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The healing powers of Hollywood

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Most of us watch films purely for entertainment but, according to psychotherapist and counsellor Bernie Wooder, they can provide an effective resource to help us process problems.

Fifteen years ago, he was helping a client describe how she felt about a family member who had deceived her. 'But it was too painful, she couldn't put words to it.'

Finally, Bernie – a film buff since childhood – suggested that the situation resembled a scene in *On the Waterfront*. 'It was the moment when Terry Malloy realises his brother has sold him out for money. She jumped out of the chair and said, "That's it! It was the betrayal."'

That moment was a breakthrough not only for his client but also for Bernie, who has since pioneered the use of 'movie therapy' as a cathartic adjunct to the therapeutic process (see themovietherapist.com).

'We build up so many defences that we often don't know how we feel – the unfinished business hidden in our subconscious. When I ask a client how a character feels, they will tell me details they can't reveal about themselves.

Seeing something you identify with in a film goes right to the heart in a way nothing else does.'

Once that happens, clients may be able to reveal their deepest truths. Bernie can then, over time, help them to identify unconscious patterns, underlying problems, and move on.

Among the cases he outlines in his book *Movie Therapy: How it Changes Lives*, several films recur often, including *The Sound of Music*, *Shirley Valentine*, *The Remains of the Day*, *Life is Beautiful* and *Shadowlands*: 'We need to





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know we are not alone,' says the writer CS Lewis, played by Anthony Hopkins.

But, like many of us, he fears getting too close to the woman he loves because of the possibility of rejection. Watching his journey enabled Coral to understand her own 'stiff upper lip' behaviour: 'Since watching the film, I've tried to make a point of telling people I'm close to how much they mean to me.'

Bernie himself is not a fan of The Sound of Music – 'but what Tasha [a profoundly disturbed client who'd been mentally abused by her mother] told me was truly moving'. The closeness of the seven siblings and the firm but unconditional love they receive from Maria (the young nun who looks after them), helped Tasha escape into a world of happiness and love that she longed for. It helped her to accept the reality of her 'rotten abusive childhood, with no love' – a realisation that would, she hoped, allow her to let go of the anger.

Also, having the DVD and remote control to hand gave her power: 'I can decide when I want to see it. And it's always there – it won't let me down.'

Stories have been part of human life since we developed language, points out Bernie. Now films have taken storytelling to a new level. 'Freud said that images are the language of the unconscious. Seeing emotions played out on the screen is a more powerful experience for many clients than talking about an abstract idea. It gives people a resource that endures. Movie therapy can help people change enormously and get to who they really are,' says Bernie.

And it's accessible to all of us.

* To order a copy of *Movie Therapy: How it Changes Lives* by Bernie Wooder (Rideau Lakes Publishing) for £10, post-free, contact the YOU Bookshop on 0845 155 0711, you-bookshop.co.uk.

Treats fit for little angels

New mums will be charmed by Angelique, a natural range of skincare, candles and organic cotton products. It's enchantingly packaged and smells heavenly: my tester hung the little Rose and Rose Geranium soaps, £9.79 for three, in the nursery 'to alleviate nasty smells'. We all loved the organic cotton velour My-Booties, £18. And Emily, one, enjoyed being gently rubbed with the Massage Balm, £18, which contains olive oil jelly and shea butter. For more information on the range and instructions on baby massage, go to angelique.co.uk

WELL BREAD

My wheat-intolerant tester is lyrical about Genius, a gluten- and dairy-free loaf, developed by chef Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne, mother of two children with food allergies. 'It's delicious! The best I've tasted; and the cheapest.' Genius Bread, available in white and brown, £1.99 for 400g, from Tesco nationwide. horough clean, inside and out. I swear my gums are already feeling firmer.'



kidneyresearchuk.org

This relaunched site gives information and support to the three million chronic kidney disease patients in the UK. It includes fact sheets and case studies, plus how to apply for Kidney Patient Support Grants.

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