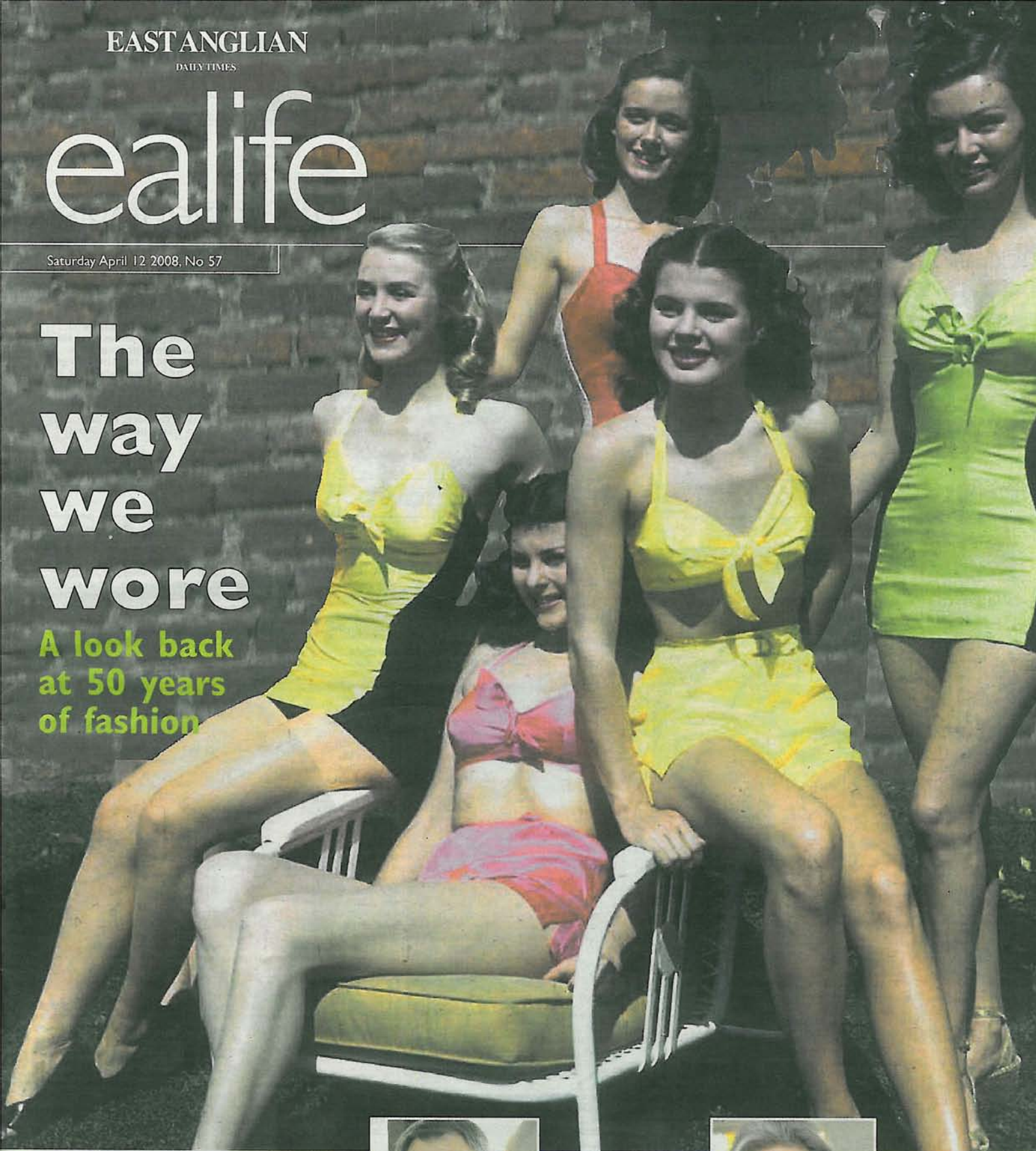


# ealife

Saturday April 12 2008, No 57

## The way we wore

A look back at 50 years of fashion



Treat yourself!

In your EA Life this week...



Gavin's got the power

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Mum's rubella warning

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## This man can inspire you to greater things

**W**ITH the loss of his mum when he was 12 years old, Gavin Drake realised how important it was to get the most out of life. Now managing director of Inspire

International, Gavin works as a personal development trainer with organisations as diverse as Norwich City Football Club and Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

"The key to fulfilment and happiness in both our work and personal lives is all about the way we think about what we think about." This is a key message delivered by Gavin Drake during one of the many workshops he runs throughout Suffolk, Norfolk and Europe.

