

# Relationships

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## OUT THERE

How to cope with life in the emotional jungle

### Summer thaws the Parisian froideur



AOIFE DREW

*J'AIME Rien: Je Suis Parisien* (I like nothing: I am Parisian) snarls a popular bumper sticker here in the City of Light. Fair play to the Parisians, they can laugh at themselves (sometimes). But is it true? Are the locals as bad as they claim they are?

Parisians have a reputation for being obnoxious, and know it. Often, the behaviour you encounter in the course of daily life is somewhat anti-social: the city-dwellers trap you under their armpits on the Metro, jump queues and never smile. In particular, they like to slag anyone not from Paris. (Just like Dubliners and "boggers", or how Corkonians consider the unfortunate souls living outside the People's Republic of Cork.) And they will happily admit to all of this, in almost a proud way, as the bumper sticker illustrates.

Well, maybe they're not naturally Zen or what you could describe as "nice", but inhabitants will unanimously agree on one thing: they all love Paris, especially in the summer, when the good weather allows full enjoyment of the city. Enjoying simple pleasures such as eating salted caramel ice cream on the Ile de la Cite, sipping a cafe creme in the Cafe del Flore, or driving a scooter along the quays of the Seine as the sun goes down, the Parisian is in his element.

This re-awakened love for the city significantly thaws the notorious Parisian *froidueur*. Recently, I've had random chats with strangers interested in Ireland, been helped with my enormous double buggy on to buses and bantered with uncommonly friendly old ladies about my *bebes*. Maybe I've met some freaks of nature, but I get the feeling that *les Parisiens* are taking a summer break from their snooty image. So *vive l'ete* in Paris. And I won't be buying the bumper sticker. Well, until autumn, anyway.

### In between boob tube and tweed skirt



ELEANOR GOGGIN

I REALLY don't know what to wear anymore. Am I too old for jeans? Do I resemble an ageing country-and-western singer in them? Should I be heading for the polyester/serge pants that move with you and reduce the flab hanging out, with the nice sensible flat brogues or orthopaedic sandals and tights underneath? Should I cover up my *decolletage*? I notice now that when I fold my arms with a low top on, there are wrinkles between my once pert, now pendulous, breasts. It's like a gathering place for them.

I'm not sure about skirts slightly above the knee anymore, either. Something very queer happens to your knees as you get older. You sort of develop another knee, attached to the original. I'm doing away with the blonde look. Too brassy. I'm reverting to a more subtle brown. I'm not sure if it looks any better, but I'm thinking I should be a more toned-down version of myself. It's probably just a phase, and I'll get over it and revert to my old self shortly, but in the interim I'm in a dilemma.

My daughter asked me why I had a stash of nice belts when I don't have a waist anymore. I know she wanted some of them, but there was a nicer way of extracting them from me. At what stage in their lives do people make the conscious decision to buy tweed skirts, cashmere cardigans and "dynamite"-coloured tights? Do they wake up one morning and decide they're going straight into sensible mode? I don't want to do the whole cougar thing and don leopard-print tights and gold stilettos or a chiffon shirt open to my belly button, but I'm somewhere in between the boob tube and the tweed skirt.

And I can't be confident any more that people aren't saying: "Sweet Jesus, what is she wearing?" Maybe I'll just stay indoors for a while.

### Son can't switch off school of thought



ANNE MARIE SCANLON

REMEMBER those millennium clocks that spent years counting down in days, hours, minutes and seconds until the turn of the century? Well, for the past two months I've had my own version running in my head. It started with counting weeks, then days, then hours; recently, I began ticking off minutes, and by the time you read this, every single second that passes will be noted as each one brings me increasingly closer to the blessed day when the young master returns to pre-school.

Now, before you rush to judgement and imagine all the hours, days, weeks and years my small son will have to spend in future therapy sessions to get over the fact that his mother couldn't wait to be rid of him, let me just say the feeling is mutual. Jack loves going to school. I'm not sure which he loves more — the school itself, or his teacher with whom he appears to be besotted.

The first day of the holidays, he spent the morning begging to go to school and repeating his teacher's name over and over until eventually just howling "Kaaaaaaarrrreeeeeeeennnn" like Marlon Brando shouting "Stella!" in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (in fact, he out-Brandoed Brando).

This was torture on so many different levels: I don't like to see my son unhappy; I don't like the fact that he prefers another woman to me (already, in fairness!); I hated that after four hours (longer than he actually spends in school) he was still screaming and there was absolutely nothing I could do to comfort him.

Things improved slightly in the subsequent days, but every night when he goes to bed he looks at me and says hopefully: "I'll go to school in the morning?" Thanks be to God I'll be able to say "yes" very soon.

## BONDINGS

# Keeping the family strong



For Dr Tamas Bakonyi and Orsi Sarkozy, nothing matters more than having as much quality time as possible with their children, they tell Andrea Smith

WHEN Dr Tamas Bakonyi and his wife Orsi Sarkozy first met in Budapest, their desire to spend as much time as possible together at first caused a few complications.

