

## One & Other Project

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today on the 4th August 2010 in New Cross in London to interview Stephanie Brookes on behalf of the Wellcome Trust as part of the oral history collection. So Stephanie, as I've already mentioned, we're just here really to ask you more about your experience of going on the plinth in retrospect and a few more questions about your life story.*

Yes it was a wonderful opportunity to go onto the plinth. It was really fantastic when I found out I'd got a place and so I decided ... I thought it's a once in a lifetime opportunity just to sit on the plinth and just enjoy the scenery around me in Trafalgar Square. So at one point I thought I'd try and do something that was connected with my interest in spirituality or my writing. I even said on my little blog that I may write an article in the hour allotted, but I decided, even though I had my pen and paper with me, as soon as I sat onto the plinth it was so beautiful, it was a clear day I remember and it was a beautiful blue sky and I thought, "What a shame if I sat with my head down as I do every day writing and not take advantage of being on a plinth." It was amazing. So I put the pen and paper down and just enjoyed looking at all the people walking through, going through, going about their day, starting work and I'm really glad I did because everyone else didn't. The first thing they asked was 'what was it like on the plinth?' So I'm glad I didn't have my head down scribbling away and missing it all. So it was a really wonderful experience and, looking back on it, it was quite surreal really sitting up there. I've walked past many times, living in London. When I go out into London I walk past the plinth and watch people sit on the plinth or do all their activities so it was quite strange to think that I was sitting on the plinth as well and part of that huge sort of collaboration. So it was a really fantastic experience, very enjoyable.

*What happened when you got off the plinth?*

As soon as I got off the plinth it felt quite strange, in fact, I didn't want to leave the plinth. It was so lovely the hour I thought it was going to be quite a long time just sitting there but because it was obviously quite an extraordinary experience being on in the middle of Trafalgar Square, elevated, it just zoomed by and also it was quite strange because obviously being in that unusual environment people would stop and speak to me and wave so its very odd just going back down to earth quite literally you ... it's just the same. You go about your day and no one really acknowledges each other but when there is something quite interesting happening there's instantly a human connection which I thought was lovely you know. I probably spoke to a lady or a gentleman that I would never have spoken to before but because it was such an unusual experience. After the plinth it was just nice to chat to everyone there who were so lovely and who put me onto the little machine, I can't think of the name of it now to begin with who sorted out my time on the plinth and thanked them for it and went about my day so it was quite an unusual morning and certainly a morning I won't forget definitely.

*Did you write about it?*

I did I just did a little ... a few of my own scribblings at home really just documenting how I felt but I realised that obviously my little clip of my time on the plinth will always be archived so any time I want to remember I can always go online and search for it

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and watch it and ... so yes I actually just really enjoyed just the experience of being there so even without words just being there was really special.

*And what would you say was the impact of the experience on yourself?*

I think it was to be a part of something that I don't think will happen again in that specific space. I actually really remember when it actually started to come about on the news. I was watching London news with my housemate at the time and boyfriend and I said 'oh I would love to go on that' and we found out it was a competition. It wasn't that you could just apply and they'd instantly let you on and I thought 'oh a competition well I'm never ever going to get on there because I never win competitions' So I thought, 'oh you know what the hell I applied and put all the relevant information in and so you know when I got on there I couldn't quite believe it, it was amazing to be a part of it and it was so well documented in the media. I know there was a Sky show dedicated to Plinthers so I realised it was a really big show, an art show that people were talking about and even friends who didn't live in London knew about it so when I told them I was going on they were really impressed and a lot of art shows and my housemate at the time was an artist so I know that lots of things go on all the time in London. But this thing had really captured something so it felt very special to be a part of it, it was nice.

*Where do you come from originally?*

Originally I was born in Stoke-on-Trent so, yes, I was born in Stoke-on-Trent and then we moved South when I was quite young so I've lived in Hertfordshire most of my life but now I live in London but I quite regularly go back to Stoke because I have family who still live there and obviously I used to go back to see my Grandparents when they were alive so I have a still a very strong connection there. In fact when I go back there my accent my Stoke accent starts to trickle back. I'm very fond of it; it's nice to go back.

