

# SECOND CHANCES

Who hasn't thought about ditching the daily grind to follow a dream that feeds the soul? Yet few of us turn our backs on the predictable and seize the chance of a new life. We talk to four women who shed their old selves to follow more fulfilling paths.

WORDS PENELOPE DEBELLE



## LORWAI TAN, 49

Clinical researcher turned life coach

**TWELVE** months ago Tan went to the head of her department at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and told him to advertise for a replacement. She would not be renewing her contract.

Tan is reinventing herself as a professional coach who helps people do what she is doing — transitioning from the predictable to the unknown in order to realise their potential. "It's a case of me not wanting to die not knowing," says Tan. "There is a story about a teacher who asks, 'how can you stand not knowing what's going to happen?' For me, how can you stand knowing? It's like Groundhog Day, it's predictable."

Tan, who is from Malaysia, pursued a science career at the University of Adelaide and worked at Flinders University as a research assistant. After she married, her husband — a freshwater research scientist — was posted to Albury Wodonga. She accompanied him with a science degree and no job. "Life gives you lemons, make lemonade," she says.

She went to the local music shop and began teaching guitar and bass, starting with one student and ending four years later with 50. It was her first taste of self-employment and it opened her mind to being entrepreneurial.

With a PhD in freshwater ecology, Tan came back to a breast cancer fellowship at the QEH. In science, she says, there are no longer permanent positions, only contracts. The work is hard and long and you have to love it. "Publications lead to a grant and the grant leads to more publications. It's like a revolving door, if you don't catch it at the right time you're just going to get smacked in

the head," she says. Her most recent contract at the QEH was to set up an ear, nose and throat laboratory to study mucus. She built it up to include research assistants and 10 post-graduate students. "At the end of it all, again that little voice was saying, 'OK, you've done all this, there is something else to do now'," she says.

At a seminar on property investment, Tan came across a life coach, Paul Blackburn, who runs a motivational business called BeyondSuccess. She has since trained with him, to "clear out the garbage", she says, that had blocked her pathways to wealth creation and happiness. Her goals are ambitious: enough money to do what she wants and to engage in some philanthropy.

She has a vision of a "Kenny Research Institute", named after her akita dog, Kenny. It would fund bright female post-doctoral students for five years while they worked out how to become self-funding. All this in an institute with a crèche for children and dogs, a gym and cafeteria serving healthy food. "If you support your people and have a happy workforce, you will have higher productivity."

Her aim now is to coach people in the psychology of transition while they do what she is doing; find the courage to leave unfulfilling jobs and seek higher goals. "A lot of people would quit their job if they knew the money was there, but they're fearful, they hang on to the security of a pay cheque and then they never find out," she says. "I don't want people to turn around and think this is just a walk in the park because it's not," she says. "It's basically a lot of soul-searching. I don't just turn around one day and say 'that's all folks'. You've got to go and work out what it is you really want to do."