

Their saving grace

Rebuilding your life after public humiliation and disgrace can be painful. Celia Dodd talks to three celebrities who found a path to redemption

THE SPIN DOCTOR ▶ Derek Draper, 40, former New Labour lobbyist

Draper quit the political scene in disgrace after the "Lobbygate" scandal in 1998, following comments that clients "stuffed his bank account" with up to £250 an hour to reap the benefit of his access to government figures. After a breakdown, he studied clinical psychology in California and now has his own psychotherapy practice in London. He is married to the GMTV presenter Kate Garraway (right); they have a two-year-old daughter, Darcey.



Derek Draper and his wife Kate Garraway

"Easter has a particular resonance for me. It has a symbolic sense of renewal; the notion that you can go through a bad time but then things get better and you can start again. When we used to follow the liturgical calendar, people were steeped in the idea of resurrection because they lived it every Easter, but that has largely been lost in secular society. In fact, I don't think it matters whether the idea is handed down from God, or people have created it to answer deep-seated human needs. It speaks to that sense of people wanting to believe that even when things are bad they can get better.

Now that I've got a toddler I'll be lucky to go to church more than once over Easter, although we go regularly as a family. But when I was training to be a psychotherapist in California I went to all the Easter services, from Palm Sunday to the midnight vigil on Holy Saturday and the celebration of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. I found that progression very moving. Going to all the services over the Easter weekend is an incredible way of going on an emotional retreat, and you don't have to go to bloody Lindisfarne!

In principle, the idea of giving something up for Lent is neat, but this Ash Wednesday I

couldn't think of anything really bad that I do. I am overweight and I should eat better, but I thought it was a bit trivialising to make Lent an excuse to go on a diet.

Initially, going to church was part of trying to get better. The therapist I saw was unusual in believing that unless you had some sort of spirituality in your life you wouldn't have good emotional and mental health. I went through the standard hackneyed trajectory that the old Derek Draper would probably have sneered at, starting with reiki and yoga, and I experienced certain moments of spirituality in yoga poses.

Finding solace in yoga and prayer

Then I started to read about Buddhism, and I was impressed by an interview with the Dalai Lama, in which he said that he didn't have time for those who seek solace in Eastern religion

who haven't first tried the religions of their own culture. So I went to my local church where the vicar gave a brilliant sermon about fear in life which was very relevant to me but too convoluted to explain. And I found that praying was similar to how I felt when I did yoga.

One of the reasons I like Christianity is that it embraces paradox: Jesus died and he didn't die; he is a man and God. One terrible human paradox is that people often desperately want to change but until they reach rock bottom, as I did, it's almost impossible. People often think this terrible thing — Lobbygate — happened and then I got depressed. That's not true. I first got depressed and started taking antidepressants, about two years before, when I was at the height of my success. I refused to let Lobbygate matter to me. In fact, I felt great that I could decide what to do with my life; I hated the lobbying job.

"But within about three months I got depressed again and this time the antidepressants didn't work. It sank in that it wasn't just that I didn't know what to do, but that I had no idea who I was, apart from this political mover and shaker who no longer wanted to move or shake, or would have been allowed to if he had.

So, suddenly, I crashed; I ceased to function. I was almost too depressed to think of suicide. I just thought there was no point in living, that my life was over. A friend suggested I try therapy, and I agreed and was urgently referred to the Priory where I spent three weeks as an in-patient, followed by two months as a day patient. That's when I started to get better.

After a while I set up an ad agency with a friend, but after a year I didn't find it fulfilling, so I started volunteering at a homeless hostel in Soho in my spare time. I also trained with the Samaritans. It got to the point where I would rather be in the hostel wiping up sick and dealing with 15-year-old alcoholics than going into the office.

The shadow that hung over me was less that I didn't know what to do with my life, but was I ever going to get over this depression? In the end, all my thoughts about finding something worthwhile and completely different to do came together. I was sitting in a restaurant with a friend when the idea of training to be a therapist suddenly came to me. It was over a year before I finally went ahead.

I didn't want to turn up at therapy school and have people go, 'that's that New Labour wanker'. So I decided to go abroad and California is a great place to train. I'm glad I met Kate so soon after I got back; since then my life has centred around her and our daughter Darcey.

Part and parcel of being politically obsessed was that I didn't nurture friendships; I was a now-you-see-me-now-you-don't friend. If I got a better offer, I'd be off. That self-centredness came out in relationships as well, and I often wasn't faithful. Now, rather than trying to do a little bit of everything, I want to be more committed to just a few focused interests and, above all else, to friendships and to psychotherapy.

I care more about what people think and, if people criticise me I'm a bit more hurt by it. I haven't felt depressed, or taken antidepressants, for years. And if I can recover from depression, anyone can. But it did take time and a huge amount of work."

