

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION INTO THE
PSYCHOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION
INTERPRETED AS 'SPIRITUAL
AWAKENING':
POSSIBLE CAUSES, CHARACTERISTICS,
AND AFTER-EFFECTS**

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Appendix 4: Transcripts of Interviews with Participants

Interview Transcript – P1

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yes, it happened after a terrible breakup with my last girlfriend, and I was for the first time in my life thinking of giving up fighting for getting better from my deep depression.

It was a sudden, and in fact brutal transformation induced in a sort of therapy session. Before this I was a mentally almost totally broken person with a history of seven years of very bad psychological health, doomed by the doctors and psychotherapists to a life on medicals for depressions and no work at all for the rest of my life, 43 years old.

My life has been nothing but a great mystical adventure since the transformation, and every day is a blessing. All kind of negative feelings have almost totally disappeared and I'm afraid of nothing. I'm sure that you understand that the journey has not been totally straight forward and easy all the time, there has been a lot of reactions from the persons around me, and the initial period (six to seven months) of total bliss in a 'nirvana state' was very difficult for me as well for the people around me.

The things that happened to me in this first period (six to seven months) was in many ways extreme both physical and psychological, and even after that, when it declined a bit, strange things continued to happen and still do. At first it was things like no hunger (lost about 18 kg in 21 days), no sweating, a feeling that the time stood almost still and that I was immortal. I danced alone for hours without music, music and art appeared as made by angels. I felt almost no cold or heat, I understood everything that happened and had happened to me and others (sometimes even before it happened), experienced extreme flow /synchronicity and many, many other things that you only can see in sci-fi- and/or horror movies.

Another very important thing that happened was that I was forced to face all dark sides in me (and in all other human beings), and to integrate this to a point where I could see both God and the Devil in me, knowing that it is up to me to choose side. Since this moment I understand that good and evil is two sides of the same coin. From then nothing that is related

to what people think or do surprises me or scares me. I can almost feel other people's bad feelings, and always with great compassion.

Today all this has declined a bit, and I don't think that is so strange or scaring any more. I have now developed a deep integrated understanding for the things that have happened, and I don't talk about what has happened to people who don't ask for help or advice. I have learned by the years that other people normally can't understand what I have experienced, and that you never should give advice to people who don't ask for it. If you do you interfere with the natural flow and the predetermined evolutionary process.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

No, not at all. I was almost an agnostic and I thought that everything in my life had to be decided by others and it was nothing I could do about that.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Totally, since the transformation I control almost everything in my life by my choices. I am almost fearless but not careless and I have a very strong self-reliability.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Very much. I don't want or need material things anymore, even though I can enjoy buying some technical and practical things from time to time, but just because I can easily afford it, not for getting 'satisfaction' as before. Today I'm working more than ever, in fact I have three jobs and a very good income (that I don't want or need any more).

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes, today I can easily establish strong and intense relationships with other people, but I only do that with people that I choose.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Extremely. I'm deeply in love with all human beings in the universe and love to be with other people, but even more I love to be totally alone with myself, doing absolutely nothing, and the most fantastic thing is that it can be anywhere in the world and in all kind of situations.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Absolutely, I have learnt to open my heart just by thinking that I am doing that, and then my heart aches in empathy and compassion for all living things, and it's a lovely feeling and in fact not sad at all, just pure love and strong feeling that love conquers all.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

Yes, I have a strong feeling of understanding for the things people think, feel and do, and that I am directly connected to everything else in the universe, in oneness.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

Mostly I identify myself to the whole human race, but Buddhism also attracts me in some ways.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

No, never. My mind is calm in all situations even though I sometimes can find myself thinking without being aware of it, but it immediately stops when I become aware of it. I can also totally empty my mind just by thinking that I want to do that, and it's the same with many other feelings like love, sex, anger, hunger, cold etc. I can control these feelings in a high degree by mentally 'switching' them on and off, and they almost never affect me in a unwanted way besides when I'm exhausted or very drunk.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes indeed, I'm not afraid of dying anymore and I can't even think of death as something negative. It's just a passing to another state where the soul separates from the body and unites with the universal soul.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes, today I know it by heart, by on some level I have known it since the shifting.