*Just to return to the plinth and explore some of the other dynamics that went on. When you were given a place you would have received a booklet that talked about how you might promote yourself going on the plinth such as contacting newspapers and so on locally. Did you do any of those things?*

I didn't actually. I filled out a little sort of piece about myself personally but because I knew that I decided to do something nothing quite showy I wasn't juggling or I wasn't doing any acrobatics I thought I just wanted to enjoy the experience I probably didn't think perhaps the newspapers might be interested but thinking about it now they probably would have been particularly if it was a local story so I perhaps didn't take advantage of the fact that I'd got a place on the plinth so I probably in hind sight should have promoted myself to the local media cause it was ... it's an experience where I suppose you decided to do something quite 'out there' such as speaking about a subject or doing an activity that a lot of people did. So yes, I probably should have promoted myself a bit more thinking about it. I think I was just so surprised to get on that I was just wanting to make sure that all my forms were filled in and that I knew what time I was going there and so I just focussed on getting on that plinth.

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*When did you find out that you had a place and how much time did you have in between?*

Oh gosh I'm trying to think back now. I remember I applied and I remember there was a little period of time when I didn't hear anything and to be honest I put it out of my mind. I thought 'it's a competition where...' I thought every single person who hears about it would naturally want to sign up for it because it would be such a nice fun thing to do. I didn't think I would ever get selected so I just remember I think one day I'd put it out my mind completely and I got an email. I remember seeing something about the plinth I thought 'oh perhaps it's just a bit of, you know, like a newsletter' because I think I'd signed up for receiving more information about future projects so I didn't think at all that it would be because I'd been selected. So when I clicked on I was completely ecstatic. I just remember being very, very pleased and I told obviously my housemate and boyfriend that I'd been selected and they were very surprised as well because, again, it was a massive competition. So yes, I was thrilled, but I think it was a little period of time because I'd put it out of my mind. I didn't think I'd get selected. So it was a very nice surprise when I received the email.

*So you mentioned filling out something for the project being in your profile on the One & Other website?*

Yes that's right. I filled ... I looked at what other people had done so I put a little photo on there. I had just written a little bit about what I do and also about what I anticipated to do while I was on the plinth and I put I would like to write an article which I thought I'd seen all these very interesting activities that people were doing and I thought 'oh I sound so boring just saying I just want to enjoy the experience' I thought I'd better put something in.' because I was thinking I might like to do a little article because it would be probably an article about the experience of just sitting on the plinth and anything that happened perhaps. So a conversation I had with someone below or perhaps someone told me to get off the plinth, you know, something might have happened that might have been quite interesting. So I did take my pen and paper with me but as soon as I sat up there, because it was such a lovely morning, I thought 'I can't not look at it.' I can't not look at the beautiful surroundings so yes, I'm glad that I just sat and enjoyed it.

*Did you have any interaction with members of the crowd?*

I did actually. A lady. I believe it was a lady who stopped, just asked me a few questions and I answered. I can't quite remember what we said, it was something about obviously the activity of being on the plinth and then a gentleman passed and asked what I was doing and I said I was just sitting down enjoying myself. It was quite unusual. But it's nice in those circumstances you can just strike up a conversation with someone because it isn't, you know, a day-to-day ... its an unusual setting but the other people around me were a few people who I know who had come to see me sit on the plinth and of course my boyfriend who was taking pictures so he was on, I noticed, he was on the film as well sort of taking pictures so it was ... but it was really good. I just enjoy watching people anyway, I like watching people and you know it's quite interesting seeing people go about their day and their reactions to the plinth. Some people obviously walk past, seen it a million times before and probably

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used to seeing things in London, so it's not unusual. The majority of people who stopped with interest, I think, were tourists who had their cameras at the ready and had an interest anyway but you could tell the Londoners who'd seen it all anyway just passing about their day but yes, it was nice. Nice to have that interaction with people. I'm glad I spoke to some people because I'd seen, watching the television show, people have a lot of ... some people who do very interesting things on the plinth had a lot of interaction, they almost had a crowd and of course I didn't expect that with myself just sitting there but it was nice to have one or two people stop and say hello so that was nice.

*You mentioned that your friends and family were around or perhaps watching online. What effect do you think it had on them seeing you on the plinth?*

I think they were quite surprised really. I think they were quite shocked. I remember when I told some family I think they probably didn't really know much about the art project that I was sitting on a plinth in Trafalgar Square they were like 'oh right that sounds interesting' that I don't think they really knew what it was about. So when I told them the link and that it was a proper big hugely funded project and the artist is Antony Gormley and he's a very successful artist when they saw the me actually on the plinth in Trafalgar Square I think it probably hit them then that it was a proper project you know, a big mainstream project, and it had coverage all over the world and it had a show dedicated to it. I think they were just surprised to see me sitting there. I think its just one of those unusual things and its quite bizarre really to see someone that, you know, just sitting on a plinth and just as you, I think you know they were surprised, but I think pleased because they knew it was an experience and I think once I told them what I was doing and they saw it, they Googled the project a bit more so they were able to see the background of what the artist was trying to accomplish and that people twenty four hours a day were on this plinth. It was never unoccupied during the time of the project so I think they were pleased, yes, I think they enjoyed it. They probably wish I'd done something more because they had to sit for the hour watching me do very little.

