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'Blogs for daughter gave me the germ of my book'

By **MATTHEW WILSON**

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IT was one of those "only in Henley" moments.

First-time author Catherine Rogers was signing copies of her new book *Gut Well Soon* — *A Practical Guide to a Healthier Body and a Happier Mind* in the Bell Bookshop earlier this month when who should walk through the door but an off-duty Theresa May.

The Prime Minister, who lives in Sonning, is a regular customer at the independent bookshop in Bell Street, which opened in 1966.

Catherine, 57, is an integrative mental health therapist who lives in Turville with her husband and three children aged 20, 19 and 17.

The pair promptly got talking, with the PM advising the author to get in touch with the Secretary of State for Health about the ideas set out in her book and an online programme called "Reset Your Gut" that she has also developed.

Catherine said: "She came into the bookshop and we chatted for about 10 minutes and she said I should talk to Matt Hancock about my programme. I've tried, but I haven't succeeded yet!"

With everything that's been happening — or not happening — in politics, how did the Prime Minister come across?

"She was fine. She's a woman under pressure. I think she was just really pleased to be in a normal situation and talking about something that wasn't Brexit.

"I chatted to her about her diabetes and one of the parts of the programme is low-carb and I think it really caught her attention."

One of the inspirations for *Gut Well Soon* was Catherine's daughter, Mia. The book's dedication reads: "For Mia, my youngest daughter who, at age 12, asked me to write down everything I know as blogs then encouraged me each week until I did. Who knew it would end up as this book!"

As Catherine recalls: "My daughter asked me to write down why she should drink water, eat her greens, and what was the matter with eating custard creams. So I started writing these blogs and after a few years I had 45 of them — explaining things like how much of your body is water, why you should eat non-inflammatory food, why the gut bacteria is so important."

And how did Mia, who at the time attended Rupert House and is now a pupil at Wycombe Abbey, respond to the blogs?

"She demanded it every Sunday night!" laughs Catherine. "I had to do little drawings! I think once she started asking it, I started realising this is a massive, massive subject."

Catherine later mentioned the blogs to a colleague who was working with her on her website, who told her: "These aren't blogs, Catherine, this is a book."

While the blogs themselves aren't reprinted in *Gut Well Soon*, the book covers many of the same health-related topics, including:

- Why should I be eating five-plus servings of fruit and vegetables a day?
- Do I really need to avoid fat, sugar and everything else that I love?
- Why do we sleep and how much should I be getting?
- Does taking omega-3 really promote intelligence?
- What is my microbiome and why should I reset it?

Catherine addresses the last question at the start of chapter one, writing: "Recently, there has been a sea change in the field of human biology. Functional medicine practitioners are beginning to see



Let's do launch: first-time author Catherine Rogers from Turville pictured at the Bell Bookshop earlier this month

people more like ecosystems, rather like rainforest and coral reefs, made up of many different organisms.

"There is a growing recognition that you are not just a mammal, you are an organism which is made up of trillions of different microbes (invisible bacteria, viruses and fungi). The term 'microbiome' is used to refer to the community of microbes you have living on and in your body."

Elsewhere in the book, Catherine notes that gut bacteria and its role in human health is "an explosive area of modern scientific research", adding: "It is becoming increasingly obvious that gut health plays a vastly underappreciated role in physical and mental wellbeing."

This was something that over the years she came to appreciate in her day job. "I was doing mental health work for 20 years and I suddenly realised talking therapies aren't the whole deal — people have to eat properly, sleep properly, they have to exercise and reduce stress.

"I'm very practical, so I'm not a psychiatrist who's going to go back to what your mum and dad said. I deal with the presenting problem and change behaviour so you can release it."

Catherine has also drawn on her own "wellness journey" in writing the book. Having suffered from debilitating migraines for most of her life, she found that, medication aside, the only thing that broke the cycle was her three pregnancies.

This led her to start researching a range of different suggested "cures" — something that eventually led her to appreciate the importance of lifestyle and its two-way feedback

relationship with the human gut microbiome — which one leading scientist memorably called "the forgotten organ".

Catherine said: "As I read and read about the gut and migraines, I started to respect my gut and stopped eating inflammatory foods like processed foods, excess sugar, gluten, trans fats — all the usual culprits. And the migraines started to disappear. Over the past five years they have decreased from one every other day to a maximum of two per month."

Over the course of 14 chapters, *Gut Well Soon* explores the key areas of healthy living to arm readers with the tools they need to make informed lifestyle changes.

One such change being the goal of "resetting your gut" — something that Catherine has designed a four-week online course to help people achieve.

Developed with the help of nutritionists, doctors, recipe writers and scientists, Reset Your Gut includes recipe plans for any allergy or food preference, together with shopping lists and tips on how to adjust your lifestyle.

"I'm not not trying to sell the book," laughs Catherine, "but I'm excited about the course. Because I think the course has got more longevity and will probably do more good. You want to make a difference, don't you?"

"The idea for Reset Your Gut came over the six months that I was writing the book. I was thinking, 'I should really mention that if they did this it would help.'"

