



[FIRST PERSON]

It's a wonderful life

Jai Breitnauer is looking for the courage to pursue her dreams. Will a heart-opening workshop help to set her on the right path?



It doesn't take much to put me in a bad mood these days – three circuits of Cheltenham's one-way system have done the trick this morning – and by the time I make it to the Isbourne Centre for the 'Open Your Heart To Your Best Life Yet!' workshop, I feel more like screaming.

But artist Cate Mackenzie is on a mission to rid people of anger and frustration. She describes herself as a 'love coach', someone who helps people open their hearts and see the potential in life. She's not talking about finding a man, but about how feeling more loving for everything boosts your self-esteem and helps create your dream life. In a nutshell, her motto is 'Forget your head and follow your heart'. And today, she's going to show us how to do it.

This workshop caught my eye because I've been caught in a dilemma for a while. My life looks good on paper – I'm married, with

an adorable two-year-old son, Isaac, and a career as a freelance writer. But my husband and I have talked about adding to our brood, and I'm terrified of committing to more kids. I want to take my family travelling, but I haven't got the nerve to follow my dream. Instead, I'm caught in the middle of two potential lives but I'm not really enjoying either. So I'm hoping today will help.

An introduction to the future

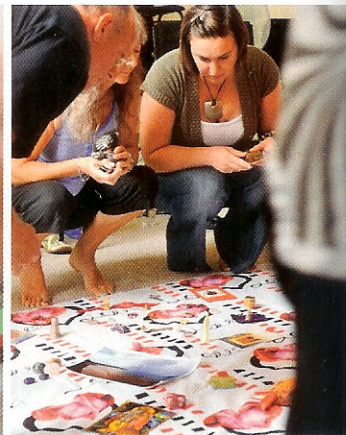
As I arrive I spot Cate, a petite, glamorous bundle of energy with flowers in her hair and a powerful smile. She asks me to join a circle of people sitting around a rug with objects on it – a small teapot, a pewter fairy, several teddy bears, and lots and lots of hearts.

'We're here today because we recognise that we can live a better life,' says Cate. 'You may already have an idea of what your goal is, or you might just have a sense that you want something better. By healing your heart and keeping it open, you can discover who you are and where you want to be.'

As she speaks, I realise that while there's a lot of love in my



Workshop leader Cate Mackenzie; Jai chooses the three objects she feels drawn to



life (my husband, my son, my family), I don't really appreciate *myself* much. Hmm... perhaps this is where I need to open my heart?

Cate offers us a pack of angel cards and one of animal cards. We each draw three angels and one animal from the face-down packs. I get Respect, Authority, Purpose and a Snake – the healer, according to the card.

'What do these things mean to you?' Cate asks me.

'The angel cards are qualities I like to think are conveyed in my

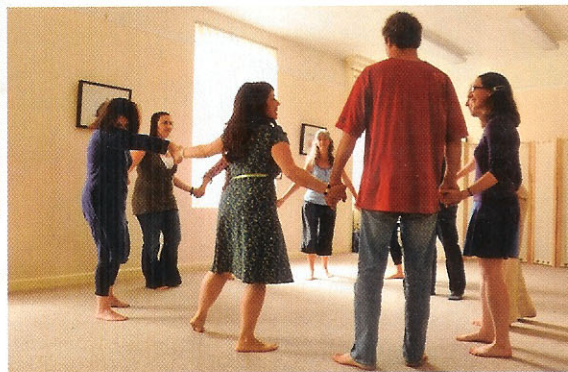
work,' I say. 'And as a mother, you're a healer every day.' I'm not sure where my answers came from, but it seems my heart is more open than I realised.

Next, we pick objects we feel drawn towards from the rug and discuss them in pairs. I've chosen a Zebra postcard (representing travel, something important in my life), a postcard of prayer, which reminds me of Sunday school as a child, and a teapot.