*So did you know that there were groups of individuals that went on the plinth or were following the plinth project who set up their own social networking sites online, a group on Facebook and one on Twitter. Did you know that?*

I didn't know that, no. I didn't realise that there was a following on about the plinthers. Oh I'd love to know if they're still going, I'd like to have a look myself. I knew there was a lot of interest in it and I knew people could follow people from the site, I think give a little thumbs up. Oh yes I'll follow you or yes I'll watch you but I didn't realise there was sort of a dedicated group assigned to watch the plinthers, no. What do they do then? Do they just watch all the plinthers or pick their favourites?

*I think they were interacting with the project and making comments on what was to come what happened and sort of observer influential group on what might happen on the plinth.*

And what was the outcome? What did they sort of get from the project? Did they feel it was worth it? Did they enjoy it?

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*Well I haven't really looked into the groups in this way I'm just interested to see whether you might have known about it whether it had an influence on what you chose to do. That's why I'm asking.*

Oh I see. No, I'm afraid I didn't know anything about the Facebook group. I'm ... in fact the only thing was my point of reference was the site itself where I had my little kind of synopsis of what I would plan to do and my photo and then I had a little thing where a few people ticked to say oh I'll watch you. So yes that was really my point of reference and all just seeing the local news, I noticed that the plinth usually featured at some point because there was usually an outrageous person one day doing something where you know it was quite a controversial story but I think my entire point of reference was definitely the *One & Other* site so that was my little port of call for all my plinth goings on.

*You had a couple of comments as well didn't you from Pat Brookes.*

Oh that's my Mum. Ah it's nice to have the support from your Mum.

*And Anne*

Yes that's my Aunt yes my Aunt Anne yes so she followed me too in fact I think she watched it as well but she both my Aunty and my Mum watched me on the plinth so its nice to have your family. Yes I told all my family to watch it and then some friends who weren't able to watch because they were at work or they were going to work because it was quite an awkward hour being at 9 'o' clock in the morning so they went back and they watched which was nice.

*Have you watched yourself?*

I watched a bit but I thought, you know, when you can never watch you ... I can never watch myself or listen to an interview back of myself so I watched a little bit of it and it was just quite interesting to see just how it seems to take ages watching myself on the camera but at the time when I was actually on the plinth the hour just zoomed by. I actually felt like I'd been up there about ten minutes and then when I saw that they'd ... they were sort of bringing ... it was my time to leave and they were bringing the other person up. I was so disappointed, I enjoyed it so much and my big I think my concern was that it would feel a long time because I'm not overly great with heights. I thought 'oh it might be a bit of a struggle', but it wasn't at all. I felt really safe and I had my little ... they give you a little metal rod to put into the plinth and I had that just in case because I thought I might be funny with the height but it was really lovely, it was quite comfortable. I had a blanket as well in case it got a little bit nippy or it decided to lash down with rain I'd have a little form of protection. But in fact having that blanket it probably wouldn't have protected me from the rain at all. I'm so glad it didn't rain because I'd seen clips of people who were absolutely soaked and they did so well. They were so brave to stay on the plinth for an hour. I know if I were I'd struggle in the rain but thank goodness it was a lovely clear morning and it was just the right temperature so I think I was very luck actually. I got a nice time slot. And that was another thing I thought I'm glad I had the time slot that I did because I know obviously it was going twenty four hours and I thought, you know, if someone

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who has it a three 'o' clock in the morning they won't be able to see their surroundings that well. I thought it would ... they wouldn't obviously be able to have as much of an interactive experience as someone who's on in the day. So I feel very lucky that I had the nine 'o' clock slot which was perfect.

*What do you think the project was about?*

I haven't ... what it says to me is that the artist was trying to give a voice to all people. it wasn't ere saying oh I only want artists on the plinth or I only want actors on the plinth it was giving a voice to everyone and it was nice to know that you didn't have to go on the plinth to perform you could do anything you wanted you could obviously so long as you weren't causing any harm to another person you could just see you could sit you could juggle you could speak about an issue you're passionate about or it was nice so I think it was giving a voice to so many different people and I felt that was what the artist was trying to give. And in such a lovely forum Central London Trafalgar Square where there's going to be such a big audience and I think people are just fascinated to watch other people you know peoples what are other people's beliefs or interests or it really does ... I suppose highlight the person for that hour of something that they believe in or really want to get across to other people so yes I think it's quite a special project really it's nice to involve everyone, yes, that's what I thought was what it meant to me.