They really tested their other relationships, both in work and everywhere else, they say, because they were so keen to see one another as much as possible. Indeed, as Tamas was working in a hospital's emergency ward, he ended up having to write a sick note on one occasion for Orsi, to prevent her from getting into trouble for an absence from work. Her own GP then spent 10 minutes looking up the particular form of pneumonia that she had been diagnosed with!

Tamas and Orsi — who are now owners of the Salt Cave Climotherapy Clinic in Maynooth — met in 1998, when both were part of a week-long canoeing camp, in which they spent the day canoeing from one place to another. The group would then camp overnight by the river every evening, an endeavour that involved a lot of partying, it seems.

So given that there were a huge number of people on the camp, what attracted Tamas, then 26, to Orsi, then 24, in particular?

"It was non-verbal," he says, enigmatically. "As in you thought she looked attractive?" I surmise? "Yes, as she is now," he replies. "We spent the whole of the second day



SALT OF THE EARTH: Tamas Bakonyi and Orsi Sarkozy's Salt Cave Climotherapy Clinic treats a variety of respiratory disorders. Photo: Tony Gavin

together, but we didn't talk very much."

"I didn't want a serious relationship at the time," Orsi admits. "I thought I didn't need a man in my life, and just wanted to enjoy the holiday."

Clearly she got over that, as Tamas and Orsi moved in together after two months. They were married in 2000, and their eldest daughter Lily was born that year. They now also have another daughter, Esther, 8, and son Adam, 2. Adam is the only one who was born in Ireland, after the family moved over here in 2005.

"We were young getting married and didn't have too much money, but we had support from both of our families," says Tamas. "We started off in a small apartment and then moved to a house as our family got bigger."

While Orsi trained in hospital management, and also worked doing accounts for clients, she was very happy to be a traditional stay-at-home mum. This type of family set-up is important to both of them, they say, as their chil-

dren mean everything to them. Tamas says he likes to spend all of his free time with his children.

The reason they came to Ireland was because Tamas had grown restless living in Budapest, where he had his own GP practice. He wanted to experience life in another country, and as he spoke English, the UK or Ireland were the natural choices.

Ireland won the draw because while at college, Orsi had previously spent a year in London, where she lived with, and worked for, an Irish family. She spent a month in Dublin and Mayo when that family came home for a wedding, and decided that she preferred it to London.

Tamas initially got a job as a locum GP in Letterkenny, and the family lived there for a while. He is now in practice with Dr Mary Boyd in Leixlip, who, he says, has been the most important and helpful person he has met here professionally.

The couple visit their families in Hungary at least twice a year, and on one occasion

there, their daughter Esther developed a cough. Friends recommended that they bring her to a local salt caves clinic, as this is a very regular form of complementary therapy in eastern European countries.

The aim is to recreate the atmosphere of underground

### 'We were young getting married and didn't have much money'

salt caves, known for their therapeutic powers in helping respiratory conditions. Advocates believe that by inhaling the very fine, floating rock salt powder in the air, it helps to heal the respiratory system, and can benefit conditions such as asthma, sinusitis and hay fever.

Although he was initially sceptical, when Tamas saw how the treatment helped his own daughter, he did exten-

sive research into the science behind it. He was so convinced of its benefits that he opened the Salt Cave Climotherapy Clinic in Maynooth last October, which he runs with Orsi. It has attracted great attention, and has been very busy since it opened with people looking for a natural, drug-free treatment facility for their respiratory problems.

On entering the treatment room, one spends an hour reading, listening to soft music and relaxing, while inhaling the invisible salt particles in the specially treated air, which is also germ and allergen-free. Treatments come in a course of sessions, and potential clients are welcome to try out a session free of charge.

Tamas is still practising as a GP, and feels that this combination of the medical and complementary approaches works very well for respiratory illnesses.

The hardest part about living here for the couple is missing their families and friends at home. Orsi's dad Gyula and Tamas' dad Tibor were both diagnosed with cancer within

three months of one another, and died last year, a mere three weeks apart.

"I found that very hard," says Orsi, adding that by the time baby Adam was only one year old, he had flown back and forth to Hungary to visit his grandparents 25 times.

While running the clinic keeps them both very busy, family is a huge priority for Tamas and Orsi. They haven't had a television in 10 years, which they say makes them sit down and talk to one another every evening. Communication is very important to them, and they are both very calm people who don't lose their temper easily — "Although Tamas always thinks that he is right," laughs Orsi.

"Life with Tamas is always going to be very challenging, so we will never get bored with one another. And I feel confident that he will always stand behind his family."

*Salt Cave Climotherapy Clinic, Unit 5 Glenroyal Shopping Centre, Maynooth, Co Kildare. Phone 01-628 9851 or visit www.saltcave.ie*

## SMUG MARRIED

# Summer lovin' gets stronger as years go by

School holidays make relationships purer, finds Aine O'Connor — although she still wants the kids to go to bed...