For details of Derek Draper's psychotherapy practice, go to www.diy-therapy.com



◀ THE OLYMPIC ATHLETE Christine Ohuruogu, 23 400m champion

Eighteen months ago Ohuruogu, 23, was banned from competing for a year after missing three drugs tests. She was branded a drugs cheat, although the appeal court conceded that there was "no suggestion that she is guilty of taking drugs" and concluded that she was "a busy young athlete being forgetful". Her automatic lifetime ban on competing in the Olympics was lifted last November, within months of her winning gold at the World Athletics Championships in Osaka.

"The story is always going to be there; I can't run away from it. That's not the way I want it, but, if I'm realistic, that's how it's going to be. The day the ban came out I was very upset; I didn't expect it and it hit me really hard. At first I was tempted to give up athletics, but I think that was just anger. I soon realised I would only be punishing myself.

My coaches came to see me and they both said, 'it's up to you: you can sit around and cry, or you can turn this around'. They have always given me a lot of moral and spiritual guidance, so I took that on board. From then on it was about trying to stay positive; that was the whole lesson for me. I didn't want to focus on the bad because that would have dragged me down.

A lot of the criticism was hurtful: you're

▶ THE POLITICIAN Mark Oaten, 43, former Lib Dem home affairs spokesman

Oaten had a brilliant political career until, two years ago, a Sunday newspaper revealed he had visited a rent boy. He resigned from his post but remains a backbench MP until the next election. He lives with his wife Belinda (right) and two daughters in his Winchester constituency.

"Not a day goes by when I don't think about what I did and the consequences it has had. When the story broke my world completely collapsed, all the foundations behind my day-to-day life were thrown up in the air and I faced the real prospect that I might lose my family. It felt overwhelming. It completely knocked my confidence and shattered my self-esteem; it shattered everything. Yet with hindsight I realised that my whole world was falling in two years earlier, when I'd seen the rent boy.

Something like this jolts you into looking at everything from a different perspective and I was forced to re-evaluate everything about myself. Whether they are close to you or not people are all looking at you in a totally different way and you are very conscious of what people are thinking. In the first few weeks, when strangers would stare and point, I wanted to go up to them and try to explain and justify things. I was so scared that people would shout at me or say rude things. But to this day I've had only two people say anything nasty.

I never once felt like blaming the *News of the World* for breaking the story because it was my mistake. I think you have to be very frank with yourself and with other people and admit that you've done something wrong.

A lot of religious people contacted me and sent pamphlets and books; I received several copies of the book that Jonathan Aitken wrote in prison about his renewed faith. But I am not religious, and in the first few weeks I had to rely on sleeping tablets and Prozac to help me get through. Going to Relate also helped. Belinda and I are still having marriage guidance, and I am still having counselling. It helps; amazingly so. At its most basic level you allow yourself time every week just to think about things. And at a much stronger level it goes into things that happened in childhood. While it's still not easy, Belinda and I are very happy. Because of our difficulties people become more open: we've had letters from people confessing to having had similar experiences to me.

I don't feel my career on the front bench is a

trying to explain the story but people keep throwing stuff back at you. If you keep trying to regain people's trust and approval, you are always going to be searching. You've got to learn to be happy with yourself. I'm hoping that with hard work all the positive things will come out without me having to scream from the rooftops.

It was hard for me to admit that I was at fault. But now I can see that maybe I was disorganised, leaving too many things to chance. So I had to change my mindset. But the only people I really felt I should apologise to were my family. I felt sorry for having dragged them into all this. It was hard to watch everyone else sad and upset and helpless, all because of me.

I had people praying for me every day. I was brought up in a Christian household and my religion is definitely what pulled me through. I believe that things happen for a reason, including the ban, and it's up to you to keep going and things will turn around if that's what you truly believe. The support of my church and my family and friends was very uplifting. Everyone had something positive to say, although sometimes you don't want to hear that things are all right if they're clearly not all right.

You have to learn to keep moving on. What kept me going was knowing that things were moving forward. I know it wasn't the best circumstance, but in a strange way things were getting better for me in that year. I was training great; I was probably the fittest I'd ever been. There's always something you can pull out, no matter how bad things are."



tremendous loss: I was clearly finding the treadmill of frontline politics tough. But I do have to regain trust and that is a hard process. You sometimes feel frustrated because you've still got the qualities you had before. Bit by bit you regain your confidence and start to feel valued again. Then you get a knock back, but generally you're always taking steps forward.

"In a strange way, you come out stronger"

Going back to the Commons within two weeks of the scandal was scary and I was pretty shaky. It was just like starting all over again. But you suddenly realise that although you assumed the world out there was going to totally collapse, actually the world is supportive of you.

It sounds corny, but I'm beginning to believe that in a strange way you come out stronger personally. I've changed so many aspects of my life. I see my daughters much more, I take tennis lessons, I've signed up to the gym, I watch Watford play. I've realised how important it is to make time for friends, whereas before I was becoming a solo operator. In my MP surgeries I spend more time trying to understand what my constituents are going through.

But I don't think I will ever forgive myself totally. I'm learning to understand it through the counselling and to come to terms with it all. But I think it will always be with me. Even when I'm 80, if someone Googles my name the scandal will be still be there, as it is with Profumo — the name means nothing else."