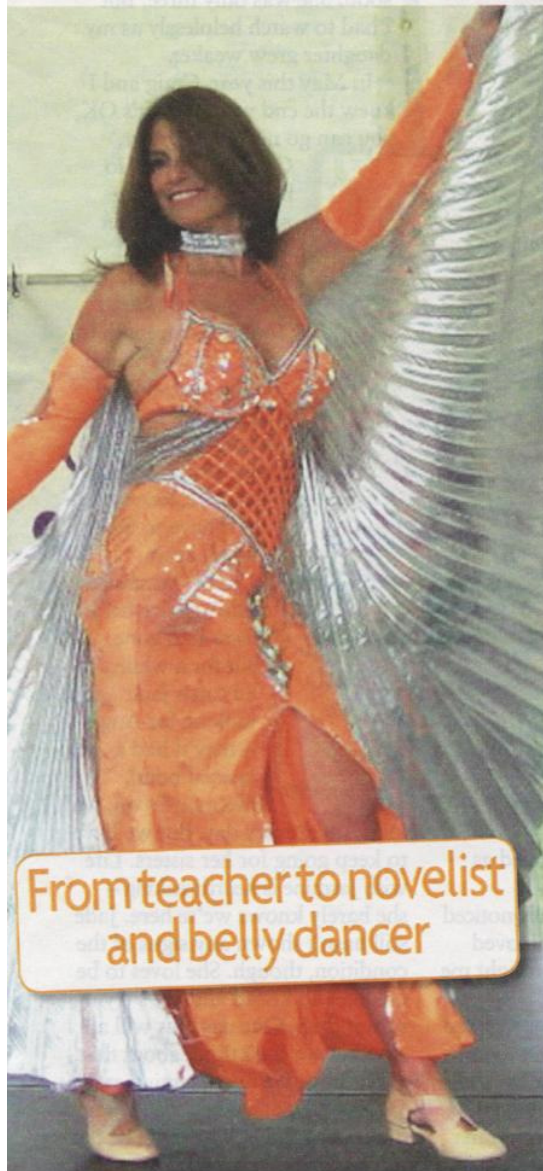


# Our 40-plus MAKEOVERS!

Being in your forties or fifties is the perfect time for a major life-change, according to a new report. Here, three *Woman's Own* readers share their transformations...



From teacher to novelist and belly dancer

## 'I made my dreams come true'

Jae De Wylde, 53, lives in Bourne, Lincolnshire, with her husband, Martin, 63, and has a daughter, Rebecca, 26.



Although I'd always wanted to write a novel, my first marriage ended when I was 29 and, as a single mum to Rowena, five, and Rebecca, two, I needed my job as a teacher to support them.

I was 38 when I married Martin, who'd been a friend for years. When I told him I longed to write, he said, 'You must believe in yourself.' But the older I got, the more distant my dreams became.

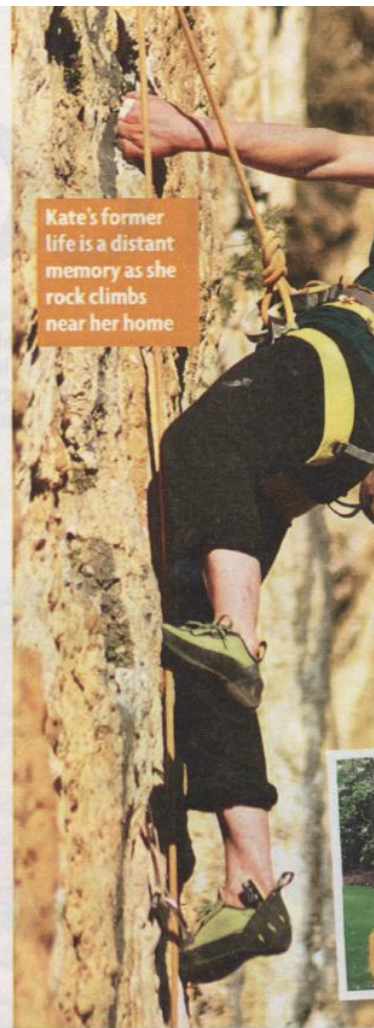
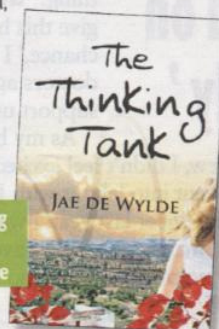
Then, in January 1999, Rowena, then 15, collapsed. We rushed her to hospital, but it was too late. Our lovely daughter had died of sudden adult death syndrome and I was trapped in a living nightmare. I couldn't carry on teaching – in every child's face I saw Rowena, and it broke my heart. I was 43 before I felt ready to work again, this time for a large travel company.

Five years later, Martin got a job in Dubai. It felt good to be in a different country and, keen to make new friends, I went along to a belly-dancing class. I felt free for the first time in years. Within months, I'd become an instructor, and with my newfound confidence, I finally started to write my novel.

When we moved back to the UK in July 2009, I didn't want to give up belly-dancing, so I set up my own classes. I also sent my manuscript to five agents and, last April, was amazed to be offered a book deal. My novel, *The Thinking Tank*, is out now and I'm already writing a sequel.

