

Find *your* bliss

Six steps to bring happiness within reach
By Nadine Lafleur



IF YOU'D MET ME ONE YEAR AGO I would have introduced myself as: *Hi, my name is Nadine and I'm a lonely divorcee, stuck in a stressful job that is making me sick and a body that is chronically tired and exhausted.*

Fast-forward from then to now, and this is my new everyday reality: *Hi, my name is Nadine and I am happy, feel full of energy and wake each morning excited about the wonders the day may bring.*

So what's changed from a year ago? Well... a lot. And if you think a year isn't enough time to make real, lasting changes in your life, think again. Here's what I did:

1. I learnt to love the skin I'm in

For years I'd had a love-hate relationship with my body. This manifested in long periods of extremely strenuous training peppered with binge-eating and boozy nights. I'd set physical challenges for myself and if I didn't achieve them, I'd punish myself by setting even higher goals and harder challenges. I was constantly setting myself up to fail and when I did fail I'd feel worthless and miserable.

So how did I turn this around? Well, I stopped setting myself up for failure and I stopped punishing myself every time I didn't live up to my own expectations. In short I learnt to be

kind to myself and I went back to basics.

Loving your body means giving it what it needs, and we all know how to do that: sleep, hydrate, move, relax. I found that once I gave my body some TLC, it started to love me back and I began to feel better about myself.

2. I allowed for change to happen

Most people I know who feel trapped in lives they want to escape from already have the freedom, creative potential and ability to make this escape. What holds them back is the fear of change.

My yoga teacher once gave me a piece of advice that ended up being the catalyst that led me to step out of my poisonous marriage: if you want to build a beautiful home in which to live happily ever after, you first have to tear down what's already there, then dig around in the dirt for a while before you can establish the foundations to build your perfect home.

Change doesn't just happen. Passively waiting for someone to come and rescue you from your dull life won't get you anywhere. You need to open your mind to change, have courage and make some tough decisions in order to take advantage of opportunities that come your way – opportunities that will start you on the path to the freedom you so desire.

3. I let people into my life that inspire me

The turning point in my life came when a friend asked me to join him on a yoga and surf retreat last year. It was during this weekend of exercise and healthy eating that I met a personal chef. She introduced me not only to the delicious tastes of raw, vegan food but also to the idea that you could actually make a living doing something you

loved and believed in. What a concept! I also met a woman who owned a photography business and gallery with her husband. She told me with certainty: "If you really want it, you can do it. But don't waste time – do it now."

Suitably inspired by these amazing people, I returned home and, after five weeks of research, my business was born. I also met my now business partner on that same weekend, and together we have travelled through thick and thin. We've shared worries, tragedies and successes in just one short year. She inspires me every day with her knowledge, attitude and outlook on life and I know I wouldn't be where I am today had I not let her unique brand of inspiration into my life.

Sometimes, we close ourselves off to such inspiration because we're stuck in our routines, afraid to try something new or scared to open up to strangers or feel vulnerable. But when we do, that's when the magic happens!

4. I realised my body is the mirror to my soul

It doesn't matter how fit your body is if you're chronically fatigued. A year ago I was training hard every morning and afternoon for an Ironman triathlon and in between this training I was working in a stressful corporate environment. Not surprisingly, my physical body was tired,

unbalanced and constantly injured. I had no energy, no drive and no courage left to face the basic challenges of each day.

