

One & Other Project

My name is Simon Cox, the date is the 1st of October 2009 and the time is 7:10 in the morning and I'm interviewing on behalf of the Wellcome Trust. Can I first ask you to say your name, age and where you've come from?

My name is Stephanie Brookes, I'm 28 and I've come from New Cross in South London.

How long have you lived in New Cross for?

I've lived in New Cross for just over two years so yes, I really enjoy it. I like living in London, this is the first time I've lived in London so it's fantastic yes.

So what were your first impressions of moving to London?

Oh, just how exciting it was and buzzy and so many things are going on, so when you actually go out of London to where you previously lived it seems so quiet in comparison. I definitely ... now that I've lived in London so much stuff is here, it would be hard not to live here. I'd like to stay here.

Where did you live before London?

I lived in Hertfordshire so not too far away, a bit of a commute but just as soon as you come to London you realise, you know, how many great things are here and the Museums and all the ... just the night life as well. So it's definitely fantastic and there's so much to do, such as this the opportunity to come and do something as crazy as this, so it's great.

And what inspired you to move to London?

All right. Well I was actually working in London and I decided to move in with my boyfriend and another sort of flatmate so it was sort of a fantastic opportunity so there were so many reasons to come to London, so yes, lots of different reasons.

And what job do you do?

Yes, I'm actually a writer. I've just landed a publishing deal so it seemed quite fitting that while I'm on the plinth that I sort of write about my experiences on the plinth. That's what I plan to do today, so just document everything that I see, even though I don't usually ... I write about a very specific subject, I write about modern spirituality for teenagers so a few specific areas.

And what inspired you, moving to writing?

All right, I've always written ever since I was very young and it's something that I've always done and I wrote a lot at university and it's just something that I've been plugging away at for many, many years and now I've recently landed the deal so, yes, a lot of exciting things have happened in the last month, getting the book deal and being told that I've been selected for the plinth, so it's been very good.

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And why modern spirituality for teenagers?

It's something I've always been interested in myself. As young child I had a spiritual experience which I couldn't understand or explain and throughout my teenage years I was questioning spirituality and what it was that I did experience and I realised that there wasn't really anything for younger people out there. The sort of mind body and spirit genre in general is generally targeted to a more mature audience and there was nothing for younger people so it's something that I write. I contribute articles to teenage online magazines so it's just something that I sort of fell into and realised that I really enjoy doing it and it has become my little niche so to speak.

Would you mind talking about your spiritual experience?

Yes, absolutely. Well, when I was a very young child I had the experience of seeing a spirit, as a lot of people would say, a ghost but what I had was the experience of seeing a spirit and I was ... I saw a spirit on and off for several years. As a teenager I sort of put it out of my mind, I sort of tried to forget about it but during university I kept seeing things and it was just something that I realise was there in my life and after speaking to a lot of people and researching it and writing about it I realised that so many people have these experiences all the time and, in fact, a close friend of mine when I told her what I was experiencing, she admitted to me and she'd never before said anything. So it's one of those hidden experiences, I think, your spirituality really, so it was, yes, something that just always fascinated me and I suppose having an experience of it prompted me to sort of work within the area, so yes.

Would you mind describing the spirit?

Yes absolutely. When I was a child I saw the spirit of two people, an elderly lady and an elderly gentleman and I remember them absolutely vividly as if it was yesterday and you know they weren't sort of a scary looking presence like you see in films, a sort of glamorised image of it, it was actually two people who were standing by my door. They weren't my parents and I remember sort of vividly seeing them I saw them off and on so yes so it made me realise you know they weren't threatening experiences it was actually you know it was lovely to see something so it sort of made me question what is it all about so that's what prompted me sort of I suppose to work in this area and help other teenagers who maybe having experiences they need to find out more about what it's about, yes.

And what is your current understanding of your spirituality?

Yes, my current understanding is that obviously I know that I can see visibly but also I think everyone has all sorts of spiritual experiences even on a day to day basis you know, using our intuition, having hunches about things, even going on a plinth, I would say that's a very spiritual experience, it's something you know that you can sort of have an experience on your own, you can think about yourself, what you are doing, why you are here and so I think spirituality is something really that can't really be defined. I think it's very personal for everyone some people have extremely strong

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opinion whereas some people are spiritual without thinking they are spiritual it's one of those subjects that it very hard to define but yes.