I barely recognise myself from the woman I was in my thirties. I used to think 'middle age' would be the end of life's adventures, but it's just the beginning. And I'm sure Rowena would be so proud of me.

*The Thinking Tank*, £7.99, Summertime



Kate's former life is a distant memory as she rock climbs near her home

## 'We look forward to every day'

Kate Lejeune, 45, is married to Howard, 48, and has a son, Tobin, four. They live in the village of Rabouillet in south-west France.

Throughout my twenties and thirties, I put my career as an environmental scientist first. My husband, Howard, an engineer, was the same. We worked at least 45 hours a week and were so focused on work, we even put off starting a family until I was 37, in 2003.

I'd always been able to do anything I put my mind to, so I assumed having a baby would be just as easy, but the following year I had two miscarriages. I was devastated and saw a fertility specialist, who told me that, at 39, I could simply be too old. I cried, convinced I would never be a mum.

Miraculously, I conceived again at 40, and this time my pregnancy progressed well. The moment Tobin was born, in April 2007, everything

## 'I fell for a different kind of man'

Margaret Brown, 52, is married to Mike, 51, and mum to Jenna, 20, and Kirsten, 17, from her first marriage. They live in Aberdeen.



**W**hen I was 30, I just drifted into my first marriage to Ali\*. We'd been together for three years and I longed to start a family.

Jenna was born in April 1991, followed by Kirsten three years later. I loved our daughters, but the pressure of juggling motherhood and my work as a training consultant took its toll. Ali was charming and handsome, but he preferred going out in the evenings to helping with bathtime and nappies. And he tried several careers rather than sticking with one long-term job.

I tried hard to make it work, but after seven years and with serious debts, I sat Ali down and told him our marriage couldn't survive. We divorced in 1995.

At 37, I was a struggling single mum. I couldn't imagine meeting anyone new and put all my energy into taking care of my daughters and making my business, MB Consulting Ltd, a success.

Eventually, I started dating again. But many of the men I met didn't treat me with respect, or didn't want the responsibility of children. I became convinced all the decent men had



From single mum to finding Mr Right

been taken and that there was no point in wasting time on charmers who couldn't commit.

Then, in spring 2002, I was having some decking fitted and hired Mike, a joiner, from recommendations. He was tall and attractive, with a lovely smile. He was also softly spoken and kind – not the type of man I usually fell for. But we stayed

friends after he finished the work. Then, in 2004, after a night out with mutual friends, I realised my feelings ran deeper.

The next day, Mike invited me for coffee and told me he felt the same. I texted my sister, Catherine, saying, 'I think I've met The One,' and sent it to Mike by mistake! He replied, 'I hope so. That would make me very happy.'

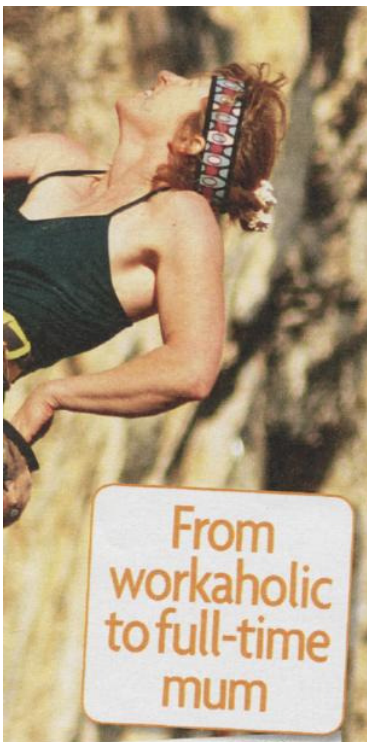
Mike proposed on Valentine's Day 2006, and we married that July, just after my 47th birthday. It was a fairytale wedding and now, five years later, I am happier than ever.

When I was younger, I put too much emphasis on the physical side alone. If I'd met Mike then, perhaps we wouldn't even be a couple. But, now I'm in my fifties, I know what's important. There's a huge attraction between us, and we're best friends, too.

● [www.mbconsultingltd.com](http://www.mbconsultingltd.com)



'Mike got on so well with my girls, I knew he was The One,' says Margaret



From workaholic to full-time mum



else I'd achieved seemed trivial. I quit my job and threw myself into motherhood.

When Tobin was three, Howard's work contract came to an end. We both dreamed about having an adventure, so we decided to move abroad. Neither of us spoke another language, but I knew that, to spend time as a family, we needed to change our lives.

We found Rabouillet, near the Pyrénées in France. With a population of just over 100, it couldn't have been more different to our busy London lives. And it has great rock-climbing nearby – something Howard and I have always loved. So last summer, we sold up and flew out.

We've been here a year now. Tobin is enjoying the local school and already speaks more French than me. So far, we've lived off our savings, but it won't last forever. Money's tighter now. We grow our own fruit and veg and have swapped eating out for nights in.

Howard and I rock climb three times a week, and spend so much time with Tobin. It is a completely different lifestyle, and I look forward to every day. My forties are so much better than my twenties and thirties. I've got enough energy to enjoy my new life, and the confidence that comes with age, too.

As told to Antonia Hoyle. \*Name has been changed