case, shut your eyes and start again. Thinking about the future is more important than the picture you come up with. It changes the way you see things, so you spot opportunities that you'd otherwise have missed.

### Change your attitude

Cultivating a 'just say yes' attitude opens all sorts of doors. For a week, try accepting every invitation that comes your way (except from those from odd callers). You'll find doing this pushes you outside your comfort zone, opening you up to new experiences and helping you take the first step to change.

### Change your plans

Once you know what you want out of life, you can work out how to get there – but now you'll need a map, not a picture. What you're after are achievable goals, so if your dream is living by the coast, don't spend hours looking at property websites, instead, plan trips to the area, look up house prices and investigate the jobs market. If you want to return – as a teacher, singer or herbalist – research the qualifications you'll need, where you can study, how much it will cost, and how much time you can commit.

Then make a list of pros and cons, recommends John Miles, Professor of Human Decision Making at Leeds University. That way, you balance the emotional pull of your dream (what psychologists call 'hot' thinking) with the long-term consequences ('cold' thinking). If the cons outweigh the pros, get realistic. Can't find a job near the

sea? Work out what it is that draws you to it. Could you live by a river, join a sailing club or buy a camper van so you can go there at weekends? If the problem's emotional – perhaps you're worried about losing touch with your friends if you move away – consider renting a house for a while and letting out yours.

Do the same when considering a new career. If you don't have the exam grades for teacher training, why not become a classroom assistant? You can even use a pro-and-con list for relationships. It sounds clinical, but it could be worth doing, says John.

### Change your mind

Do you remember how hot the water was last time you washed your hands? Chances are you don't, because you did it automatically. Habits like these are incredibly powerful," says psychologist Professor Ben Fletcher, "and they build up over the years. They make life easier because they free up the brain to concentrate on what's new. But they also force us in, making us resistant to change."

The answer, according to Ben, is to do something different, however small, every day. It can even keep you slim, he says in his book *The No Diet Diet* (Doubt, US\$9). Sitting in a different chair, cleaning your teeth with your other hand, eating a new food or driving down a street you've never been down before, wake up your brain and cut through the web of habits that make life easier – but fishy (at).

“By opening up to new experiences you're taking the first step to change”

## How to cope with unwanted change

Unwanted change can knock you sideways, whether it's a run of bad luck or a disaster such as death, divorce or redundancy. If any of these comes into your life, it's only human to think 'why me?' But though it's important to mourn any loss, brooding over it can tip you into depression. To combat this, you need what psychologists call 'resilience' – the ability to bounce back.

Two-thirds of us are naturally resilient, says Professor George Bonanno of Columbia University. "We suffer, but then we move on." Others find it harder to recover from

setbacks but get there in the end. "They start focusing on what the change has meant. In that life," he says. Because the good news for anyone whose bounce is deflated is that resilience is a skill that can be learned.

### Bouncing back

Resilience is like a cake – a lot of ingredients go into it. Here's the recipe for success:

**Keep optimistic.** Faith in the future stops you feeling helpless and makes life

## IN MY CASE



### 'A car crash changed my life'

**Karin Murray, 34, from Eaglescliffe, Cleveland, lost her confidence, and her job with the police**

"My world in the police had ended four years ago when I stopped and an incoming car hit me and knocked me and I couldn't face driving or working with accidents, so I resigned. I always loved sewing so I set up Pins and Ribbons and started selling cushions and peg bags on eBay. Being self-employed gave me time with my mum who was ill. Soon, she asked about business books so I read *Start-Up* and *How to Start a Business*. I'm launching a new range of cushions, made up of all those cushions I made."

**My life lesson:** "Take a moment to acknowledge that you're not unhappy. After my car crash, I looked at it as a new start, not an end of things."

### 'Divorce was a new beginning'

**Liz Hawthorn, 51, from Wells, Somerset, found a new life at 40**

"Two years after my divorce, I looked for a job to change. I went to a man with two young children and a job with a transport company which took me all over the country. Feeling drained and exhausted, I gave up full time work to be with the kids and think about what I really wanted. Four years later, I was still thinking. Then one day I was complaining to my friends that it was impossible to find a job that looked good on my CV. I said, 'Why can't you do something useful?' I was told to look for a job that gave you my need. I knew nothing about the beauty business, but in five years I built up my own company and I'm still going with the help of a coach. I worked down in the 20s and my friends who worked in the same area. Now I'm consistently on a road, enjoying the beauty scene. It's the time, hard work, and the daily life lesson."

"I've found a new little you know – change will follow."