"Reset Your Gut is a four-week one-off education in order to

change a lifestyle. It's not about selling you something else afterwards. There's no follow-on fee, there's no monthly fee, it's not a fad diet — the idea is you get the gist after the four weeks and then it's up to you whether you go on with it. You know, it's hard enough to change my own habits — to change other people's, all I can do is deliver something that's correct and accurate."

Would she consider turning the Reset Your Gut programme into a book at some point?

"What I was advised was that you had to have a successful website where people are engaged.

"I think my next aim is to make it a medical device — so doctors don't have to worry about whether they're prescribing the right thing. Because doctors would genuinely worry, wouldn't they?"

"And so once it's a medical device, it's been approved — you go through the EU, the US Food and Drug Administration. I'm going through that process and it will take about a year. So the doctors don't have to worry — they won't get sued for recommending it."

As a fan of functional medicine, Catherine has attended a number of conferences on the subject.

She said: "The thing about doctors — and they admit this — they say to me 'We have two hours of nutritional education in our degrees.' That's all they have."

"Medical students are campaigning to have more. The only nutritional education doctors get, and it's optional, is a continuing professional development course that's just been introduced — they don't have to do it. I mean, there's a quote on my website from a doctor saying 'I don't have the nutritional education to deal with this.'"

"So I see Reset Your Gut as a grassroots tool for health professionals. And when I was at a conference it was the doctors who were most interested."

"For example, they've just found that someone who has a more healthy gut bacteria, if they're given oncology, like a cancer treatment, they respond better because the body's better able to deal with it. And we will do an oncology version — we'll do it in the next few years. There's lots of young doctors who get it, who want it."

• For more information on *Gut Well Soon* visit Catherine's website www.maphealthsolutions.com. The Reset Your Gut website can be found at www.ryghealth.com

Hamlet to be staged against the clock

"BREVITY is the soul of wit," wrote Shakespeare, who knew a thing or two about the theatre.

The phrase is memorably spoken by Polonius in the second act of *Hamlet*.

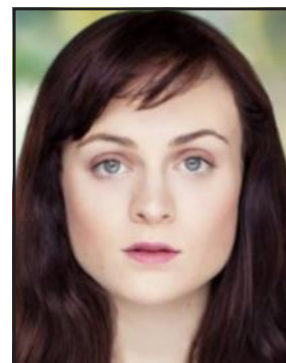
Now a group of actors are taking the Bard at his word by staging a production of the Danish tragedy from scratch in just 60 hours.

Caversham Court Gardens is the venue for two performances by the 60 Hour Shakespeare company in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support.

The company's founder, Gavin Leigh said: "It's 1949. In Central Park West, Manhattan, an English socialite has remarried, to a politician named the 'King' of the city, following the death of her influential husband. Her son, Hamlet, is in freefall, railing against his mother's marriage and grieving over his father's death, when his friends, Horatio and Marcellus, return from Wittenberg University in Ohio."

Gavin added that doing *Hamlet* in just 60 hours is very much in the spirit of Shakespeare's life and times, as his ensemble might have had only one rehearsal before the first performance of every play.

Rehearsals are open to the public from 9.30am tomorrow (Saturday) until 5.30pm on Monday (May 27). The performance will then take place from 7pm to 9.30pm, but there will also be a preview performance at 7pm on Sunday (May 26).



Round the clock: Kat Dulfer as Ophelia and, below, Math Sams as Polonius in *Hamlet*



Playgoers are invited to bring picnics with them.

A spokesman for 60 Hour Shakespeare said: "This is an open-air event, so please bring something to sit on. Limited seating will be prioritised for audience members in need. Doors open at 7pm."

Tickets for the Monday evening performance are £10 with concessions £6.

For more information and to book, visit www.60hourshakespeare.com



Multi-talented: James Pearson visits Henley next Saturday

Jazz director's ready to pop in on Purdy

THE artistic director of Ronnie Scott's is popping up in Henley next Saturday (June 1) as the special guest of jazz singer Purdy.

James Pearson and his trio will be covering "100 years of Jazz Piano" at the HAODS Studio in New Street, next door to the Kenton Theatre.

Purdy, aka Rebecca Poole, grew up on the Joyce Grove estate in Nettlebed and regularly performs live in the Henley area — as well as in central London and beyond.

Each month she stages a "pop-up" jazz night at the HAODS Studio, usually accompanied by a guest artist.

Purdy said: "James Pearson is the artistic director at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club in Soho."

"A world-class pianist, composer and raconteur extraordinaire, James is equally at home as a concert pianist."

"In this whistle-stop tour through some of the jazz piano greats, James takes us on a rollercoaster ride to



Concert organiser: Purdy

the music of Oscar Peterson, Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, Erroll Garner, Bill Evans and many more.

"As always with one of JP's performances you can expect anecdotes and a few things you may not have known alongside some truly great piano playing. This one is not to be missed!"

Doors open at 7.30pm and the show starts at 8.30pm. Early bird tickets are £20 with standard tickets £25.

For more information and to book, visit www.purdymusic.co.uk



Yes, Prime Minister: Theresa May was among the customers browsing in the Bell Bookshop when Catherine Rogers was launching her book, *Gut Well Soon*. The PM advised her to speak to health secretary Matt Hancock