*Thank you. Now if we can move on to your personal life.*

Yes of course.

*When you were interviewed for your pre-plinth interview before you went up, you were saying to my colleague that you had just been given a deal a publishing deal to write a book for teenagers, young people on spirituality. So that would have been a years ago almost so what's been happening since?*

Yes absolutely. I've been writing my book, it's all been sent to my publisher which is great. The book is aimed at teenagers but slightly older teenagers to young women in their early twenties. So as I was writing it I realised that it was probably for older teens and for young people in their twenties, so it is a book about spirituality and spiritual practices that they can incorporate into their lives with, you know, with relative ease. I wanted it to be a fun book and a book that they could take with them and, you know, it's quite a fun book. So yes, it's all completed now and the due date is next May when it's coming out. It has gone very quickly since I spoke to your colleague, yes, I'd just secured the deal so I've been writing it ever since so it's been a lot of fun and I've got a fabulous publishing house who have taken the book on and they've all been wonderful and my editor there she's been amazing so I've had a very lovely year. I've been very blessed.

*What's the title of the book?*

Yes the title of the book is *How to be a Spiritual Goddess* so it's quite a fun title. It's definitely aimed at young women who have an interest in spirituality. It's meant to be a book for ... it's a mainstream book for women who perhaps have heard of spiritual

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practices, either meditation or auras or angels and want to know a bit more about it and it's just a very fun book really. It's just sort of for people who are starting to perhaps question spirituality or see if it's something for them and there's such a wide variety of topics in the book that hopefully a lady who'll pick it up may think, 'oh I want to know a bit more about angels' or 'I think I want to learn a bit more about meditation' so they can just take what they want from it. So that's my hope anyway that they will use it as a little guide book for their spiritual journey.

*Well there's loads of questions I want to ask you actually about your spirituality and of course about your writing prior to this. But I thought if we just go back to some of the things that you talked about in the pre-plinth interview, which I remind you of now, you mentioned that you saw spirits for the first time when you were a child. And you told us about the realisation later on in life that they had been your Great Grandparents as a result of finding a picture and talking this over with your father. So I suppose what I'm interested in is how you explain to yourself these, perhaps, visions we might call them? How do you contextualize them?*

Yes well my experience when I was a child, when I saw a spirit, obviously as I child I didn't know what it was at the time. In fact I remember being quite frightened at first and remember sort of being quite nervous putting the covers over my head and thinking 'oh it will go away' and as a child you don't really know what it is it could be a dream. But I kept seeing them off and on and as a teenager I'd started to sort of think about spirit guides and you know girls in their teenage years we speak about spirits and guardian angels and it suddenly hit me that what I'd seen was real, it left a real emotional impact on me and that I suddenly thought that it could indeed be spirit guides or relatives who were watching out for me now and then much later on into my early twenties, my dad had just moved house and I was helping him unpack and I saw a picture of him and with an old man and it suddenly struck me that the person in the picture looked just like the person who I'd seen obviously many years previously as a child. So I just felt that it was most definitely relatives who were just watching over me and sort of having read a lot about spirituality and have been fascinated and have written about it for years I know that a lot of children, I think, do see sort of spirits around them because they're a lot more open and not judgemental in any way and see a lot more I suppose than adults do so I suppose it made perfect sense that I could see quite clearly as a child. But it was lovely, it was nice to sort of have that connection back to when I was a child of what I saw and then that experience as a child I think sewed the seed for my interest later in life 'cause I sort of picked it up while I was at university and I just felt that it was something that a lot of people experience and friends had experienced and it just seemed it was a subject that was usually spoken about behind closed doors you know if you say that you've seen a spirit guide or you've seen something people would obviously think that you've either had a bit too much to drink or you know it might be a crazy thing to say. But I think nowadays I think people are a lot more open and they're not nervous to say what they've seen or what they've experienced for fear of what people may think of them so I think it's definitely come quite a long way because I remember as a teenager I would share ghost stories with friends but I would never mention that experience because it was real to me it was something that a real experience so yes I think it did it sort of planted the seed for my interest later in life and trying to find a bit more about it.