Interview Transcript – P2

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

My 3 experiences followed extreme distress/turmoil based on not being able to help people I cared about. The first experience took place in 2002 and was so out-of-the-blue that apart from 3 people to support me through the 2/3 weeks of unusualness I never said anything to anyone. It was overwhelming although powerful, pure and beautiful in the connectedness but I didn't really understand what was happening at all - it was as though a veil was lifted and time didn't mean anything in the normal sense. The first experience left some psychic/spiritual guidance residual effects. I inadvertently channelled somebody – one time with my sister I channelled our dead father. I could actually hear spiritual guidance, like someone who was psychic. I could be with my sisters and my close friend and they could ask me something but if I could quieten my mind and tried not to think I could actually hear spiritual guidance or wisdom coming through – not me thinking, it was just coming into my consciousness.

The first experience happened as a result of working in a job where I was being bullied by a colleague whom I cared about but who was quite unbalanced. We had a disagreement which resulted in a very uneasy atmosphere at work and her being distressed. I felt upset about her and wanted to be able to help her. Then the spiritual awakening experience began.

I experienced very strange highs - for example, I felt a very heightened awareness, to the point where I was very conscious of every sound and everyone's expression. I felt a real sense of connection, to something a bigger, an energy beyond the normal everyday environment.

Whenever I met this person at my workplace I felt physically sick and very unwell. A colleague who worked with me was into spiritual books and understood. She reassured me, looked after me.

I was in a strange state where I felt I was looking at newspapers or books and I felt like words were jumping out of the page. I felt drawn to particular words. It was almost like I was totally

aware of myself. I had no mental breakdown, no drugs or alcohol. I had the sense of another dimension, another kind of world. In one sense I knew where I was but I had almost like gone through the veil, a doorway to something else, something very intense, very powerful - not scary at all but something that I couldn't control. I just had to go with it. It went on for two and a half weeks.

I couldn't sleep, I had non-stop thoughts. I didn't understand at all what was going on. I had no concepts to help me understand it. Something was happening which felt very strong spiritually but I didn't know what was going to happen at the end of it. Luckily my sisters were keeping an eye on me. I think they thought I was going through a breakdown.

We had a cat and she sensed something because she had actually pooped on the bed, which she had never done before. Another day I came home and our cat had urinated on one of the chairs in the sitting room and the wee was in the shape of a bowl. The cat was so agitated - she sensed something.

Once the whole experience stopped I was left with a feeling that there is something bigger which we don't have a clue about. Once it had passed my mind was really quiet. After that all I did was carry on with my life - I'd been interested in quite a few books in the past and it ignited an interest in spiritual books.

In 2007 my older sister became very ill. This was particularly bad because she came to stay with me and my partner and it was the first time my partner had seen the seriousness of her mental health. Once she got home the trauma of the recent events hit me very hard and as a result the same pattern of the spiritual/psychic awakening happened again. I felt very connected, very calm, very safe but really like we're all one, that there was nothing to ever worry about because the spirit would always live on.

The second time I wasn't so overwhelmed as it followed the same pattern as the first time and I just went with the process. I felt compelled to read certain books. Words would pop out of newspapers, billboards, shop signs etc again. I bought things that I felt compelled to. There seemed to be a significance to everything. But after 2/3 weeks the experience died down slowly.

Unfortunately between and the 2 and 3rd incident I was diagnosed with cancer. I didn't have any kind of psychic or spiritual happening when I went through my diagnoses and treatment but I felt very accepting of my illness and very very grateful to be alive. The feeling that I believed in something bigger helped me get through.

The third spiritual experience happened this year – February 2011. The same older sister fell seriously ill again and I was rushing back and forth to hospital, I couldn't cope in the way I had in the past because I get tired a lot more now because of my cancer treatment.

