

# Is being on your own really such a bad thing?

When **KELLY ROSE BRADFORD** decided to spend a little time by herself she could not believe the amount of attention that she attracted

**M**ARLENE Dietrich famously wanted to be alone and if I'm honest for a long time I never understood why. I didn't see how people could be content with their own company. Solitariness made me anxious, bored and in a continual state of waiting for something to happen. Then I had an epiphany. My 15-year relationship ended and I was forced from the confines of couplehood into singlehood. Instead of being seized by it I decided to embrace it. At the age of 37 I was starting to feel a bit abandoned. Life had become predictable. I was constantly at other people's beck and call and never had time to myself to take stock or simply do nothing.

As a mum, a daughter and a friend, not to mention having a busy working life, my days were filled with people whether I wanted them there or not. So when my ex announced he was taking our son on holiday for 10 days I decided to enjoy my own company.

Usually I would have filled such a break with brunch and lunch dates with girlfriends, evening drinks, theatre trips or dinners at other people's houses. Instead I cleared my diary. I made no plans to do anything other than please myself.

I started by sleeping in each morning and not feeling guilty. I took long, leisurely, mid-morning baths. I ate what I wanted when I wanted. If I craved a packet of Jaffa Cakes for lunch I had them. I engaged in solitary pursuits such as reading, sewing and drawing. I sat in my garden and stared at the sky.

However once I started venturing out on my leisure-time things became more tricky. At home there was no one to interfere but when I went out to pubs or cafes I discovered a female enjoying her own company attracted attention.

One morning I took a book to my local coffee shop and sat sipping a latte and reading. It was blissful. Until someone sat down next to me and tried to engage me in conversation. "On your own?" the man asked with pity in his eyes.

"Just enjoying the peace and quiet," I replied, my gaze not leaving my book. He didn't take the hint. For the duration of his



TURNING A PAGE: Kelly found that she enjoyed having time to herself

large exproction he tried to make conversation. "Nice chatting," he said broadly as he left. I gave him a tight smile.

Later in the week I tipped the ante and went to the pub on my own. While I usually have no problem sitting in a bar waiting for friends I've not spent an entire evening in one alone.

Armed with my trusty book I pitched up at my local. Ordering a bottle of wine I was asked how many glasses I needed. My reply of only one raised eyebrows.

I spent the evening in a cosy corner enjoying my wine and my book but not the frequent comments from the bar staff bustling around. "Been stood up?" one joked while another

problem with me wanting to spend some time by myself?

I decided to seek a professional opinion. Perhaps I was sending out desperate or lonely vibes when dining or drinking alone?

Was it my age? Should 30-something women be at home with their children and husband, not knocking back merlot?

Was it the fact I was reading and not engaging with people? Was I sending out signals that there was a problem or are we just such a caring society we want to reach out to the lonely?

I somehow doubted the latter. Eve Meneses Cunningham, a life and confidence coach at Apple Coaching, offered me

reassurance. "It sounds as if you were sending out 'content in own skin' rather than desperate or lonely vibes," she said. "Perhaps the people who were intrusive were envious. So many people fear solitude and fill every spare moment with distractions."

I asked if she thought every solo outing in places usually associated with couples or groups would end in stares or constant interruptions.

"No," she said, "although I'm wondering if you could have been a little bit more assertive when people were intrusive. It can be tricky to get the balance right. You could experiment with how you respond to people but don't give up on your alone time."

"Enjoy it and make more time for you. When you fill your own well as they say, everyone else in your life benefits too."

I agree. When my son returned I felt refreshed and recharged. I felt as if I'd had a break. In truth I suppose I had a break from the demands and expectations of others. It's something I intend to do regularly from now on.

'Perhaps I was sending out desperate vibes?'

chortled. "Oh dear, Billy No Mate!" Other customers looked at the with a mixture of curiosity and sympathy.

I wandered home, annoyed by the comments and stars but generally content and nicely relaxed when my wine. That changed when I checked my e-mails. A message from a friend read: "Dave says he thought he saw you on your own in the pub tonight, are you OK? Want to come for dinner or something?"

I shook my head at the screen and typed, "I'm fine thanks, just enjoying a bit of 'me' time."

What was wrong with people? Why was the fact I'd gone to the pub on my own of such concern? Why did other people have such