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*So how do you explain these visions?*

It's quite difficult to explain because I saw a lot of spirit guides as a child but now into adulthood I feel more around me which is a form of clairvoyance which is when you can feel sort of either spirits around you. I don't see as much as I did it's one of these interesting things, psychic ability, it's widely debated, why do some people see? Why do some people feel things around them? Why does some ability change as you get older or develop out of the blue? And I've spoken about this with friends, with teachers and to be honest there really isn't any rhyme or reason I mean you know if you could flick a switch of course everyone would, it would be lovely because obviously we all want to know as much as possible but I say to people, friends who ask me, 'why can't I see?' and the answer is 'you might do, you might have another ability in that area that you don't realise, you might be feeling things around you which you haven't really picked up on before' and so I don't think there's any rhyme or reason for it, you know, I don't see as much as I used to so I think it's something that comes to the person very individually and very uniquely to them.

*I suppose I'm interested in exploring your world view when I hear the word meditation or and angels it obviously can belong to particular historical and cultural times, for example, you might think that angels were belonging to the European sort of history rather than Eastern Philosophy. So why do you choose to focus particularly on these kind of terms?*

I think it's always come quite naturally to me. I've always been fascinated, I think, about the possibility of a spiritual realm for I think since my early twenties I started to think, as we all do. We question life and why are we here and what do we believe in and what interests us and I'd always had an interest in sort of spirit guides because I was able to see things and I'm quite a quite a down to earth person I question things and I'm sceptical of things of course and so I really felt that I wanted to learn more and I started to learn more about angels and I was just fascinated at angels and why they were here and how they could help us and I decided to sort of contact my guardian angel and I felt that I was receiving a lot of positive energy from that and as well as meditation. I actually discovered meditation when I was a teenager I was feeling a little stressed around exam time as people, teenagers usually are and a friend of mine was interested in meditation so I came to that quite organically really it was through suggestions 'why don't you try meditation?' And it's a wonderful way to sort of relax and to de-stress. So I started to meditate and go to group meditations and got a lot out of it. Again it was something that I responded to, I mean some people might not. Certain things work for certain people like I think some people prefer to exercise to let go of stress and I find medication, sorry meditation,] *meditation* seems to work for me. Chocolate's my medication. So yes, I've come to things quite naturally in my own time it wasn't something that someone said right if you're interested in this then surely you must be interested in crystals and this and that and the other it was. It all came to me I think because it was meant to and I think I'm interested in a lot of spiritual practices and yes such as chakra work and auras and also crystals so this is all the things that I write about in my book as well because it's coming from, you know, a place where I've just enjoyed it and it's helped me and as a young woman and so if it can help other young women then that's wonderful too but again spirituality is just one small part of my life. I wouldn't classify myself as



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spiritual and that's it you know. I love to see my friends I love theatre I love theatre I love reading I think you know the word 'spiritual' it tends to hang over people who have interest in spirituality. If you say that you're interested in spiritual practices they instantly perhaps have a perception of you and it's a little bit frustrating because I tell people you know I am interested in meditation I love crystals and I'm interested in angel work but I'm interested in all the other things that any other young woman is interested in you know going out seeing friends going to a party you know it's ... I sometimes think the word spiritual can restrict people so I hope that with my book it will show that you know you can incorporate spirituality into your life very easily because it's just one part of the greater mix of everything really.

*Thank you. You mentioned about receiving positive energy from your guardian angel. In what sense would you say that manifested?*

Yes I find that when I speak to my guardian angel ... I believe that we all have a guardian angel with us you know all the time and I find that when I sort of meditate and ask them a question that the answer will come back. I mean of course a lot of that will be my own self processing the information but I feel that I most definitely feel a change in the energy around me I sort of have a very warm sensation like there is someone standing close it's almost like the feeling when someone stands behind you, you may not be able to see but you can feel them and it's just an energy that I sense around me which gives me a lot of positivity and I believe that guardian angels and archangels are a force for good and are there to help us it's always a very positive experience so yes, it's something that I incorporate into my life quite regularly I like to. And also I think I think for people who are perhaps sceptical about it sometimes just meditating and thinking to yourself you can think to a guardian angel or a or a spirit guide but sometimes just the very act of ask questions you often answer them yourself anyway so I think it's just a positive thing I like to incorporate into my life.

*How would you say you can get in touch with a guardian angel?*

It very simply actually a lot of people have asked is there any kind of angel speak or any do you have to do a mantra and I'm like 'no' you literally just the best time to do it is when you've got a bit of quiet time where you won't be disturbed and then just ask nothing more than asking as you would now 'I'd like you to make your presence known if you could make your presence known you know through touch or scent' 'cause a lot of people can suddenly smell things out of nowhere and that's a psychic sense being able to sense something around them. So I always advise sort of the girls who email me just to really just to do it very naturally it isn't anything that you have to pray for or you don't have to be on your very best behaviour you just have to ask honestly and you know from your own heart really so ask in the way that is right for you that's what I always suggest.