I felt that same very intense pattern like the previous two occasions; suddenly I felt very connected to something strong and beautiful and spiritual. The experience was fast and relentless - words popping into my head, guidance, synchronicity, serenity, a powerful connected feeling that all is one. Overall, the experience was full of grace and powerful, peaceful and beautiful but also very tiring!

The difference on the third occasion was that I realised it was the same pattern and I thought 'I've got to write it down.' I wrote down whatever was coming into my head I filled up notebooks – I hardly slept. After two or three weeks it came to a stop.

So now I'm at the stage where I'm just about to start a new job. I've got my notebooks and I've started to work through them. I want to try to make sense of them. It's a kind of never-ending story – a spiritual signpost.

It no longer feels right to pursue a job where I cannot include my beliefs regarding healing, spiritual evolvment etc to the greater good. I left my last job as a PA to a Professor at Christmas so I could have some time-out before finding a part-time job.

Everything that happens has a meaning to it. There's a link to something else. Nothing happens in isolation. It's very beautiful but also a big thing to try to understand. I don't have the right words to try to explain the enormity of it.

I believe that a lot of people who have mental problems, are going through spiritual awakenings. They have no education or framework of reference so they end up feeling freaked out.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

Only insofar we came from a very strict Greek-Cypriot upbringing so religion was very strict, but not spirituality. But I was also interested in the meaning of life I was also reading popular psychological and self development but the spirituality side didn't kick in until the first experience.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

There's a great sense of awareness and calmness, a greater feeling of the spiritual.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Yes, although I was never a materialistic person but I feel that less is more, it's a minimalistic thing. Before I would have worried more about not having money and not having a job. But now I don't worry. I have real faith that the universe will put me in the right place.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes, I do. I feel that I try much harder to step back and almost watch myself when I'm with other people, a detachment but not in an uncaring way. I used to want to help other people, but now I have a better understanding that we're each on our path and sometimes one's worries and illness are part of the path and it's not up to me to interfere.

I was always patient but now I'm far more tolerant. I've always felt that you shouldn't judge people. I'm very conscious of that. I'm more careful of what I say to and do.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Oh yes. There's a gratitude in just being well enough and alive to stare out of the window and look at a tree. It's lovely. I never feel bored.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Yes very much so.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

When I was going through the experience I felt it very strongly, very intensely. Now I know it's there and once in a while I can feel it. I feel very connected to nature, and with animals. I feel a very strong spiritual connection when I'm with people who I care about.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I would identify myself as being holistic. I am very drawn to the Buddhism philosophy too. I don't feel defined by my previous jobs as a PA/Secretary. I might have relationships with people but it's more than just being a human being, it's being a spiritual being. I don't need labels. I don't feel the need to have expensive clothes or car or jewellery because that doesn't define who I am. The essence of me is something purer than that and something indefinable.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

No. My mind isn't busy at all. It's so calm and still it's absolutely wonderful. Sometimes I just sit and I wish everyone could have a quiet mind. When I see people getting impatient in a queue I think 'I wish you could have that quietness.'

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I've never been scared of death, although it bothered me as a child. As I got older it's never frightened me, probably because a lot of close relatives have died. The only thing is that I suppose I just feel that I wish other people weren't so scared of death. It's a joyful dimension.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes, in so far as I feel calm and very grateful and very aware and I have a greater understanding. I feel like a different person.

Interview Transcript – P3

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It's been a lifelong gradual process. Transformation is such a big word, enlightenment is such a big word. My experience has been profound but really really simple, a stepping over the threshold from being untransformed to being transformed. It's something that I've been observing since I was a kid. But I would say that the main process of transformation has happened within the last two years

Q: Did you have spiritual experiences as a child?

I had some really unusual experiences, usually when I was by myself, of being a tiny part of something very very big. Visually it was like being a tiny speck that was being held on top of a giant finger. It felt like I was part of that finger but also slightly detached. I had that experience a lot, of being very very small in a big space, usually when I was very relaxed. A really pleasant experience, a very connected experience. It felt very natural and really good.

Q: How often did you have the experience?

It was a regular experience from being about 4 or 5, right through until just before my pre-teens. I never talked about it to my parents because it didn't feel like it was something I had to talk about. I never discussed it with anyone.

