



On the couch with (from left): Lorraine Flaherty, Karen Salem, Lizzie McGowan, Pippa Wilcox and Nichola Lenehan

'Therapy is like a class in yourself'

You know the intimate details of your friends' marriages and sex lives, but would they mention it if they'd had counselling? Five women tell Mary Braid how therapy transformed their lives **Photographs Sarah Dunn**



'My claustrophobia was just the tip of the iceberg'

I was actually going into the first pyramid, I thought "Oh, my God", but I remembered the rehearsal and told myself that I could do it – and I did.

That was just the tip of the iceberg. I was a make-up artist and wanted a career change, so I decided to practice hypnotherapy myself, but when I found out the courses took place at weekends, I was put off. The truth was, a weekend course would have interfered with my drinking. Until then, I'd convinced myself I didn't have a drink problem, but turning down a chance to learn more about something that had such an effect on my life made something click in my head.

I went back to Ursula, who said that hypnosis takes what you already know and makes it acceptable. She helped me acknowledge that drinking

was stopping me changing my life. She got me to question my conviction that I couldn't enjoy myself without booze. I'd been seeing a guy for 12 years and we went to the pub every night; to me, that was normal. Ursula and I talked about the damage drink was doing to my health and we discussed how I might change. Then, under hypnosis, she asked me to imagine going to a club, just drinking water, but still having a great time. She suggested

'Hypnosis switched off my angst button'

LORRAINE FLAHERTY, 40, is a holistic therapist and lives in London.

I didn't confront my claustrophobia for a long time – I couldn't even watch a programme on potholing on the TV. Then, a few years ago, I got the chance to visit Egypt. It was the trip of a lifetime, but involved going inside pyramids, and the thought of those narrow entry tunnels wiped me out. Not long after, someone told me about the hypnotherapist, Ursula James. In my first session with her, we discussed my problem and then she put me into a trance-like state. There were no swinging crystals – Ursula hypnotised me simply by talking.

For half an hour, I felt as if I was in a deep daydream. I was aware of Ursula's voice, but my body was incredibly relaxed. At this point, the hypnotherapist can make suggestions that your conscious mind would normally reject. Ursula asked me to imagine a pyramid tunnel.

Ordinarily, this would have induced a panic attack, but I was able to calmly imagine the tunnel and talk about how I would go through it. This rehearsal under hypnosis somehow switched off my angst button and gave me control. After a few sessions, I said yes to Egypt. When

that I might stop drinking for two years, which was smart because, at the time, I couldn't have coped with forever.

Hypnotherapy put positive thoughts into my head about what I could achieve without drink.

I did stay off alcohol for two years and all I've had since is the occasional glass of champagne at a wedding. I'm into health and fitness now and drink is no longer part of who I am. I lost some friends along the way – those that weren't comfortable with the non-drinking me – and I now have a boyfriend who doesn't drink. It's the best relationship I've ever had. Career-wise, I've also never been happier. Since hypnosis, I've really started to live.' *Ursula James can be contacted at ursulajames.co.uk*