

REAL LIFE

"MEDITATION GOT ME HEALTHY AND HELPED ME TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE AGAIN"

After developing Multiple Chemical Disorder, Derval Dunford thought she'd never enjoy life but something changed *By Angharad Williams*

"I'm more aware of balance in my life and I'm more aware that I need to keep that balance whereas I used to always be busy"

Losing a parent at 17 is a heartbreaking and traumatic event and your world changes completely. Derval Dunford, now 42, was badly injured and suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder following a serious car crash in which her mother was injured and her dad was killed. "That was a long time ago," she says from her home in County Mayo, "and I thought I would never recover from it. I was in hospital initially after the accident for two nights. I had bad whiplash which affected my whole back and neck and I had a dislocated jaw which wasn't discovered until I left hospital.

"I wasn't really in a fit state to say something so it was 10 or 12 days later when they discovered it was dislocated and that whole time I couldn't eat. It was pure shock, you



a long recovery process because I was suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder but didn't go and see anyone about it so it was well over two years before I got help from a professional so it took some time to get through it and get back to reality."

This was just the first of a series of major incidents in Derval's life. In 2004, she began feeling unwell and experiencing a lack of energy, she discovered she had Chronic Fatigue brought on by Multiple Chemical Disorder (MCD).

"I had a severe reaction to oil paint," Derval explains. "I was painting doors at the time and I just got a very bad migraine, was very nauseous and then felt absolutely exhausted and ended up in bed for a few days. I thought it would just go and I'd be okay but it didn't.

"When I came into contact with chemicals my head would

feel sort of muzzy and sometimes I'd feel nauseous and then I would just feel completely drained almost instantly and the colour would drain from my face, I'd just be exhausted."

The diagnosis meant she had to change her life completely as she was forced to give up work and socialising as she could not come in contact with any household or everyday chemicals found in perfumes, deodorants or even freshly washed hair or clothes: "I was also working full-time as a beauty therapist and I had to give that up too because of the exhaustion and I couldn't come into contact with people who had used chemicals that would make me sick. For three months I didn't work at all and then I started doing a few hours here and there and I would ask my clients not to wear any freshly laundered clothes or wear any chemical fragrance.

"When I was at home and not working that was when I threw myself into my meditation. I was very worried about my health, finances and everything and I just knew that I needed to do something to settle my mind and help me emotionally. I

had started doing a meditation a few years ago with a group in Westport and I used to attend that regularly. I just loved the opportunity to sit because I used to be go, go, go.

"I began doing short meditations of three minutes per day and I found that difficult to do but then I worked up to 10 minutes, then 20 minutes.

"When you're ill it is all consuming and takes up a lot of your mind, you're constantly wondering things like, 'How long will this last, when will I get my energy back, when will I be able to go back to work,' so you drive yourself mad with all these thoughts and meditation allowed me to get a break from that and focus my mind in the present rather than thinking about the future.

"Even in my illness I had a desire to be productive so as I began to recover and began to get more energy I decided to start work on putting something together to help people rest their minds and create a bit of space. Because I was so busy and realised that we all need to stop and we should do so before we get sick. I put together a seven-week course

"It was pure shock, you don't realise what's going on"





and I've been running it locally for the past three years."

Derval has gone on to record a double CD called *Suí*, Irish for 'to sit' with a little help from her family including her brother John Dunford who works in the Irish music industry to help others with their meditation.

"I now work part time as a beauty therapist and I work on my relaxation and meditation classes. My life has changed. I'm more aware of balance in my life and I'm aware that I need to keep that balance whereas I used to always be busy and I always thought I had too much to do to sit down.

"I make meditation and relaxation a priority and I have a nice balance in my life. I'm aware of my diet. I don't eat processed food unless I have to, generally I avoid it and try to eat my own grown produce.

"My partner and son are very supportive of my all my work. As for the future, I'm hoping *Suí* will go from strength to strength and people will enjoy using it, and for people to see that the way to bring change and balance into your life is to begin to look within for the answer instead of looking outwards." **WW**

***Suí* is available to purchase now from www.sui.ie**