

Marty Wilson has discovered a whole new way of feeling

How NOT to be SCARED

Twelve years ago, I did my first-ever stand-up comedy gig. It was a cold June Monday night in Sydney and I'd managed to fill my head with gags, the audience with friends and family, and my time waiting to go on with countless trips to the bathroom.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICK CUBBIN



FOLLOW YOUR BUTTERFLIES
I believe the best thing about newfeeling is that it unerringly points to things we could be doing to express more fully who we are meant to be. And the best way to find it is to look around, consider your options, then do the thing that gives you the biggest knots in your stomach. Notice what scares you most, then grab life with both sweaty palms.

Stand-up comedy meant standing up to stage fright – yet another “newfeeling” for author Marty Wilson

I managed to get through my set and the audience loved it. Yet I realised that if I couldn't cope with pre-gig nerves, I was never going to keep this up. Then, on the way to try out for the UK comedy circuit, I saw something in Paris that changed my approach to comedy.

It wasn't an enlightening piece of art in the Louvre. It wasn't the majesty of the Arc de Triomphe. I was in my hotel room and *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* was on the TV. Only it was in French: *L'Empire Contrattaque*.

It was eye-opening (and pretty hilarious) because this very familiar movie felt totally different when all the characters were speaking the Language of Love. C-3PO and R2-D2 seemed like a bickering old married couple. Yoda in French was like a sleazy little munchkin: “Snog you I can, mmmm yes.”

Then the penny dropped. If I was going to change how I felt about my stage nerves, I had to change the words I was using to describe it.

Back in Australia, I mentioned all this to an old mate, John O'Connor, and together we came up with a better word than “scared” or “nervous” to describe the adrenaline burst we all get when out of our comfort zones. For years, this has helped me embrace the changes that come with life. But last year, something happened to make me realise the idea was worth sharing.

I was taking my five-year-old son, Connor, to the orientation day at his new school. We were walking along – I was carrying him on my shoulders – and he seemed happy enough as he cuddled his little body into the back of my head.

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He chatted away, asking the questions that are so important to a five-year-old: “Where do they keep the PlayStation?” “Do they have Foxtel?” “Where do I go to buy a slushy?”

Then we turned the corner and Connor froze in mid-sentence. He'd taken in the imposing school gates and the noisy groups of older children. I felt his little hands grip my hair, and he became very quiet.

He whispered: “Dad, it's all funny in my tummy, and I feel a bit shy.”

I asked if he was afraid. “Nah!” he said, “I'm not scared, I've just got ‘newfeeling.’”

Newfeeling! This word I'd made up years earlier and had talked about with Connor was helping him cope with the biggest day of change in his young life so far. I was over the moon.

No-one loves change. I'm a pharmacist turned copywriter turned stand-up comic turned wine writer turned author and speaker, and I still find change

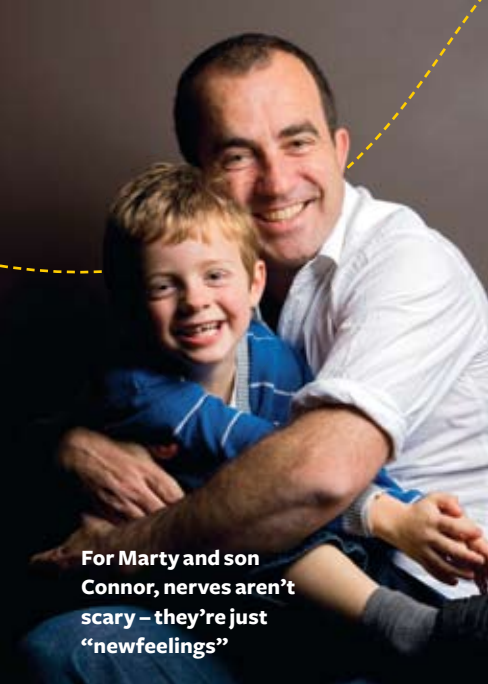
incredibly challenging. If you ever hear anyone brag, “Change scares me not! I am The Change Master,” point at them and chant, “Liar, liar.” But having swapped careers so many times, I've ended up becoming a student of what it takes to change.

It all comes down to two rock-solid, cast-iron facts.

1. Life is change. Get this and you're halfway there. I'm not saying “life is full of change” or “change is such a big part of life”. No. Life is change. The Buddhists call it “Impermanence”. The times they're always a-changing.

When I was young I always thought that life was about amassing enough wealth so you could sit down with your wife and 2.2 kids and everything will be just “swell”. But I learnt fact No. 1 by making the mistake covered in fact No. 2:

2. When you refuse to change, you don't hold onto the past: you lose the future. You can't get a new girlfriend until you stop hanging onto the old girlfriend.



For Marty and son Connor, nerves aren't scary – they're just "newfeelings"

I couldn't throw myself into stand-up until I resigned from my advertising job. Adaptable or stuck? The choice is yours.

We are hard-wired to seek patterns and love certainty. When we're trying something different, the Neanderthal part of our brains – the amygdale – sets off a surge of adrenaline that gives us sweaty palms and a tight feeling in our guts. It's such a shame that the only English words we have for describing this are negative. Some people call it fear or nerves, some call it knots in the stomach. Sadly, for some of us, it's "that thing that stops me learning a language/starting a business/phoning that girl".

That's why I prefer "newfeeling" – it's neutral. In the same way that

walking outside on a hot day makes you feel "hot", when you go out of your comfort zone you get "newfeeling". It's up to you if "hot" and "newfeeling" are good or bad.

To explain the incredible importance of choosing the right word (and make myself sound learned and smug) I'll quote the philosopher Wittgenstein: "The limits of one's language are the limits of one's world." The number of ways you can talk about something determines the number of ways you can think about something, and that determines how you feel about something. So change the word, change the meaning, change the feeling.

"Dad, it's all funny in my tummy, and I feel a bit shy." I asked if he was afraid.

"Nah!" he said, "I'm not scared, I've just got newfeeling"

On his first day of school, Connor told himself he didn't feel "scared" he just had "newfeeling". Because we talk about this at home, he knew this was a normal and natural thing to feel.

Every single time I go on stage I stand at the back of the room and say to myself, "Marty, you don't have knots in your stomach, you have newfeeling." This doesn't make the adrenaline go away, but it reframes it and lets me see it as a normal – not scary – thing.

After 35 years being the class idiot, I kind of like it. ■


Now we challenge you to do that thing you've been avoiding. Tame your butterflies!


NATIONAL
newfeeling
day

September 1, 2009

You've got until the first day of spring to sign up, pay up, or somehow commit to doing that thing you've been putting off for years – then challenge your friends and colleagues to face their own fears (or sponsor you!). All proceeds go to Dymocks Children's Charities. Here are some suggestions to start you thinking:

- * Enrol in a public-speaking course.
- * Do your first skydive or bungee jump.
- * Start that business you've been thinking about.
- * Call that person and ask them on a date.
- * Sign up to quit smoking or lose 5kg.
- * Begin writing that novel you know you have in you.

Register now 

Once you've completed your Newfeeling challenge, we invite you to share your story with us! All registered participants to Newfeeling Day who tell us how they went will be in the running to win a \$20,000 cash prize.

Plus the most inspiring story will win a luxury break for two, staying at the Voyages Ayers Rock Resort at the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, Northern Territory.

Go to www.readersdigest.com.au/newfeeling for details.