And how did your family react the first time you told about the experience?

They were fine. Actually my dad has sort of an interest in spirituality and all my family and friends were very supportive and I think when you speak honestly about something you know it was an experience I had you know people are very open and I think people nowadays are very open to sort of spirituality it's a big part of our you know mainstream culture you know we are all aware of it you know from all the mountains of mind body and spirit books and there's lots of shows about it and I think people are very open to sort of spiritual experiences and speaking about them and so yes.

Before these experiences were you either religious or spiritual in any way?

No I've never been a religious person and really my interest from it grew out of an experience as a young child so it's something that I've always been interested in and so yes I've never had any religious background or anything it's just something that has just become a part of her life so yes.

And how are you going to address spirituality for teenagers?

My way of doing it is in a very practical way I hope to bring the subject very down to earth and to make it accessible I think the world spiritual sometimes sounds a little bit, it's such an umbrella word for a lot of different things and different subjects so I hope to sort of you know show people in my book particularly young people how to get in contact with a guardian angel a very you know down to earth gentle way nothing you know too much as a teenager you are interested in so many things and you want to you are finding out about who you are as a person so I hope the book is just a fun and gentle introduction to the subjects.

And how does spirituality affect your day-to-day life?

I think it's just a part of my daily life in a really natural way I mean for example you know I usually meditate on a day to day basis and that's just a small strand I suppose of a spiritual way of being which helps me particularly with London life I think a lot of people sort of want to you know connect with themselves some people may do it through exercise or meditation or you know having a good night's walk through the park if it inspires you then that's a very spiritual way of being.

And do you feel spirituality?

I've been saying the word too much.

Is ... how can it benefit society?

I think when you look at spirituality you are sort of connecting with yourself and thinking about what you are here to do so I think in a very basic way it sort of helps the person in a very selfish way but that's important I think if you can help yourself in

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any way perhaps if you are interested in spiritual ideas you are going to be discovering more about yourself so by helping yourself I suppose you are helping other people you feel more positive and so I think it's a sort of trickle down effect I don't think someone says I am spiritual suddenly everything is fine, it's a constant, you know, progression, you know meditating is a great way of connecting as well, so yes I think it can help, yes.

Just to stick to the plinth.

Yes.

Can I ask how you first heard about the project?

Yes, actually it was on I think it was London news and I suddenly saw this person on this plinth and I thought wow what's going on here and then I suddenly realised you could actually take part in it so I think I remember running up to my computer and logging on and I thought oh it's a massive competition there's going to be millions of people I won't be selected in a million years so when I got the email about a month ago I was absolutely completely shocked I thought it was a rejection letter so I had to keep looking to make sure it has been confirmed so it's fantastic yes.

And how are you feeling at this moment in this?

I feel very nervous I'm sort of now looking out of the window and I'm getting a bit nervous because I'm not great with heights it's a challenge for me to see if I can sit up there for an hour so but it should be good I'm just going to be sitting down taking notes of my experience so nothing you know nothing too much I'm not going to be doing any acrobatics or anything so I'm just going to sit there and just enjoy it so yes.

And have you any plans for these notes?

Yes, the lady I spoke to when I just arrived said you know you can release them for the archive for the One & Other archive so if something you know half way ok comes out I'll definitely forward it on because obviously it's nice to have people's experiences of the plinth so but then again I might just be enjoying the view so much I probably won't write a thing so I'm going to play it by ear.

And what would you like to gain from your experience?

I think just simply actually the experience. A lot of people said, Oh I should do something a bit more ... maybe perhaps meditate or do something connected with what I'm interested in, but I just decided I just want to go up and enjoy it, you know, just be on a plinth in the middle of Trafalgar square. I don't think I'll do that again. I think I just want to enjoy the experience, yes.

So in general are you a follower of the Arts?

Yes. I actually went to Antony Gormley's previous exhibition he had the cloud within the box god that absolutely terrified me I walked in and I completely lost my you know my senses where was I going so I thought that was fascinating, so when I

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heard it was Antony Gormley I thought oh fantastic you can actually take part. It was even better so yes, definitely.

And what are your current interests?

Oh gosh, interests, lots of interests, writing, obviously, spirituality, meditation, seeing friends, going out for dinner with friends, oh gosh all sorts of things, cinema, films, lots of different interests off the top of your head it's something like what am I interested in?