Q: Did you continue having spiritual experiences as an adult?

Certainly. I got interested in psychedelic drugs, a journey of wanting to push my consciousness to its limits. I had some profound experience using psychoactive drugs. I used them as a tool, a way of finding out what was going on.

Q: So what is the process of transformation over the last two years?

About five years ago I had an experience when I became seriously ill. My appendix burst. I was taken into hospital and operated on and I picked up a bug and almost died. It made me more aware of what was going on and the things that I was doing and I decided to have a bit

of a change, which led me to different career choices. I left behind a well paid job in local government and started training in hypnotherapy.

I helped out with my wife's business too but found it was in a bad way, and to cut a long short, we lost everything bar the house. It wiped us out financially. We had to go into massive debt management. It was a really dark moment in my adult life. I thought I was going to have to give up my training. I started losing it, got really really super depressed.

I was looking round trying to cling on to an idea and I came across a book by John Parkin called *Fuck it*. I sat down and read it in a couple of sittings and it was like being reintroduced to Taoism. It reconnected me with Taoism and was a really nice experience. I realised that I was doing all the things I shouldn't do, becoming really attached to stuff, viewing too much meaning into what's going on. I needed to step back, so I did.

Then there was a lovely synchronistic experience when I won a competition at the back of the book, a week at the retreat that the author ran in Italy. It was just a lovely experience that we would never have been able to afford ourselves, and when I got back I felt great. It reintroduced me to writers like Eckhart Tolle – I don't think I got it ten years ago but this time I did. The real awakening was just starting to utilise the idea of being present more and developing a really good sense of presence. Over the last 18 months as I've practised being more present, and not having such a strong relationship with my thoughts, my overall experience of being here right now has been brilliant. I have loads more energy and am excited about everything I do, but not completely attached to it. I don't live in a world where I'm hugging trees and not doing anything. I'm superactive and I've found that it's a massively enriching experience. I've had an amazing shift in my life.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

One of the big problems I had when my wife's business was going under was that I was really embarrassed about the fact that we were having to go into debt management. I just felt terrible. I put myself through months of anguish, because of this construction of how I perceived my ego. It was mad really – I was so depressed I was given anti-depressants. But now I really don't care. There are some things we can't do. We live completely within our means and I'm really really alright about it. What it means is that our lives have opened up to

a lot of new experiences. What does having a lot of material things matter if someone is unhappy?

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Certainly my relationship with my children – when I’m with them I’m present. Likewise with my wife. My relationships have broadened out. They’re not quite as intense with my close circle of friends but they have broadened. I seem to have a lot more interesting relationships with people I don’t know very well – really nice communication.

Q: Are you happy doing nothing?

Yes I love it. It’s a balance. I meditate - I practise mindfulness. I find that I love being by myself. We live right on the edge of the Peak District and the Pennines, close to nature. I love getting out there with my kids and by myself. I love having moments when there’s nothing to do.

Q: Would you say that you have a busy or quiet mind?

One of my big qualms about self-development is that it promotes the idea of quick fixes. I think we’re really process driven and the one I follow is one of disengaging thought and observing thoughts and thinking ‘Where’s that coming from?’ And not being judgemental about it but just stepping away from it. But over the last 18 months I exist a lot more comfortably and a lot more harmoniously with not having so much mind-chatter and I find it now really easy if stuff does come up and I perceive it as not helpful. And I find more that unhelpful thoughts don’t arise so much.

Q: Would you say you have an enhanced perception of beauty?

Absolutely, but it doesn’t have to be countryside. I see it everywhere. One of the unusual things I’ve experienced is if I’m around a lot of people - for example, last week I was working with a large group of people...One of the things that I really like about being in large groups of people is that I feel totally connected to the group, not just on a spiritual level but in terms of recognising them. I spent 20 minutes looking around the room and everyone

looked really familiar. I'd certainly not met any of them before but there was some kind of visual recognition. I recognised something in everybody I looked at.

Q: Do you feel a strong sense of purpose?

