

My New Year's

Most of us make them
with the best intentions,
but by February,
80 per cent have failed.

Emma J Page meets
four women who set
ambitious goals last
January – twelve months
later, how did they fare?

one year on



THE SURFER

Natalie Trice

'I wanted to do something completely out of character'

THE PLASTIC AVOIDER

Sheena Murphy

'Explaining this to our families has been tricky'



resolution...

THE
NEW VEGAN

Phoebe McCarthy

*'I was nervous I'd be
judged by others'*



THE
SELF-ASSURED
FLIRT

Emma Copeland

*'Somewhere along
the line, I'd lost my
confidence'*



Photography
SILVANA TREVALE



MY RESOLUTION... To take up surfing

Natalie Trice, 45, PR consultant and author

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the sea, but I've never been a confident swimmer, so for most of my life I'd barely dunked my head under the water. But in late 2018, during a holiday in Cornwall with my husband Oliver and our sons, Ed, 12, and Lucas, 10, something clicked. The boys were already in the water and I made a snap decision to hire a wetsuit and surfboard. Oliver couldn't believe it. 'Are you really going to do this?' he asked. But I told him that I wanted to do something completely out of character.

I didn't know what I was doing as I waded out into the shallows, but I struggled on to the

board, clinging to it, and felt a rush of freedom. That day I made it my mission to learn to surf in 2019.

Oliver was astonished when I told him. Secretly, even *I* doubted that I'd stick to it, as the most ambitious resolution I'd set myself previously – to drink less coffee – had quickly fallen by the wayside. But this felt different, and it was the result of some difficult preceding years.

Lucas was born with hip dysplasia (where the ball-and-socket joint doesn't properly form), and so I'd temporarily swapped my PR career to become a 'hospital mum', seeing him through the many operations he needed.

In 2016, we moved from the Home Counties to Devon, so the boys could grow up by the sea. It wasn't easy: we knew no one, and leaving my pressurised career – swapping Jimmy Choos and boardrooms for flip-flops and life at home – took some adjustment.

In January last year, I enlisted a surf instructor. He taught me and Ed (who came along too) on the sand at first, showing us how to stand on the board in one smooth motion, known as 'popping up'. But applying those skills in the water turned out to be a lot harder. In those first lessons I'd get vertigo whenever I looked down. Once, the entire RAF surfing team arrived to practise nearby; seeing how competent they were was intimidating, but I told myself to get on with it. And every time I zipped up my wetsuit, I felt as though I was stepping out of who I thought I should be.

After mastering the basics, I took group lessons over the course of the year. It's amazing how quickly your body adapts, and over time I was able to get up on my knees, then my feet. Gliding back to the beach on the board was a brilliant feeling. I fell off countless times, but the more I practised the better I became.

I still can't stand up on the board for long or surf like a pro, but that's not the point. When I'm surfing, I free up vital headspace, as the only thing I can concentrate on is the here and now. I've also enjoyed the thrill of honing a skill and discovering a new kind of body confidence – there's nowhere to hide any lumps and bumps in a wetsuit.

A year on, I still hop in the car with the boys and practise all the time. Ed is fearless, Lucas is gradually taking to the water and Oliver acts as photographer, while minding Dotty, our Jack Russell-springer.

This December, I marked how far I'd come with a family surf trip to Watergate Bay in Cornwall. Freezing doesn't convey quite how cold the water was, but realising how much I'd progressed was incredible. I wouldn't have believed it just a few years ago, but 12 months after setting that resolution, I've discovered that I'm never happier than when I'm in a wetsuit.

natalietrice.co.uk



MY RESOLUTION... To go plastic-free

Sheena Murphy, 38, interior designer

WE WERE ON holiday in the Lake District last January when my husband Paul and I made a joint resolution to become plastic-free. We'd recently returned from living in Brooklyn, where pretty much everyone carried refillable coffee cups (no one would dream of ordering a take-away coffee with a single-use plastic lid), and we were used to being mindful about our plastic consumption.