*And what type of meditation do you practise?*

I like the guided meditations. I like the meditation where I usually like to have a crystal in my hand and something to focus on because meditation, I think, when you first get into it, it can be quite tricky sometimes because you are trying to switch off

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but I always find even now that I have to just bat any little quibbles that I have in my mind away mentally and try and send them on their way because obviously it's about trying to switch off from the external world around you but I always meditate actually, sort of for five to ten minutes usually and sometimes I do longer meditations if I'm listening to a CD. But I think if you've enjoyed the moment it's always time very well spent so I always just go with what I feel like. I try not to force it if I'm not in the mood. I'll try and do a five minute one so I know sometimes a meditation on a CD is quite long so sometimes I think you do have to be in the right frame of mind to really be there.

*Another thing I wanted to ask you about was your relationship with your parents because you mentioned in the pre-plinth interview that you did talk about it with your father about seeing these spirits and that it was an accepted thing in the family, which I was very surprised when I heard that.*

Yes well when I told my dad and then my mum, both extremely open, I'm very lucky, I have parents who are you know very ... they'll listen to me and they're always positive and encouraging, and I think that's nice because I think a lot of people I always think about my experience I'm sure there is a lot of other perhaps you people out there who have had a spiritual experience whether they've seen something or perhaps felt something and perhaps felt a bit confused or concerned and it's nice to have a friend or perhaps mum and dad or aunt or uncle or whoever it may be to confide in so I was very lucky that both my mum and dad were both very supportive really and just open really. I think sometimes you just need someone to listen and then you know you'll work it out for yourself what it meant or what it was so I think it's just nice to have someone to speak to. And equally when I confided in a close friend I was a bit nervous because I hadn't spoken about my interest in spirituality, you know, the topic of conversation was usually boys or films or reality TV or what was going on in our lives so it wasn't a topic of conversation we really explored. So when I told her she said to herself said to me that she had also had an experience and she often felt something around her in her room so that was quite a surprise because I would never have thought that maybe she would have shared that so I think a lot of people have perhaps spiritual experiences that they haven't really discussed with people so it's ... I've been very lucky actually I have a very good network of people around me even if they're sceptical 'cause a lot of my friends and even my boyfriends sceptical but they're open and they want to listen so its so yes I'm very lucky [laughs] a nice balance.

*When was the last time you had a vision?*

The last time that I saw something was probably about a month again, again I don't see very often I mean there are people who are clairvoyant through and through and can see things right now they can see your aura they could see an angel or a spirit guide but I've developed again from I don't know what reason, clairsentience, so I can feel things around me but not see them. But I saw sort of a shape in my room about a month ago and I felt it was a spirit presence close but again I don't see them that much but I feel them close to me which I actually prefer really. I prefer having the sense of it than seeing all the time so I saw a lot more when I was in my teenage years but that's something ... again, I speak about that in my book that it can

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change, you know, you can suddenly smell things out of nowhere you could suddenly have a lovely whiff of a scent which couldn't have come from anything around you and that's a form of psychic sense because I think our spirit guides and our guardian angels have to be quite inventive to communicate with us because obviously not all of us can see them so clearly.

*So what would you say determines the improvement of one's intuition towards the psychic?*

I think a lot of meditation speaking to teachers who have taught me or e say that a lot of it is meditation and just almost quietening your mind because I think we're so busy in today's age we're rushing around and you know spirits' communication is ever so subtle so if we are constantly going at one hundred miles an hour we wouldn't be able to sense if you'd suddenly felt like a feather across your arm or a feather across your face or perhaps suddenly a scent out of nowhere. I know a lot of people have that, like freshly cut roses suddenly really from ... it couldn't have come from anywhere in your home. So I think if anyone wants to start sort of get in touch with their either guardian angel or just develop just start to develop their psychic sense is to sort of slow down take time for yourself and meditate because when you quieten down and you're relaxed you take in so much more, you know, I know that when you're rushing for a bus in central London you wouldn't know if the person who just something you felt across your arm was someone who just bashed you in the street or it was your angel so I think meditation is definitely the key and then often by speaking to your guardian angel and asking for help with developing your psychic skill or developing a certain area they will help you and they will sort of guide you on your way as well so you will meet perhaps the right teachers who will nurture you're your ability or so yes I think meditation is perhaps definitely the first point and there are so many mediation groups you can go to I think it's such a lovely practice and I know in London particularly I'm always passing meditation groups so that's always a great place to start so you're with other people.

