



From trauma to tranquility

Derval Dunford found new meaning in her life in her journey from chemical illness to meditative stillness

Modern life is hard enough, but if you're literally allergic to it then you have a real problem. That's what Derval Dunford faced a few years back when she realised she had an intolerance to many ordinary everyday items, or more precisely, some of the chemicals contained in them – from shampoo and shower gel, to petrol.

The symptoms – exhaustion, nausea, fuzzy head – became apparent after inhalation, therefore contact with other people fragranced with these products became impossible. She later discovered she was suffering from MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity). It was a lonely, isolating time. "I had never heard of it and initially found it difficult to comprehend," she says. "But it is becoming increasingly common, and different people seem to be affected to varying degrees."

There were early warning signs, in 2002, after using a chemical-based spray in an enclosed space. "I felt completely exhausted and literally as if my body was falling apart, nothing felt right," she says. The following year, while painting a door, she developed severe migraine, nausea and extreme exhaustion. "From then on, I began to react to everyday chemical products such as shampoo, perfume, deodorant and washing powder."

She turned inwards, stripping the house of all chemical products and closing off contact with others. "I couldn't work, I couldn't socialise. I felt like a prisoner in my own home."

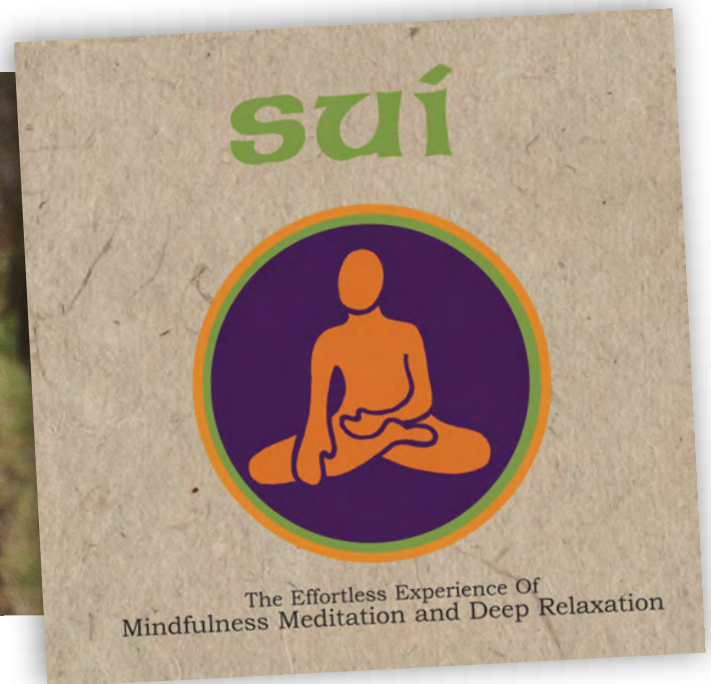
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Living in Westport, on Ireland's west coast, Dunford's life was about to take a new turn amid this enforced time out period, which she now sees as a wake up call. "Always being the productive type, I still felt the need to carry on in some way even while ill, so I took to meditation, relaxation and visualisation. I knew I needed something to balance all the 'busyness' in my body and mind. I had been running around for years, always thinking, always doing. I feel in some ways, because I wouldn't stop, that I was stopped."

It took two years and a lot of hard work to reach an acceptable level of tolerance to chemicals once again. She removed all toxins from her environment, diet and mind, staying positive through her reinvigorated meditative practice. She went to a healer friend to reboot her immune system, followed a strict Candida diet and took supplements. It was then she decided she wanted to share what she had learned.



Derval Dunford



She created Sui Mindfulness Meditation and Relaxation (www.sui.ie), her own business running meditation and mindfulness classes, with her partner, Mick, handcrafting beautiful Irish hardwood yoga and meditation stools. The name comes not from the Irish word, Sui, which simply means 'sit' (in Ireland, the word is pronounced in a similar fashion to the English word 'see').

Dunford has now found peace, better health, and built a new career out of her difficult past. She has created a CD to capture her ideas, and this newly found peace of mind, and to take it all to a wider audience, in the hope that it can aid others in a similar fashion. "This challenging time in my life turned out to be a great opportunity for growth and learning," she says. "As a result of this experience, I was inspired and motivated to share the benefits of simple mindfulness, meditation and relaxation techniques with others."

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The creation of the CD (Sui: The Effortless Experience of Mindfulness Meditation and Deep Relaxation) was a genuine family affair. While Dunford masterminded the project, one of her brothers designed the logo, while another organised the recording and manufacturing. Her son then provided the music – from relaxing instrumental pieces to the balancing healing sounds of Tibetan bowls – with two nieces also helping out. Her partner, Mick, played a part in the inspiration with his meditative stools.

With a background that includes stress management studies, Dunford is carrying a message that is sorely needed for those people struggling with the pace – and the toxins – of modern life. "The idea behind Sui is to make meditation and relaxation more accessible to everybody," she says. Her CD programme has already gone down a storm. "We've had huge press coverage and an amazing response to Sui in Ireland and we are now in talks with distributors in the UK and Australia."

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But she has not forgotten the past and the trauma of how she came to arrive at where she is today. This means living a generally chemical-free existence. "I continue to eat a healthy diet, I juice fruit and veg every day, I grow and juice wheatgrass, and while I can now go about my daily business the same as the average person, I steer clear of chemicals as much as possible. I chose products based on natural ingredients such as Lilly's Eco Clean (www.lillysecoluv.com) for household use, as they are completely natural, and made by someone who understands MCS from personal experience."

She reckons using Sui techniques can be beneficial for anyone suffering from anxiety, illness or recovering from illness, those who have difficulty sleeping, and for those who say they just can't meditate or visualize. It's also a great and quick chill-out for ordinary busy people, she says. "I feel there is a real need for balance; people are becoming very aware of this need right now and Sui is providing an easy way to achieve this in the comfort of your own home, even your own bed!"