Just to talk about the meditation, when did you get into it?

Oh gosh, quite a while ago and actually it was probably about university time. I needed something to relax and de-stress particularly at university when you've got all of your deadlines looming. So yes it's just ... I mean I do some very basic meditation where I concentrate on my breathing. It just helps me to come down and I suppose it just relaxes you ready for the day really, so it sort of helps me but I know it helps, you know, millions of people, it's such a wonderful thing to do.

And are you part of a group of spiritual people or meditating?

No, not really, actually I meet people all the time, oh I'm interested in that or I've seen my guardian angel or I know about an aura. So I meet people through sort of workshops I've done or spiritual fairs or book signings and so really it's just a very natural way of meeting people I usually do a meditation on my own I used to do a guided meditation with a group when I was a teenager but I really got into it when I was at university.

And what do you mean by guardian angel?

Oh guardian angel well, spiritually speaking, I personally believe we all have a guardian angel, well, quite a few, you know, many guardian angels who basically guide us throughout our lives and they are always at our sides it's just a matter of connecting with them obviously and then asking them for help so I, that's one of my sort of spiritual beliefs.

And how did you personally connect with your guardian angel?

I ask through meditation, actually meditation is one of the key exercises you can do to sort of link with your spirituality, whether you want to it starts to open more of your sort of psychic sense your sixth sense or connect with the guardian angel. Meditation is basically the way to do it because obviously when you are in a meditative state you are in a sort of more relaxed state of mind sort of cut off from all the hustle and bustle of daily life so I always suggest to anyone who asks how can I get in touch with my guardian angel I always suggest starting with meditation or even doing a class I always suggest to people that want to get into it straight away classes are always great because they help you concentrate because often when you start learning on your own it's you know you hear the phone going you hear something you want to go

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and answer it or if there is a lot of noise in your house I think a sort of meditation group are fantastic way of connecting with your spirituality.

And how do you find people react when you talk about your spirituality?

Really well actually, funnily enough when I was younger I used to get a little bit worried that people might think I'm a [?] you know all the spiritual stereotypes you know head up in the clouds but most people I speak to respond really well because they see I'm very genuine about it I just tell them honestly my experiences that I'm just learning about them myself it's a constant everyday learning more about you know your spirituality and what you are capable of. So everyone has been really positive actually and open minded because, you know, I speak to a lot of people who obviously don't believe in the presence of God and angels but you know a lot of those people are my closest friends and people I love so I think it's great it adds to the mixture that's part of what's it all about, questioning things and deciding that's not for you or that's right for you yes.

And can I ask what's important in your life?

Oh, important in my life ... my family and friends are important they are sort of number one and then sort of at the moment my new book, that's very important, that's something I am very excited about so that's on my mind all the time so yes, those two things, my family and friends and sort of my career that's important to me.

And you mentioned your boyfriend?

Yes, yes. John just outside there.

When did you first meet him?

I met actually a few years ago when I was working in PR for a little while. I did a stint in PR and he has his own business. He's a website designer, he has his own business and I met him as he worked within the office that I was working in so yes, we've been together just over three years now so yes, he's great.

You mentioned you worked in PR what other jobs have you previously done?

Yes well PR has been something that I went into because I wanted to know how to sort of promote myself with the work I'm doing and you know it's... PR is an interesting way to sort of find out more about the media I was interested in the media and how they operate and because I knew what I was writing was quite a niche area I needed to know how to promote myself so PR was a very good experience it just sort of helped me to you know learn a bit more about the media and how they work so yes.

And I am just going to ask if you could paint a picture of yourself generally in this moment in time in your life?



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Gosh, very excited, anxious, lots of things happening sort of very hopeful and yes, I think just excited this month lots of great things have been happening so very excited.

What other great things are happening this month?

Well basically obviously the book deal was a major thing. I think that's been a major thing, also I'm going to be moving house soon so I'm looking forward to that and I'm also going on the plinth. It's been a really major thing, I mean, my gosh I've been very excited about it so yes, this month a lot of things have been happening.

Whereabouts are you moving to?

Actually we are only moving down the road not moving too far, not very adventurous, literally, we are just moving to the other side of where we live now so very close still not moving too far.

Thank you.

Thank you.