*What brought you to meditation when you were a teenager?*

I remember I was feeling a little bit stressed around exams and just being quite jittery and a bit anxious and my friend at the time she was very interested and again her mother was interested in sort of holistic practices such as Reiki and always was fascinated to know what they were into and they all mentioned meditation in fact some family had mentioned mediation as well so I took it as a little bit of a clue to go and find out if it was something that could help. And it was lovely it was really nice it just fitted me really like a glove it was just what I needed and I did feel the benefits I felt after I'd had a meditation a lot calmer and I think when you're calmer you can deal with things a lot easier than if you're tightly wound so it's just lovely, it's ... I always recommend people to try it and try the different forms of mediation. I know some people might not want to meditate with a group of people but it's always a good start because obviously you're more likely to stay with it because people are around you whereas if you're at home if you're not feeling it you might just turn the telly on instead. So, yes it's a lovely thing to do.

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I think they think it's probably quite unusual actually if I'm honest. I imagine that a lot of my family think it might be quite unusual. Some family members are very open and very interested and fascinated to know more. But then I think there are family members who are supportive but perhaps in all honesty don't really understand what it is which is absolutely fair enough because it is quite an unusual subject matter it is quite, quite strange I suppose because usually people come to it very individually. It's not perhaps a mainstream area of discussion and also if it's never been a part of your life naturally people have a healthy scepticism which I think is good because I think people should be sceptical about things sometimes I don't think everyone should just take things at face value. So I think again I do have a balance of people in my life who are naturally interested themselves, some are interested in certain aspects and I think others, who just support me, but perhaps you know a little bit you know 'what is it all about?' But that's absolutely fine because I think I'm quite well-rounded as a person. I understand other people's perceptions of it who perhaps have never meditated or perhaps thought of angels as perhaps a part of every day life so I totally understand both sides of the of the opinion of it, yes.

*So were you brought up religiously at all as a child?*

No, not at all actually. I wasn't brought up religious, some family members were and went to church but it was never a part of my upbringing at all and that's I think the beauty of what I'm interested in. It isn't associated with religion, that's why I think it's so broad really. I think you don't have to be religious at all and I'm not religious. It's just something that I've become interested in, I think. I think spirituality's such a fascinating thing. I think it's almost a universal thing to know who are we, what are we capable of. Is it just a material world we live in or is there a spiritual aspect? So I've come to it really just from a curious perspective ever since I was a child.

*I wanted to ask you about your writing practice actually, for example, when you began to write and what sort of techniques do you use to get you going?*

Yes, I first started to write as a teenager. I loved writing stories and I sort of hoped one day I could perhaps work in, you know, as a writer. So it's wonderful what's happened obviously in the last year with getting the book deal. But my writing practise ... I write best in the mornings, I always find that I write really quite fluently in the mornings and then less so as the day goes on so I like to get up early and write. And I usually give myself a specific amount of time and because I know if I don't give myself strong deadlines I will get distracted by a book or a phone call or an email. So I have to discipline myself and I usually give myself an allotted word count. So when I was writing my book I had a deadline. I gave myself a thousand words a day and obviously would endeavour to do that and some days I wouldn't reach it and other days I would. So if I reached it quicker I try to give myself a little more so I try to give myself a good framework so I would keep to it and not let my editor down so ... Definitely deadlines work for me so otherwise I'll go off into my imagination and start thinking of things so, yes, I always like to know authors' different styles and if they have any tricks up their sleeve. But a lot of authors that I've spoken to or have read about have said, you know, keep give yourself a good framework, try and be disciplined, you'll have days when you're very disciplined and it's sort of flowing out of you and a few friends who are in the industry said, 'don't beat yourself up when it's

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not coming because there's no point trying to force yourself. Just take a break, have a walk, get some air and then come back to it which is very good advice because I would be quite hard on myself if I was having a bad day and I wasn't able to produce what I wanted to and I'd sit and get quite stressed. So meditation helps and getting out into the fresh air I think because as writers we're generally sort of always in our home so it's nice to have a walk. But I think that was my general style, just giving myself a deadline each day, a word count, try to write in the mornings as much as possible and also I used to write quite a lot on the weekends. So just write as much as possible.

*So you write both fiction and non-fiction?*

I did. I wrote a fiction book a few ago but this book now is a non-fiction book so it's ... I really enjoyed doing the non-fiction. Actually it's ... as much as it's non-fiction, it's also got my own sort of personal views and story intertwined so I sort of wanted to relate to the girls and show them, you know, how you know it is and try, so they can understand that I understand their ... how they would feel so hopefully it's relatable, so a little of my story is interwoven.