'Do you feel conflict between your stable childhood and



This page, clockwise from above: dancing proudly to cheesy tunes; a group dance; mutual compliments; Cate asks Jai about her desires; receiving love; a firm 'no' exercise



your need to travel?' Cate asks. She's spot on, since tea reminds me of my mum and dad, but the ritual I use – a traditional Chinese green tea ritual – was picked up on travels through Hong Kong. 'It's not unusual to have conflicting interests, especially when you have deep-rooted beliefs set down in childhood,' Cate

people at today's workshop feel, lacking direction and control. Cate asks us to visualise a situation we'd like to say no to, then walk towards our partner and shout: 'No!' I imagine my life full of clutter – clothes that should go to charity, broken knick-knacks I can't part with, and cupboards full of toys my son barely looks at. All these

my brains, but I'm pretty sure I've cracked the exercise. 'What is your heart telling you?' Cate suggests gently, and then I realise – it's not freedom to move physically I'm after, it's freedom to move emotionally. It's a thunderbolt moment.

Give your confidence a boost

Knowing what you want and getting it are two different things, and Cate's next exercise is all about confidence. 'You can manifest any wish you want. What's important is that you exert the power to manifest what your heart wants.'

Flicking on the stereo, Cate begins marching to Lenny Kravitz's *Are You Gonna Go My Way* and encourages us to do the same. Gradually we lose our shyness and fling our arms around to a variety of tracks, ending with the all-time cheesy tune, Right Said Fred's *I'm Too Sexy*! My inhibitions are dropping, but I wonder what the office workers across the street make of the scene through the windows. Mind you, Cate's right when she says that if you can throw shapes with a group of strangers sober in the middle of the day, you can do anything.

Exhausted, but feeling happy and powerful, I'm happy to join the final meditation. Then Cate passes the cards round again, face down. This time I draw the Swan (grace) from the animal pack, and my angel cards are Strength and Creativity. My cards this morning represented my role as a mother,

whereas these cards feel like what my heart wants me to be, someone who likes herself and accepts it's OK to make mistakes.

Today taught me that I worry too much about what others think – for example, whether my work is good enough or my parenting style is right. Now I feel I can step out with more confidence and be more loving towards myself, which should benefit my family. And with this final thought in mind, I get a hug from Cate and step out into a whole new world.

• Places at the Open Your Heart To Your Best Life Yet! workshop start at £45. Call 08708-747123 or visit www.catemackenzie.com

My inhibitions are dropping, but I still wonder what the office workers across the street are making of the scene

explains. 'One of those interests will win, and today's workshop will help you to choose which.'

Just say no!

The next exercise is designed to teach us to say 'no' – something I don't feel I have a problem with, until Cate begins to explain. 'When you run your own business, you find yourself saying yes to every opportunity,' she states. As a freelance writer, that rings a bell.

Then Cate asks us to get into pairs, and my partner tells her story. 'My relationship finished and I needed a change,' she says. 'I left everything in Ireland where I've been living for the last decade and came here with just a bag of clothes and some old photos. But now I'm here, I don't know where to turn.'

My heart goes out to her. I think her situation represents how most

things keep me tied to my home in Bristol and prevent me realising my dream – my family's dream – of moving abroad. But there's a voice in my head that says, 'You might need these things one day.'

Determined, I tell that voice: 'No!' and, surprisingly, it's not as difficult as I think. My partner has much more trouble saying no to the fear that she doesn't deserve what she wants in life, and we end the exercise in a tearful hug.

'By saying no to something, you're actually saying yes to something else,' Cate explains. I tell her I think it's clear that by saying no to the clutter in my life, I'm saying yes to being able to travel without worrying about putting things in storage.

'You don't sound convinced,' Cate laughs. 'Is there anything else you could be saying yes to?' I rack

SIX MONTHS ON, JAI SAYS

Well, I'm pregnant again, and I'm finding it empowering this time round. I've stopped taking on work if it conflicts with time I want to spend with my family, and I don't feel like a bad mother for sending Isaac off with friends or family for a few hours while I complete other tasks.

We've finished our kitchen after three indecisive months, tidied up our finances and booked a trip to San Francisco, New Zealand and Hong Kong for Christmas. Travelling with a toddler and a baby will be a challenge, but not as much as admitting that it was possible or acceptable in the first place! **SPIRIT&DESTINY**