

selling a cure,' says Tonkinson. 'Their aim is to make people feel less alone, and to contribute to a better world. Books by Melinda Gates and Jack Monroe help us understand the world we're in, rather than just look inside at ourselves.'

Now that my self-improvement project is over, I'm constantly asked if it 'worked'. I feel the pressure to announce some dramatic transformation, to say, 'Yes, I now feel totally content.' But of course I'm not. 'I'm not fixed,' I said to my mum. 'I'm still broke, still single.' But Mum cut in, 'I didn't think you were trying to fix yourself, only to know yourself - and you must know yourself very well by now.' She was right. I used to be someone who would walk into a room and feel intimidated. I thought everyone was smarter, better-looking, more confident than me. I now realise everybody else is struggling, too. One night during my experiment, after forcing myself to do an excruciating bout of stand-up comedy, I remember getting into a taxi home and telling the driver what I'd just done. He looked at me in the rear-view mirror and admitted that since his wife had left him, he was scared to go into social situations because he thought people were laughing at him. 'But when I make myself do it, I wonder what I was worrying about,' he said. It was a beautiful moment of honest communication.

A year on, I've let go of my belief that happiness comes in the form of a hot man in a cashmere jumper. At the start of the project friends joked that if I didn't walk off into the sunset with my dream man at the end, it would have been a waste of time. Part of me hated this but then another bit of me was secretly desperately

wanting it to happen. By the end of the year it hadn't happened, but I did suddenly realise just how much love I already had around me.

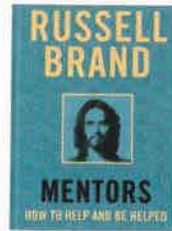
But there was one surprising byproduct of my 12 months of self-improvement - I wrote a book about it. I was so broke, I moved back in with my mum to write it, hardly leaving the house. I sent it to 20 publishers, and was rejected by 14 of them... then one said yes.

Today, two years after that cold January day in 2016 when my experiment began, the book is published in 25 languages and I'm being described as an 'international publishing sensation'. I've been on French TV, received a standing ovation at Holland's biggest music festival, and am having conference calls with Hollywood producers. It's the stuff of dreams and means that, in some ways, my life *has* changed. The public speaking that once terrified me is now something I do regularly, and every day I get messages from strangers who relate to the book, which is magic. In other ways, life is the same. I'm still me, I still worry, I'm still terrible with money. But the critical voice in my head, the one that used to make me physically and mentally sick, is quieter these days. I'm not saying it's going to stay that way, but for now I feel at peace. Today, I'm more inclined to read Buddhist books on how to understand and accept life, rather than change it. I know I am not broken and don't need to be fixed. And neither do you. So, yes, buy the books and think about how to live life better, but remember that you're doing great right now. ■

Help Me! One Woman's Quest To Find Out If Self-Help Really Can Change Her Life by *Marianne Power* is out now

'THE
CRITICAL
VOICE IN
MY HEAD
IS QUIETER
THESE DAYS'

BEST WELL-BEING BOOKS FOR 2019



Mentors: How To Help And Be Helped

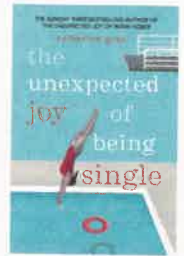
by Russell Brand, out on 24 January

A book about how to work together and help each other - we are not meant to do it on our own.

The Unexpected Joy Of Being Single

by Catherine Gray, out now

How to enjoy being single in a world that's constantly telling us happiness only comes when we're paired up.



Just Eat It: How Intuitive Eating Can Help You Get Your Shit Together Around Food

by Laura Thomas, out on 10 January

A take-down of diet culture that aims to rid us of our anxieties over food.

The Bullet Journal Method

by Ryder Carroll, out now

Converts of the 'bullet' method of organising to-do lists, notes and calendars swear it changes the way they work and think.



Quiet by Fearné Cotton, out now

A gentle, thought-provoking book that explores why none of us feel we are good enough, with tips on how to quieten our inner critic.