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THE SUNDAY TIMES

2 DECEMBER 2012

STYLE

WELLBEING

SALLY

I WANT TO GET ON WITH MY LIFE, BUT FEEL STUCK

I am a 24-year-old graduate, working part time for the family business while I figure out what I want to do. I am utterly stuck and know it is not helped by living at home. I have a good relationship with my parents, but they constantly ask why I don't join the business or suggest professions they think I might like or be good at. I feel an insurmountable silent pressure and am desperate to get on with my life, but cannot seem to help myself. This is further complicated by recent heartbreak and residual resentment and anger towards my sister. We went

travelling and fell in love with two French friends. I stayed and travelled with the boy I fell in love with, but we split up when I returned home as he didn't want a long-distance relationship. My sister moved to Paris to be with her boyfriend. I adore her, but cannot move past (what feels like) the unfairness of the situation. Any advice would be appreciated.

It is the use of the word "unfair" that struck me the most, together with your mention of resentment and anger. Who are you resentful towards? Is it your sister, for being happy, or your parents, for not only giving you work, but encouraging you with ideas about professions you might be good at or enjoy? Is that insurmountable silent pressure really coming from them, or is the person you are truly angry with yourself?

In your longer letter, you say you want to achieve something for yourself. Well, perhaps we might start with a little more gratitude and a little less self-pity. You have a job, which is more than can be said for many people at the moment. You have enough money to go travelling for months. You have a home and, while living with your parents may not be ideal, it allows you the luxury of time to consider your future.

If I have any advice, it is that you are sitting firmly on the pity pot and it is time to get off it. I am sure you are not even aware of the depth of your self-pity, but resentment about somebody else's happiness (particularly somebody you adore, such as your sister) is symptomatic. I am sorry to sound harsh, but sometimes it is important that somebody challenges our thinking head-on, because we get so lost in our own minds that we cannot see our situation clearly. You may be mildly depressed, in as much as you feel stuck, hopeless and helpless, but a reactive depression (a response to life events) is very different from true, clinical depression, and the best way out of it is to examine our negative thoughts and turn them on their head.

Research into the science of happiness or, if you prefer it (and I do), emotional good health has proved that the best way to do that is, literally, to count our blessings by making a daily gratitude list. Writing it down imprints it more firmly on our minds. Consistency is important. Set thought patterns do not change overnight. Controlled trials also show that helping others has a significant impact on our happiness, one that lingers for days. The suggestion is not that we all run around being irritating, intrusive good samaritans, but simply that putting others first helps kick our self-absorbed ruminations into the background. As we emerge into the light, possibilities begin to unfold, chances that we cannot even begin to see when we are blindfolded in pessimism. As the saying goes, when one door closes, another opens. It is just that we might have to hang around in the corridor for a while. It might be a bore. It might be unpleasant or uncomfortable, or it might be, as you put it, "unfair", but life is passive. It has no concept of right or wrong, no grand schemes or cruel intentions. It just is. We may be unfortunate victims of circumstance, illness or terrible grief, but the human spirit is extraordinarily indomitable. Stephen Hawking, who you might say has been dealt the trump card when it comes to unfairness, expressed it brilliantly: "Remember to look at the stars and not down at your feet... be curious, and however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up." ●

IF YOU HAVE A DILEMMA, PLEASE SEND A SHORT EMAIL TO SALLY AT SALLYBRAMPTON@SUNDAYTIMES.CO.UK

WE'RE SORRY, BUT SALLY CANNOT ANSWER LETTERS PERSONALLY

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WORKERS' HEALTH

People who run their own business are likely to be healthier than those working for a boss, according to a new report. Of the 273,175 Americans interviewed, those who defined themselves as self-employed and a business owner were less likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. Dragon's Den types were more likely to exercise frequently and eat fruit and vegetables regularly. Interviewers speculated the results may be due to the drive and discipline needed to run your own business, as well as more flexible schedules.

TOO CLEAN LIVING

Children from wealthy families are more prone to peanut allergies, says a new study. Researchers analysed information from more than 8,000 American patients and noticed that children under nine from high-income families had a higher rate of peanut allergies than their low-income peers. Why? The lead author of the report, Dr Sandy Yip, said it supported the "hygiene hypothesis" — the theory that living in an overly clean home may hinder the development of children's immune systems, causing allergies. Step away from the sanitiser.



FUTURE FABRICS

MOVE OVER, SWEATY BETTY — HPE CLOTHING GETS THE GYMWEAR GOLD MEDAL. THE FRESHFIT FABRIC IT USES FOR ITS WORKOUT GEAR WICKS SWEAT AWAY FROM THE BODY ULTRA QUICKLY AND CONTROLS FLUID LOSS TO MAINTAIN HYDRATION. IT'S EMBEDDED WITH ANTIMICROBIAL SILVER PARTICLES, PROTECTING YOU FROM THE HARMFUL BACTERIA LURKING IN THE GYM AND CHANGING ROOM. FINALLY, COMPRESSION TECHNOLOGY IN THE FABRIC HELPS TO INCREASE CIRCULATION, PROTECTING AGAINST INJURY AND MUSCLE SORENESS AND SPEEDING RECOVERY IF YOU WEAR IT AFTER A WORKOUT. AND SINCE IT ALL LOOKS RATHER SNAZZY, YOU MIGHT WANT TO DO JUST THAT.