The first step we took was to replace cling film with beeswax wraps, plastic bottles of hand soap and washing-up liquid with reusable glass dispensers, and our usual cleaning products with sustainable brands such as OceanSaver.

We also tried to reduce the amount of online shopping we did because so much of it arrives in plastic and styrofoam. And instead of doing big supermarket shops as we used to, we signed up to Farmdrop, which provides groceries directly from farms, and comes without unnecessary packaging. By March, we were

right skincare products has been difficult.

Explaining all of this to our families has been tricky, especially when it came to making sure Matilda wasn't given plastic toys for Christmas or her birthday. We've had to find a way to explain our ethos diplomatically, and although it does elicit some gentle ribbing and eye-rolling, with comments about me being a hippy, I don't mind. Ultimately they've been supportive.

There was an awkward moment, however, when a friend we hadn't seen in a while came to visit us in October and brought Matilda a gift that was wrapped in plastic. Matilda promptly told her that we don't allow plastic in our house because it's 'bad for the environment'. Luckily those words coming from a four-year-old meant our friend found it funny, rather than offensive.

These days, I carry a cotton tote bag to the shops and if I'm caught out, I stuff my pockets with whatever I'm buying, instead of resorting to using a plas-

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also visiting our local farmer's market in west London, where we could shop plastic-free.

We had already banned plastic toys for our four-year-old daughter Matilda, but soon we realised the other ways that plastic infiltrated our lives. Takeaways had been a regular treat, but we thought again after noticing that the food was delivered in multiple plastic containers.

Making these changes has been a slow burn and there have been a few slips along the way. I still need to replace some of my face creams and other beauty products with plastic-free options. I feel guilty about this, but finding the

tic bag. Walking down my local high street with bulging pockets and armloads of groceries has proved amusing. On flights, I always ask for water in a glass, rather than a plastic cup, which has earned me some odd looks in economy class. It might sound picky, but my resolution has become so much a part of who I am and has shown me that if you put your mind to it, you can achieve anything.

Sometimes it feels as though the impact we're making is insignificant, but then I remind myself that all the small steps eventually add up.

Sheena is founder of the design studio Nune; nunenune.com

MY RESOLUTION... To become a vegan

Phoebe McCarthy, 31, runs an online vegan shop

WHEN I WAS growing up in Dublin, we kept chickens and geese, and I was always an animal lover. Still, I kept eating meat until, in late 2018, I saw Joaquin Phoenix's documentary *Earthlings*, about our reliance on animals for food, scientific research and more. I found it shocking: my decision to go vegan was literally overnight.

For the first few weeks, I made life easy by buying ready meals. I'd snack on lentil chips and Graze bars, and make banana and spinach smoothies. I felt positive, but I was nervous that I'd be judged by others.

My dad had worked as a meat trader for years and Sunday roasts were, and still are, the order of the day in my family, but he was fine with my decision. Mum initially panicked about what she'd cook me, but she bought the recipe book *There's a Vegan in the House*. Having their support was important to me.

As the weeks went on, there were times when I tried to emulate my usual dinners, such as shepherd's pie and spaghetti

contained milk – like my favourite crisps, pickled-onion Monster Munch. I was gutted! But I don't feel guilty if I make a mistake. I just try to be kind to myself and do my best. Now, a year on, I'm much more aware, so it's easier.

I miss dairy the most, especially cheese, but there are some great vegan substitutes available. While I didn't want to impose my views on others, the whole family has reduced their meat consumption, too. I share a flat with my husband James, my sister Moe and her boyfriend Jack, and when I'm cooking for all of us, meals are plant-based. We love to try new vegan restaurants and cook together. James is into fitness and says that a largely vegan diet has helped his energy levels.