Born in Adelaide in 1962, Gavin returned to the UK with his mother and father when he was three: "We weren't an overly wealthy family. Dad worked as a builder and we lived in Norwich in a small terraced house. My sister and I had an ordinary, happy childhood; there was a park at the end of the garden and I lived there after school playing cricket, football and messing about."

When he was 12 Gavin had an experience which was to have a dramatic impact on the rest of his life. "Dad bought mum a new bike and as she hadn't ridden one for years she went out to practice. A mile down the road she had a brain haemorrhage - she was 37. When dad went to the hospital, my sister and I were taken care of by our next-door neighbour. We got up the next morning full of dread. Dad was standing there when we walked into the house. I said, 'how's mum?' He said 'mum's not coming back' and that was it."

Gavin's teenage years weren't overly happy: "I was a lost soul. Dad was a good dad and we were a close-knit family before mum died, so I think that prevented me from going off the rails. Dad worked really hard to do what he thought was right but he remarried reasonably quickly and it wasn't brilliant. I used to spend nearly all my time away at mates'; school was all right but I didn't fulfil my potential. I didn't have a clue who I was or what I wanted to do."

By the time he left school Gavin had become independent and resourceful; he could cook, sew and iron. "I got my own flat and went to work for the shoe company Bally and they were absolutely fantastic to me. The first day I turned

**INSPIRING OTHERS:** Personal development trainer Gavin Drake, whose aim is to spur his clients on to greater positivity and achievement in their lives

Photo: ALEX FAIRFULL



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# People

## The Big Interview

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up at work they sent me off to college and I'm hugely grateful. I developed a real hunger for learning and tried to make up for lost time.

"Eventually I moved to the electrical industry and found I had a passion for training people. I had always been fascinated by the human mind. Having lost mum and knowing that I didn't really maximise my school years, I wanted to make sure I got the very best out of life by getting the very best out of me. I also wanted to help other people maximise their potential by making their minds work for them.

"During the late 90s I kept having discussions with my wife Sue along the lines of 'wouldn't it be great if we had our own training and development business...?' Eventually Sue said 'what's the worst that could happen?' I thought, well I suppose if after six months we don't have enough money coming in, I'll just get a job! Didn't make it seem that bad really, so I thought for goodness sake get off your backside and do something about it!

"Sue has a financial background, which was very useful in the business and she was hugely supportive. I think a few people thought we were slightly crazy starting a business from scratch. I was in my 30s with two children and a mortgage but the thought of being able to impact other people's lives positively and constructively was a real driving force."

And so the company Inspire was born. It's a job he must find hugely rewarding? "Yes it really is - human beings are fascinating! I get paid well for doing it too, which is an added bonus, but there's nothing quite like it when someone comes up to you to tell you of some major changes they've made or how they've turned their lives around after attending one of the courses. There's a smile on their face and I think 'I had a part to play in that.' No financial reward can be as great as that."

After merging with Mancroft Training a few years later and spending a productive time there, Gavin recently decided to go solo again and created Inspire International: "I want to concentrate on peak performance and do more work in schools to fulfil stuff I want to achieve. Young people are very receptive; I would like to work with youngsters about to take exams and gifted and talented sports students. I'm part of the group Fundamental Athlete Support Training based at UEA - we work with young sports people in particular, but also with coaches from around East Anglia. If I had known some of the things I'm sharing with youngsters now, at the age of 14 or 15, it would have really helped."

A new tennis academy in Norwich has asked Gavin to be their resident sports psychologist and he has also worked with Norwich City Football Club. "I started working with the young academy players and their parents, looking at how their behaviour can affect the performance of their children. People focus on skills, they focus on resources, but all too often what they don't work on - because they don't realise they need to - is what's going on in their heads."

When Norwich City's first team got to a very low ebb a couple of years ago it was Gavin who was called in: "They were in the doldrums having been relegated from the Premiership and they were plummeting down the Championship too. I asked them to concentrate on actively winning rather than trying not to lose. I got them to start visualising themselves tackling well and not giving the ball away; putting the ball in the net as opposed to trying not to miss. It all sounds so simple but the brain struggles to process negatively structured goals positively. If you think about something you don't want, because of how the brain works it's probably what you're going to get more of!"