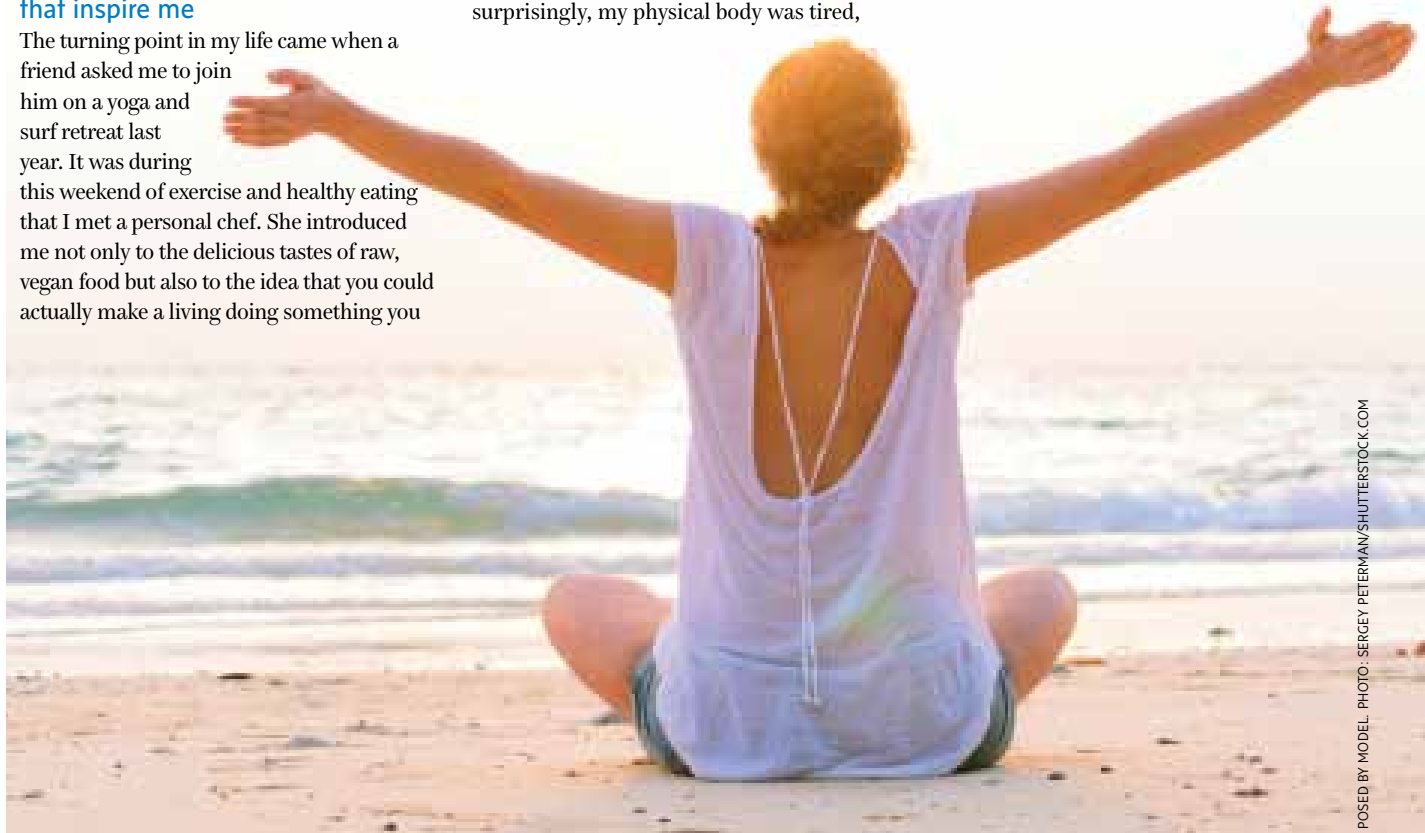
When my right calf muscle started tearing off the shinbone it became clear it needed some time out. And I needed some time out, too – I was dangerously close to a complete burnout. It was at this point that I discovered restorative yoga and the juicy joys of deep hip, chest and back opening.

I began meditating every day, even if I only had five minutes. Meditation would calm my mind and make my body rest so much easier. It's hard to explain the benefits of yoga and meditation if you've never felt them. Running might give you a rush of endorphins, but yoga and meditation allowed me to feel truly relaxed and at peace with myself and the world.

It's so important to listen to your body and give it the rest and restore phase it needs – to repair damaged tissue, get rid of free radicals and replenish energy stores.

5. I chased my dreams – even over hurdles

When my relationship broke down, I felt like a failure. Not being able to keep my promise was killing me. Even worse was being abandoned by the person I trusted the most and being left with a miserable self.



It took a solid six months, but I finally decided to do the things I've always dreamed of. I became a surfer, an Ironwoman and a business owner (the latter being something that takes me to my favourite place in the world every other month). Talk about dreams coming true!

It wasn't always easy, and I can tell you I had gone through what could be the toughest time in my life. During this period I was dealing with three different legal cases, one of which was over \$40K; I was being threatened with five years' imprisonment by immigration officials for unknowingly not having the correct Indonesian work permit; I got injured during training; and I poisoned myself with an MSG overdose by accident. It was a lot to take in within just a couple of months.

But I have learnt to be grateful for any of the experiences I have had in my life, because the sum of them brought me here today. The fact I achieved all my goals to be living my dream now by myself gives me immense satisfaction, and I feel like a magnet for goodness as I am radiating goodness into the world.

6. I learnt to let go – and accept

The final lesson I learnt (and I'm still working on this one) is to let go of what keeps you from moving ahead. I admire people who have the ability to forgive and forget. But I would say for most of us it is not quite so easy.

I'm harsh on myself and possibly just as harsh on others. When we feel that something or someone has done us wrong, we tend to want to do justice or sort things out straight away. The saying "sleep on it" started making sense to me when I realised that over-thinking or over-analysing a situation only made it more difficult to overcome.

Quite often it's the case that when you step away from an issue for a day or let go of your frustration for an hour, go outside for a walk or meditate for 20 minutes, you come back to the same issue and see the solution clearly or discover that it wasn't that important.

I was hurt by the first man I saw after my marriage broke down. I was so desperate to make things work even though deep down I knew we weren't

right for each other. I wouldn't allow myself to step away and let time work its healing powers. Then a friend told me it was okay to be sad and to grieve the loss of the companion I had become so used to. So I did – I took my time to grieve and ultimately I was able to let go.

What I cannot control, I need not ponder over. What's the point in worrying about somebody else's feelings, about something that hasn't happened yet or something that will happen eventually anyway? It's just using up energy that could be spent in a more productive way.

Holding on is like driving a car with the handbrake on – but letting go will get you into motion so you can reach your ultimate happiness quicker. 🙏

After being inspired at a yoga and surf retreat, Nadine founded a transformational retreat of her own in Bali – Bali Bliss Retreats (baliblissretreats.com). Her dream is to pass on this same inspiration and help others find the ultimate level of health, self-love, passion and harmony.

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