A few months into my resolution, I started thinking about ethical and environmental issues and how far to take this new ethos. Should I replace my leather shoes and jackets? What about flying? But I've decided to be sensible. If I book a flight, I offset my carbon footprint via

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bolognese, using meat substitutes, and I relied heavily on vegan pizzas and burgers. But I love cooking and as my confidence in vegan options grew, I stopped trying to find meat replacements and became more adventurous, whipping up vegan tacos, summer rolls, chocolate-chip cookies and banana bread.

Inevitably, there were slip-ups. Falafels I'd eaten turned out to contain egg, and once, during a family skiing holiday in Austria, I succumbed to a plate of cheesy pasta as there were no alternatives on the menu. Sometimes I'd munch on a snack and halfway through find out that it

online tools such as carbonfootprint.com. When my make-up runs out I replace it with ethical options that don't contain animal-derived ingredients, and when I need new clothes, I buy from ethical brands. I also started a business that offers vegan-friendly fashion and food products.

These days I'm calmer, and I think that's because my lifestyle is now more in line with my principles. I didn't expect that my resolution would lead to me starting a business or making such substantial life changes, but one year on, I'm fully committed. *Phoebe is co-founder of carmaldn.com*



Make-up: Rose Angus at S Management. Hair: Nandi Kai at S Management. Jumpsuit: £325, Pesticide (gunggholondon.com)

How to stick to your resolution

By Geeta Sidhu-Robb, life coach and founder of Nosh Detox

1 MAKE A PLAN
Ask yourself these questions before you commit to a resolution: 'Why do I want to make the change?' 'Is success concrete and measurable?' 'What are my first five steps?'

2 IDENTIFY A NETWORK OF CHEERLEADERS
Work out who can support you through the tough times – and who will be there to help you celebrate your victories.

3 BE REALISTIC
Remember that this will be a challenge, not least because it takes an average of 66 days to change or fully form a new, sustainable habit.

4 HANG ON IN THERE FOR THE FIRST MONTH
Try to stick to your resolution for longer than a month. As time passes, you will find it easier.

5 LEARN TO SAY NO
Whatever your resolution, practise self-care and try to stop running around after others. This will free up the time to action your resolution.



MY RESOLUTION... To learn how to flirt

Emma Copeland, 37, works in PR

THE START OF 2019 was a turning point for me. In January, I split up from my partner of 17 years and moved away with my son. I'd been a stay-at-home mum for five years and somewhere along the line, I'd lost my confidence. Though I found a job soon after the break-up, the euphoria of it quickly faded and a few weeks later, on my 37th birthday, I made a pledge: to learn how to flirt by the end of the year.

It wasn't so much to find a partner as to gain confidence. I can come across as sure of myself, but often I feel shy, and I'm told I can seem unapproachable. The truth is that if I spotted a handsome man, I'd look away because I felt uncomfortable showing interest.

After making my pledge, I read *Dating Again*, a book about embracing who you are before hitting the dating scene. I real-

ised that my lack of confidence stemmed from the fact I rarely focused on my positive qualities. It encouraged me to list what I like about myself: I'm reasonably attractive, intelligent and well dressed, with an interesting personality.

A few weeks into my challenge, I decided to make small but subtle changes. I walked taller, didn't avoid anyone's gaze and generally tried to project a friendly demeanour. I didn't chat anyone up, I was simply more open in my body language. I began to realise that flirting isn't about sex, but being more aware of your attractiveness.

By the summer, I began to see every encounter as an opportunity to strike up a conversation or meet somebody new, whether that meant saying hello to the dry cleaner or asking the manager of

my local café how he was. I had no end goal, other than learning to be confident and chatty.

Recently, I went to a friend's baby shower at a restaurant and there were three men sitting at the bar. Instead of walking past with my head down, I adopted a little swagger and made eye contact. My tactic was to be funny and sexy at the same time, because they complement each other. Later, we got chatting and I ended up going out with one of them. He didn't turn out to be my type, but we had fun.

Learning to flirt has given me more confidence in the workplace too – I am less shy in client meetings and other work situations. It'd be nice to meet a new partner, but my resolution wasn't about that. I feel like I've recovered a sense of self, along with my ambition. ▀