



A new initiative aimed at highlighting all the good things in one's life had self-confessed cynic Emma Sloley counting her blessings

THESE days the world can be divided into two types of people: those who post inspirational quotes and motivational sayings as their Facebook status and Twitter feeds; and those who, on seeing such things, immediately hit the "delete friend" button.

I fall squarely into the second camp. It's genetic: the lingua franca of my family is sarcasm, and my three sisters and I learned how to engage in witty banter, hurl ironic barbs and raise sardonically amused eyebrows before we learned to conjugate verbs.

So when my editor asked if I'd

actually counting one's blessings, stopping to smell the roses, being thankful for the little things...that seemed the province of other, more congenitally cheerful people.

Of course I'm grateful for my health, but only in the most peripheral way: health is one of those things you only really notice when it's not there. There have been a couple of wake-up calls, like when my older sister was diagnosed with breast cancer and when my husband had a malignant melanoma removed.

Still, there was something about being forced to feel grateful that seemed a little, well, *forced*.

Dutifully, however, I signed up for my daily newsletter at www.gratefulinapril.com and waited. My first instruction was to begin a "book of gratitude" listing at least 100 things I'm grateful for. It was easy...at first. I quickly covered the obvious ones – my husband,

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report on a new global campaign called Grateful in April, aimed at "getting people focused on feeling good about what they've already got in their lives", I was, to put it mildly, sceptical.

I realised that, over the years, my husband Adam and I had slipped into a routine of what a friend of ours calls "leisure nagging", a social activity consisting of sitting around and casually complaining...never mind that we have very little of genuine consequence to complain about.

The very act of complaining had come to feel comforting, like slipping on a favourite jumper. The idea of

my family and friends, the endless opportunities and privileges I've been afforded throughout my life (a great education, the opportunity to live in New York and travel for work) – but it got a little trickier once I got closer to 50. I added to it over the following days and by the time I was in the 70s, the entries were getting pretty random: "good cheese", "nice handbags" and "huskies". Hey, it's the little things...

The tips continued. "Learn from others", "link to happy memories", "spring into cleaning". I'm a voracious reader and absorber of information (kind of a prerequisite for being ►

GRATEFUL IN APRIL – YOU KNOW YOU WANT TO!

GRATEFUL in April was founded by Melbourne-based motivational speaker Melina Schamroth after she realised many of us often overlook the good things in life.

"After a period of time where I was surrounded by a lot of negative experiences, I wanted to see what would happen if I focused on being positive and fostered an attitude of gratitude – I started Grateful in April and many amazing things started coming my way," she enthuses.

"But the most rewarding thing was that so many people reported they had life-changing experiences. We got great feedback from all over the world."

Well, what are you waiting for? Sign up at www.gratefulinapril.com to feel the love for yourself.

Do you have a
GRATITUDE PROBLEM?

a writer), my home is full of lovely art my husband and I have amassed over the years, and I'm something of a clean freak, so I didn't have any trouble fulfilling any of those instructions.

Others were more challenging. "Start acting". No, this was not a green light to join an amateur theatre group, thank god. Instead, it offered encouragement to act on areas of your life you've considered changing: a dream, an unfulfilled passion, a business idea. For a lifelong procrastinator, the urge to put this off until later was formidable, but in the interests of the experiment, I put a couple into action.

I've been vowing to learn another language for years and given we now own a farmhouse in Mexico – yep, another reason to be grateful – Spanish seemed the obvious one. Using the few words and phrases I'd

to do something worked wonders. I managed to finish the prologue I'd been labouring over for months, and a fresh new direction that had previously proved elusive emerged.

When I told Adam that evening he too was rapt, insisting we celebrate. Enthusiasm definitely is catchy.

Each day a new tip appeared in the inbox: learn to forgive yourself, avoid tall-poppy syndrome, carry a talisman to remind you of something happy. While at the beginning I'd snigger at the earnestness of the entreaties, after a while something changed.

I began to leisure nag a lot less, which left me with a lot more time to actually get things done. I also started performing small-scale kindnesses, like recommending an acquaintance for a job that I could have chased myself (she was so grateful she sent flowers). And resolving to put in a regular call to a friend who was going through a difficult time – she was so happy to hear from me she cried and I even let her vent for ages.

Not only did these things make me feel good, it felt like in paying forward the gratitude, others might be inspired to follow suit.

The final proof that I was actually becoming a converted cynic came when I received my final tip: "Create miles of smiles". Uh-oh. Yep, I had to give a complete stranger a big hearty smile. Apparently there's research that shows your serotonin levels rise when you do something good for someone else. And not only that, the recipient gets a burst of happy hormones too.

Biting the bullet, I walked into my favourite coffee shop and, without stopping to think, I blurted out to the hard-nosed New York barista lady who normally serves me, "You look so pretty today!" and gave her a big cheesy grin.

At first she was completely taken aback. Sheepishly I grabbed my coffee. But then her face transformed. She touched a hand to her hair and beamed at me, a big genuine smile of pure gratitude and delight. "Thank you so much," she said. "That's the nicest thing anyone has said to me for ages." ■

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picked up on our travels, I decided to try my luck with the South American superintendent of our apartment building. "Hola! Como estas?", I started confidently when meeting him on the stairs. Normally I look in the other direction when I spot him, so the exchange left him a little shocked at first, but then he burst into a big grin and a torrent of enthusiastic Spanish – none of which I could comprehend. But I returned the warm smile and, I have to admit, the connection not only lifted my spirits, it also propelled me finally to sign up for those classes.

Emboldened, I decided to attack another thing I'd long been putting off: that unfinished novel I'd been studiously neglecting. Amazingly, the simple act of being instructed

WORD ON THE TWEET

We asked you what you're grateful for



DRIED STRAWBERRIES FROM THE FARMERS MARKET, FRESHLY SQUEEZED JUICE, GOOD COFFEE & SUNLIGHT.
@MELRUDKIEWICZ

THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF MY FIANCEE, A CUP OF IRISH BREAKFAST TEA, ST TROPEZ NATURALS FAKE TAN + MY GHD.
@SHESSONIC

MY COSY HOUSE PANTS AND BOYFRIEND'S THREADBARE T-SHIRT TO SETTLE INTO ONCE STILETTOS AND OFFICE GARB DISCARDED.
@NATBANNISTER1

ANIMALS, LIFE, SHOES AND OF COURSE SEX!
@TSKYEROBERTS

MY BESTIE WHO HAS HELPED ME DEAL WITH MY DEPRESSION SINCE I WAS DIAGNOSED, HE'S A BEAUTIFUL MAN.
@KAZY_BABIE

HEALTH, HEELS, HUSBAND.
@CLOTCLO

COFFEE AND FAMILY... YES AT THE SAME TIME.
@FOODIECRAVINGS

MY MUM, SHE HAS GONE WITHOUT SO MUCH TO MAKE SURE I HAVE THE BEST I CAN & I KNOW SHE IS ALWAYS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY.
@JAIME20LEE