

## Even the bad times are good

By Ruth Ostrow

IT had been a hard few weeks leading up to Christmas. Work deadlines were bearing down on me in a way that stopped me doing the normal things I needed to do. Between articles due in and some messy financial business I found myself working long into the night.

I promised myself that the minute I had a free moment I would feed the cat, wash the dishes that had begun to spill out everywhere, and create room on my desk amid the piles of paper and countless coffee mugs so I could move my mouse.

Then someone said the words "Christmas party". No time. "No time for partying or fun," I said, feeling gravely disappointed. And the phone rang, and another person said, "Christmas party."

"OK, I'll go," I said to myself, but under the strict promise that I'd keep myself nice. No excessive drinking, no excessive cake eating, no staying up too late. I'd go for one hour only and limit myself to one beverage in order to maintain the disciplined regime I had myself on to survive all the pressure.

But as soon as I entered the party, the waves of music hit me. And I started to feel better. A bit like a parched plant suddenly being drenched with rain. As the sound washed over me I began to dance. "Ahhhh. This is how it feels to move hips that have been stuck in front of a computer screen the last few weeks," I moaned as blood started to surge back into joints and ligaments that had grown stiff.

And happiness flooded back into a heart that had grown stiff and suddenly I was saying yes: "Yes, I will have that drink" and, "Yes I will have another drink" and, "Yezzz I will have another drink and that big piece of chocolate cake." I said yes while promising myself that my new year's resolution would be to say no next year.

Six hours later, having fallen asleep somewhere near a giant speaker and then rolled off the couch onto or under something -- or someone -- I stumbled home. The hangover the next morning was atrocious. I had forgotten to hydrate with lots of water, and the combination of vodka, wine, champagne and sweaty dancing was not an intelligent mix.

I felt really ill when I opened my eyes. But here's the funny thing. After I took a few pain-killers my head started to feel clearer and better than it had for months. The words I'd been grappling with began rolling off my fingers. For the first time in ages I was actually liking what I was writing. I even cracked a smile.

It was as if a huge burden had been lifted from my shoulders.

And I had this insight. That there is indeed bad drinking, bad partying and bad self-abuse. But there is also good self-abuse too. There are times where we need to let our hair down and be as bad as can be in order to pull ourselves up from the slimy gutter and be better than we can be.

And this is the time of year to do it. Our attempts to stay nice, reliable and clean-living all year are to be commended. I'm a big fan of emotional, spiritual and

physical wellness. But I have now decided that wellness includes badness. Really bad behaviour sometimes can be as fantastic for overall health and fitness as a vitamin C injection is for a cold.

The thing is that when we deny ourselves la dolce vita we feel deprived and angry and tend to do the binge-eating and drinking thing.

I say, give a child the occasional bit of chocolate and you won't have a child who raids the cupboard on the sly.

I'm sure certain elements of society, on reading this, would say I am being highly irresponsible. But I'm not. I have been researching how in many tribal cultures the community treats such times of going wild as medicinal. Many cultures take euphoric herbs and medicine or simply use ecstatic dance to get themselves in an altered state and regard the ensuing celebration as a rite of cleansing, healing and spiritual awakening.

The healing often involves singing, drumming passionately under the moon, fertility rituals and having a wow of a time. Such celebration is often seen as a way of exorcising evil spirits and reclaiming health. It's as if our souls break free and we can truly be at one with our bliss which is a path to the divine.

And perhaps that's what we, in our Western culture, are attempting to do by the Christmas -- and notorious New Year's Eve -- party. Albeit without a connection to deep spiritual practice, we are nonetheless finding our tribal healing roots. Yes, our partying is often too much, too excessive, too wild, too inappropriate. And yet I've been feeling 10 years younger since my crazy antics last week.

It's great to let ourselves off the leash. Not all bad things are bad. The art of wellbeing is knowing when bad things are good.

[www.ruthostrow.com](http://www.ruthostrow.com)

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