As the psychology of performance gains popularity, Gavin finds himself in demand by an increasing variety of people and organisations from academics and charities like Suffolk Wildlife Trust to corporate clients such as the international pharmaceutical



**TAKING THE POSITIVE APPROACH:** Gavin aims to help people use the power of positive thought to enable them to take action to improve difficult situations. We all have a huge capacity to be positive, he says, although tapping it isn't always easy  
Photos: ALEX FAIRFULL

company Eli Lilly. Gavin keeps his workshops simple and jargon free and he seems to get results. What he teaches in the work place and sports field he says, can as easily be applied to people's personal lives.

Who does he consider his main influences? "Martin Seligman has driven a new field called positive psychology. Historically, psychology has tried to take people from a minus five mental functioning to zero where they can operate adequately in life. Whereas Seligman is looking at how we can go from everyday functioning at zero up to plus five. It's about maximising fulfilment and happiness. The concepts and theories of Maxwell Maltz, who wrote the influential book *Psycho Cybernetics*, are fundamental to the work I do and I also find Tony Robbins, a proponent of neuro-linguistic programming, extremely interesting."

You could say that concentrating on having positive thoughts all the time prevents us from acknowledging and tackling life's difficulties?

"Positive thinking for me is not about pretending everything is pink, fluffy and lovely when it isn't. Life can be very challenging and there can be big things to deal with. It's not about brushing things under the carpet and saying things are OK when they're not. If you're facing a problem you need to think about it in a positive, constructive way

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**Positive thinking isn't about pretending everything is pink, fluffy and lovely when it isn't**

to help you take action and improve the situation. If you work yourself into a negative thought spiral that won't happen.

"Most people's brains are running their lives but we need to consciously run our brains. We need to take control and make conscious decisions about the mood we're going to choose in the morning; about the emotional state we take home to our families in the evening. What we focus on we feel, and we become what we think about most of the time so we need to be careful. We all have a huge capacity to be positive but it isn't always easy. My job involves working with people to pull the power back inside themselves and make conscious decisions about the way they think about things."

Gavin sounds very sorted, but does he ever have any less edifying moments when he feels like kicking the cat or shouting at the kids?

"Of course I have challenging times and some things are worth getting angry about! Losing my mum early has forced me to put things into perspective - is there anything more important than actually being here? That's a powerful yardstick for me. But no, I don't have it all sorted. Sometimes I have 'interesting' discussions with my wife and I have teenage children, so I'm not painting a picture of it being perfect in the Drake household. I don't think I'd want it to be. I want to continue to work at things - to become a better dad and husband. There's a lot of stuff to improve!"

Would he describe himself as contented? "I would say I'm positively discontented! Not content as in 'here I am, I've made it and I hope it stays like this for the next 20-30yrs.' I'm happy with where 90% of my life is but I want a whole lot more of it and I want to continue to expand my comfort zone."

"I suppose it's a key challenge for western culture. You get yourself an education, a good career, a partner, maybe children; you work your way up the property ladder, get material things and a standard of living you aspire to.

And think now what? I remember when I was in my 30s - there was a phase when a number of couples around us had relationship problems and divorces; they had got there and were wondering 'is the next 40-50 years of my life going to be the same?'"

"When you ask people what they want out of life most will say fulfilment. That's strongly linked to stepping out of your comfort zone but, paradoxically, what most human beings want at a deep level are comfort, safety and security. So it's a fine balance; you don't want to be reckless and go mad in terms of pushing your comfort boundaries but if you have too much security and comfort you stagnate, get bored and lack fulfilment."

"I try to make getting out of my comfort zone, normal. It means different things to different people; it could be taking on a new job, starting a new hobby, making a social commitment or increasing your income for instance. For many years I've had an image in my head of me galloping along Holkham beach - I thought, I'm 45 years old so I ought to do something about it soon or I might look back and say 'I wish'. Now I have horse riding lessons every Sunday and love every minute of it!"

Gavin recommends paying attention to the constant conversations we all have with ourselves: "When you notice unproductive thought processes, stop and consciously try and think about things in a more helpful way. You may need to work at it, especially if it has been habitual over many years. Push your comfort zone and try new things. Fear of failure can put people off. Richard Branson probably hasn't succeeded in everything he's done - but I bet he's learned a lot!"

■ Gavin lives with his wife and two teenage children in Shotesham on the Suffolk Norfolk border and can be contacted at [gavin@inspireinternational.co.uk](mailto:gavin@inspireinternational.co.uk) and by phone on 0844 8841844.