

Pain is inevitable; suffering optional

By Ruth Ostrow

This festive season has been an interesting time for reinventions: there's Madonna on the television again with her new bod, new song, dusted down and touched (up) for the very first time (yawn). Kate Moss has emerged from the darkness to front a British commercial, and as we speak scores of ageing rock stars are probably stepping out of formaldehyde, preparing to make a comeback.

As 2006 dawns I can't help thinking that we too - the great unwashed masses, the unsung daily heroes - should also reinvent our lives in a way that is resplendent with love and joy. Why do we have to stay stuck in the same old patterns, same relationship struggles, same old belief systems instead of recreating ourselves?

It's always interesting to listen to poolside and restaurant banter this time of year. The same arguments get repeated over and over. In my own relationship I have The Summer Series. Tape 1, side A: "I'm always the one who ... " followed by the flipside "You never ... " and its sister, Tape 2: "Why don't you ever ... ?" Which comes complete with the bonus track, "Ten things you could do to make things better between us".

Meanwhile, many people continually play the hugely popular self-denigration I'm Not Okay series: "At 40 I can no longer ... ", "I'm not the type who ... ", "I can't do that, I'm not gifted". I recently told a girlfriend she was beautiful and she put on a tape entitled That's Just Because I Was Wearing Makeup That Day, which includes such favourite tracks as: "You haven't seen me without clothes on recently", "All that awful cellulite", and "It's really hard getting older".

Then there is the universal Things Ain't Right series, including the classics: "All people are users", "Life's not fair" and "Life's difficult", with listeners creating their very own bank of evidence to support the self-fulfilling prophecies.

In psychological terms what we need is a circuit breaker - the thing, the thought that breaks the old patterns. If one can step outside of beliefs it's amazing what can be created. Cyclist Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France after his battle with cancer by refusing to play the limiting Having Cancer Means ... tape.

As I wrote last year, author W. Mitchell lived through being severely crippled to become a legend in the United States by inventing an empowering self-image. He says: "Pain is inevitable; suffering optional." A good motto to begin the new year with.

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First published in The Weekend Australian SAT 07 JAN 2006