REMEMBER being in a coffee shop, perhaps 10 years ago, in a queue to grab something with which to go back to work. It was the end of June, there was a group of women sitting at a table and they were toasting their "last day of freedom". The school holidays were about to begin; they'd have the kids home all day.

I was filled with something not entirely pleasant. Disdain, it felt like, but it was more likely some form of jealousy.

I had one not-yet school-going child, so the school holidays meant nothing — I'd still be dropping him, as I always did, to a childminder three days a week and juggling favours and sleep times the other two days.

I kept hearing that being a stay-at-home mother was as hard as being a working one. I'd never had the opportunity to choose and I just didn't buy it. The coffee-shop ladies were complaining about losing their free mornings. What were free mornings?

I was fairly new at this parenting lark and knew only one way — the way it had always been for me: mother to a small boy; working, juggling, stressing. You think it will always be that way. But it isn't.

The small boy started school, a small girl was born, I started working mostly from home, then not really much at all. Things fell apart and came back together. Sometimes what feels like no choice becomes the opportunity you refused to entertain when it was a choice you had to make.

Yet another phase begins. For a time, quite a time, school holidays were hard going, trying to juggle work, a fitness regime and mental

health with two smallish kids, who needed most things doing for them and stayed up half the night. It could be frustrating, this new thing I thought would last forever.

But summers are a year apart, evidently, and a year for kids is gigantic. They get sneakily more self-sufficient, less demanding, less around, though they still never go to bed. So now comes the end of what has been the easiest summer so far. For me, life is simpler when the kids are bigger. Delicious as babies and toddlers are, I prefer it this way. And I'm sad the summer is over.

Although I will be glad of them being in bed before midnight — allowing a few "Beloved and I alone" hours — I'm going to miss the kids. And I'm going to miss how in summer our relationship with them becomes somehow purer.

During the holidays, we are just parents and kids — casual, simple, the odd argument about dishwashers and fighting and not getting out of bed, but no real hassle.

There are slower starts to easier days, no homework to argue over (I hated my own school homework less than I hate the kids'! Those primary school projects? Guess who ends up learning more about Nagasaki?), no errant sports kit, no lost beakers, no endless letters, no damn head-lice warnings. My work fits in so much better — it's just me and my babies so much more of the time.

An absence of stress that knocks on for Beloved, too — there might be no dinner to come home to, but there is no tension either. So I'm going to miss them. But at least now I've worked out everything is just a phase.

## WORKING IT OUT

# Seen and not heard? There are times it should be neither

THESE days, it is the norm for women with children to work. I know the children have fathers as well, but cut me a bit of slack. I can see why these mothers do it. Work is apparently fulfilling (sometimes), allows you to mix with other adults (not that they always behave like adults), provides enough money for the creche (sometimes) and gets you away from the children (always).

The downside of this arrangement is that you and I see more of their children than we want. Face it, hardly any-

Parents need to think before inflicting their little treasures on others, says John Masterson

body has the slightest interest in anyone else's children. Those of us who do not have children have no interest in any of them at all until they are midway through secondary school. The less time we spend in their company, the better. I don't need to see the

photographs either. There was a time when children were welcome in adult company so long as they were seen and not heard. Perhaps that was taking it a bit far, but these days the only role they seem to occupy at social gatherings is centre

stage. So enthralled are their parents by what they have produced that they focus on their every utterance in case ignoring the occasional sound would irreparably damage the child's self-esteem. We are raising children who think that everything they say matters, when in reality most of it doesn't. The carefully over-nourished self-esteem is going to take some battering when they enter the real world. Since Mozart, I cannot think of a child worth giving total attention to. Because both parents work,

they want to spend vast amounts of leisure time with their offspring. This was illustrated to me by a very sensible woman who told me about the plague of uninvited youngsters turning up at anniversaries, weddings and parties these days.

It seems that there is a breed of couple who think it is the norm to travel *en famille* so that if you invite Mum and Dad they take it for granted that their brood can come to. It is not that they are too mean to pay for a babysitter. They genuinely think you won't

mind and that it is no problem to pull up a few extra chairs at the table. And you cannot say a word about it or a friendship will be ruptured for a generation. Now, if you ask me, that is not necessarily a bad thing at all.

It is not as if you can rely on the children having even rudimentary manners. They will be banging away on their Gameboys punctuated by intermittent sibling rows. On occasion, you will hear language that they should not have learned how to use. Or they are so tuned into their

iPod that their only speech level is "shout". And that will probably happen during the speeches, as they are in a world of their own and have no desire to be at the gathering in the first place.

Women who stay at home looking after their children have a much more balanced attitude to their little dears. They know what it's like to see too much of them, and have no hesitation about telling them to "shut up" or "go away" because they aren't racked with guilt for having spent too much time at work.

Truth be told, they have no difficulty dispensing the occasional clip on the ear, and in no doubt that this is not only harmless, but good for them, no matter what the politically correct do-gooders say.

Parents need to wake up in the morning and recite the following mantra: "I think my children are wonderful but it is prudent to assume that nobody else does."

And if you invite Brangelina or Madonna to your wedding it is better to make your intentions very clear.