

Power of magical thinking

By Ruth Ostrow

"HE'S not coming up here. We will have to go to Sydney or Melbourne," says my partner, who has just tried to get tickets to a national concert through the booking agency.

Art Garfunkel is in Australia. The mere name sends tingles down my spine. The sounds of silence from a bygone era are still echoing in my ears. I still drive along in my car listening to The Boxer, Bridge Over Troubled Water, nostalgically crooning to Scarborough Fair. My favourite film has remained The Graduate, with its lilting Simon and Garfunkel soundtrack and its rendition of middle-class values.

I came of age identifying with the film's portrayal of misunderstood youth and then watched in horror as my baby-boomer peers grew into Mr and Mrs Robinson - the very parents we all mocked for the world they created, a world steeped in artifice, social etiquette and crushing hypocrisy, where people cheated on their own Vision Splendid.

"I must see him," I insist. "He must be coming to Byron Bay. We're his core fans here." But Garfunkel is not coming our way. And we haven't the time to fly anywhere. Like the couples who inhabit the film, we have our commitments and over-commitments. The freedom to just jump on a plane is buried under the weight of family values and responsibilities.

"Just put an order into the Universe," says a witchy friend of mine who reminds me that we are not like the Robinsons at all. We have moved to Byron Bay in protest, choosing instead a gentler, New Age society. Here, we're believers that people can manifest what they need. A sign outside one local shop says: "Be realistic! Trust that magic happens."

"People are always so afraid that they won't get what they want in life. They make up confines, walls, and live inside them - rebelling all the way. Just push against the invisible walls," she says, pressing her hand into the air, "and the Universe will deliver."

There is some truth in her words. Limitation is a state of mind. I grew up in a world where people believed in the Great Australian-American dream. Believed in institutions and did what they were told. Few people made up alternatives or looked at the possibilities of life. Very few followed their own script. And now so many people I know feel trapped and creatively stifled, just like their parents' generation before them.

New Age thinking at least believes in chance, serendipity, endless opportunities to create and live our own fantasy - otherwise know as Magic.

"Please let me go to Art Garfunkel," I tell the sky, the wind, the sea. I put my order in to God. And then I forget about it. Because in reality there's no sign we'll have the time or money to fly off anywhere. We're in the midst of settling ageing in-laws into nursing homes, looking after children and dealing with work obligations.

One of our many duties is driving up the coast to pick up a child we're minding over the school holidays. We've just collected her and feel exhausted from battling traffic through the middle-class mecca that is the Gold Coast. And suddenly we see a sign outside the small town of Tweed Heads on the border of Queensland. It's a sign from above, on a billboard below: "Tonight. Art Garfunkel at the Tweed Heads Twin Towns Services Club."

"It's not possible!" I exclaim. "Must be an impersonator. What would he be doing all the way out here?"

We ring the number. Yes, it's the real Garfunkel who's playing. Yes, the club has child-minding facilities. Yes, there are two good tickets for tonight's show. No, we wouldn't have been told by the promoter because Garfunkel has been brought to this tiny town by the club, separately, not as part of the national tour. My jaw hangs open at the serendipity of the situation.

Still in disbelief we walk into the club 10 minutes later, past gamblers pulling the levers of their beloved pokies, past the sound of clinking money and into the auditorium. The lights dim and on to the present stage walks my past. Our past. The audience screams, people clutch each other and sigh. I see tears running down people's faces. It's really, really him - in Tweed Heads among the old biddies and retirees who have moved to the coast, the smell of cigarettes and alcohol, the swirling, bad-taste carpets and symbols of suburbia. An anachronism. I pinch myself in disbelief.

"Be realistic! Trust that magic happens," I whisper in bliss, as he begins to sing: "Are you going to Scarborough Fair? Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme..." Visions of Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* flash into my mind. "This is a song about loss," Garfunkel tells the audience.

But for me it's about being found. Delivered from the confines of narrow thinking. And in his next song I hear the Universe talking directly to me. "So here's to you, Mrs Robinson. Heaven holds a place for those who pray. Hey, hey, hey."

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