

## **Sometimes you gotta move on**

**By Ruth Ostrow**

IT all started one day when a close friend decided to renovate a small cottage he had bought.

"Knock-down job, mate," said the builder. But my friend knew better. He knew that with a little love and patience, he could turn the place into a palace. He would do it himself, thus saving on tradesman's fees.

I remember going with him to the potential palace. It was dark and miserable. It had been devotedly neglected over many decades.

"I'm just going to do some minor works on it, not too much time or money, and see how it comes up. If it isn't working, then I'll build something better," said my friend.

And so the weekends were taken up with his pilgrimages to the palace. The sun burned down, and still he toiled upon the roof, plugging holes that had been made through shoddy workmanship, replacing downpipes and gutters. It rained, and still he was out in the garden pulling out overgrown shrubs and building a retaining wall to help create a usable space.

Soon the dollars began to mount up. He took out the kitchen sink because it was dirty, and found rotten timber either side. He took off the rotting timber and uncovered rats' nests burrowed into the kitchen cabinets. In the end he had to order a new kitchen.

"Time to cut your losses," said the builder, a friend he called in to give him a reality check. "You have to know when to stop.

"Put a new kitchen in if you must, then leave well enough alone. The best you can do is slap on a coat of paint, rent it out for a while, then build a brand-new place in a few years time."

This was wise advice. The foundations were not much chop and there was rising damp.

But my friend had one fatal flaw. In building and in love. He never knew when to cut his losses. His relationships went well past their use-by date, causing untold drama. The eternal optimist, he often built on shifting sands and didn't know when to stop patching up the facade to make up for poor structure.

I had the same fatal flaw. Which is probably why we ended up together for a period of time. It was supposed to be a brief fling. A lovely, fun-filled and exciting affaire d'coeur. But he wasn't great on timing. And I - desperate to get married - had been sold an adage by my grandmother: "Never chuck out the dirty water till you get clean water!" So I lived in terror of an impending drought.

I am reminded of this story this week because I'm in the process of rereading New Age guru Louise Hay, author of 18 books including the best-selling *You Can Heal Your Life*.

Hay teaches the opposite of my grandmother's words. No clean water will ever flood into your life if you're stuck in a stagnant pond. Or as her own metaphor has it: It's vital to let go of the clutter in your cupboards in order to create space for the new.

But this affair was a lifetime ago, and I remember working hard each day trying to salvage a difficult emotional situation, while he was off trying to rescue his pull-down palace.

There is always a point at which the cruel cut must be made. Where a businessman must shut down a beloved factory because he's tipping good money in after bad, where a woman must decide that another child won't salvage the marriage, and move on. Where the lover realises that her best efforts are just water poured into the sand.

It happened one day when we were at the palace. He insisted I join him on the roof. I became afraid. I don't like heights. "Coward," he growled, as he pulled me up next to him. I stood shivering in fear, and suddenly I realised he was right. I was a coward. But only where it really mattered.

"No use flogging a dead horse," my mother cried to counteract my grandmother's rantings about letting out the dirty bathwater. Bad adages and corny proverbs collided midair, as I packed my bags to leave.

I never found out what happened to the palace after I left. But I learned a valuable lesson. That the greatest asset in life is the ability to know when to cut loose. To walk away while there is still grace and dignity. With no regrets.

And I have developed an adage of my own that I'm teaching my daughter: "She who sits in stagnant water will eventually go down the plug-hole." It isn't Oscar Wilde, or even Hay, but it does the job.

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