*So when you are writing either fiction or non-fiction how do you plan your piece of work?*

The first thing that I did with well with this book was have a proposal and the first thing I did was have the proposal so I had each chapter and then it was all broken down so for example when I did the angel chapter it was broken down into angels and then the archangels and then how to get in touch with your angels and sort of signs of angelic intervention so it was nicely sort of all broken up and in fact as I was writing the book I used it as my template occasionally I went off tangent if I suddenly thought 'oh that's a good idea' or if I realised something in the proposal wasn't applicable any more I got rid of a section that wasn't really appropriate because the book had gone in a different direction so I used the proposal as much as possible but then sort of veered off track when it was necessary. But yes, I'm someone ... I do like a quite a structured proposal because it gives me the structure so I was very pleased to have my proposal in front of me as I wrote.

*You mentioned in the pre-plinth interview about the fact that there aren't that many books geared towards young people, teenagers, and now you're talking slightly older as well, to deal with these issues of needs of spirituality we might say. How were you aware of that?*

I think it was just through my own interest fascination with the subject. I read a lot of books and a lot of the books I was reading, particularly as an older teenager, I felt were perhaps a little bit ... they were too, what's the best word to describe it? It wasn't where I was at that moment, you know, it was talking about things that were quite complex and I thought what are they talking about? So I was a bit confused. I was probably choosing the wrong books, I was probably choosing the big spiritual titles and I perhaps overwhelmed myself and I thought what did I want in my early twenties or my late teens? And I wanted a book that had chapters on each of the big spiritual subjects so to speak and you know practical 'how to' exercises and just a

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really nice way of approaching it and also someone who understood. So I hope I've written it so the girls will know that I know what they're going through. I know what it's like so it's very friendly and at the end of the book there's links so the girls who are reading it can contact me or if they have a question or perhaps they weren't sure what this was about you know they're more than welcome to contact me and I you know welcome emails because it's interesting someone can ask something and then it's like well ooh that's interesting so there's a discussion so I hope that they will they will enjoy it and pick up a bit of information about all of the big topics of spirituality.

*When is the book coming out?*

It's coming out in May 2011 yes, so it's going quickly actually. I keep thinking it's such a long way away but I think it will be here in no time at all.

*And what are you up to right now?*

At the moment I'm actually just finishing the last bits of the book we're just ... my editor's just sending over the text design and then the front cover so it's all the little tweaks at the moment. So I'm just finishing off there and then I want to start planning my next book so I think I'll be asking my editor's opinion on what she thinks of my next book yet I'm not quite sure what it's going to be but I know that I want to start drafting it now. I miss the writing, the big writing process, now that it's starting to be sort of the tweaks and the edit I quite miss getting into the nitty gritty.

*Have you got ideas for your next book?*

I'd like to do sort of a continuation of this one but it would be quite nice perhaps to go over subjects that maybe I didn't touch upon or perhaps go into further detail in another book so I'll probably have a chat with my editor and see what she thinks about it.

*Who's the publishing house?*

It's Piatkus yes, they're wonderful, they're the dream publishing house so I feel very lucky.

*Well that's fantastic thank you. I suppose what I wanted to ask you as well really was about your plans for the future. I mean I know you want to become more of a writer you already are you want to continue to write but is there anything else that you wish for?*

Well I'd love to obviously continue doing the books and I'd like to perhaps do something on TV to do with Spirituality for younger people. I'd like to do that, I'd quite enjoy that and I think also TV gets it out to a wide audience and I love speaking about the subject with people and particularly obviously my target age group which is sort of teenagers and women in their twenties so that might be quite an interesting avenue to go down so we'll see what happens with the book and hopefully that will be a possibility.

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*So do you know if there are really big forums for example on the Internet for this target group and this interest?*

Yes I'm, in fact, I'm just setting up a forum on my own website at the moment where the website's recently gone live and I'm going to have a blog and a forum so that, you know, people can go on and chat about the subjects discussed in the book and also just spirituality in general it would be nice for people to go on and, you know, put their opinions or perhaps say which crystal really works for them or any meditation exercises or hints and tips so it's hopefully a good forum for people to go on and just chat amongst themselves and share ideas so in fact I need to start ... I need to get all that finalized so I need to, I think, focus on my website definitely.

*Thank you very much. I hope you've enjoyed this interview today.*

Oh thank you, it's been wonderful. I've really enjoyed talking to you, thank you.

*Lovely, thank you.*