Not necessarily. It's allowed me to actually not be afraid of trying stuff out, to step away and stop being fearful of rejection or failure. But I think that my purpose is just to exist and try to bring up three children as well as I can.

Q: Has your perception of death changed?

5 years ago I was laid up in a hospital, plugged up to a load of monitors, being told it was touch and go. I was shitting myself. It was one of the worst experiences I've ever had – part of it was the fear for my two boys. I knew my wife would get on with it but my biggest concern was how the boys would cope. I didn't want to die. But since then I really don't have any particular fear of it. I feel very calm about it. There are times I would quite be willing to accept it if I was told my death was to come, even though I don't want to die just yet.

Q: Does it feel like a permanent transformation?

It does actually. It feels really good I can't see it changing in the distant future. I'm aware that at some point something is going to happen which will test it – probably something along the lines of death of a family member or friend. About 11 years ago when I first started reading about Taoism it gave me a similar experience. It bizarrely coincided with my mother becoming really ill – we thought she was going to die and it made the experience really different. Being with her – just me and her – I thought whatever happens here, everything will be alright. I felt a real sense of calmness – I felt I was having an enlightened moment. At some point to come – it might be tomorrow – it may be tested.

My impression was that enlightenment took place and you'd turn into Buddhist and you'd be levitating across the globe. It's not like that, it's something that's a lot more real. It's been and continues to be a really interesting experience that I'm enjoying but am not too attached to, because it feels like a very natural state.

Interview Transcript – P4

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation? Sudden

I would say that all through my life I've felt frequent awakening experiences, but it was in September last year that I felt a real permanent shift.

When I was a child it was that connection with nature, the clarity of being part of it. I grew up feeling that way because I grew up in the countryside and I spent all my time outside. It could just be because that was my environment. Later I started on a more structured deliberate spiritual way of life that really began when I was introduced to Reiki three or four years ago. I've had some experiences through that side of things.

As a child it was with me all the time to a level and every now and again there would be a more intense experience of it. We grew up in a religious family from the age of about 5 to 16. But even then when I was little I never believed in God in a traditional way. God to me is spirit, everything, the connection between every living thing on the planet, and in other worlds, other dimensions.

Q: What happened in September last year?

It was when my father died. We'd been in the hospital with him for about 24 hours and it was actually just as he passed. I was sat beside him and just at the moment that he passed there was a huge golden bright light, circular, it seemed to be from the solar plexus and it seemed to be suddenly there and it was spinning round and round. And that developed and grew brighter, and moved through my body and filled my body. There was a flood of joy right through me. It felt like something that was already in me. When I think about it now I can feel traces of it. It was just a sensation of pure absolute joy. It just overwhelmed me and it stayed for about an hour. It didn't leave me until I went outside.

It felt like the most amazing thing. I found it difficult to reconcile what he was. I think if I didn't talk myself out of it, how long would it have stayed? I felt the need to categorise what it was, whereas I think it was an insight into what is really our lives.

Q: In what way has your outlook and attitude changed?

Something inside me has changed in the way that I don't worry about anything – I know everything's okay. There is some much more. This is just something that I've chosen to experience – it's just a small part of what else is there. The full-time job I have is a temporary contract in the local government. I don't know from one day to the next if I'm going to have a job but it doesn't worry me. I feel a huge sense of peace.

Q: Have you experienced a change in perception too?

I feel that I always felt that things are more beautiful. I like to sit and look at the stars and yes, quite often when I have quiet time it takes on a kind of intensity. But I always felt that to a degree.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

No I never have been interested in material things, so there is no change.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I would say that it has changed. Because the people I work with on a day job, I used to feel before that... To me that's a job to pay the mortgage. I don't get a lot of fulfilment from it, not that I don't enjoy it. But I used to find it difficult to be in that environment because people can be quite cynical and negative. But since September I kind of feel more of a connection. I kind of see past that...

Q: So you feel a sense of empathy with them?

I would say so. Before I would empathise with the people who share my experiences but that's quite distinct from the people I work with. I feel a lot more empathy with them. The strongest thing from having that experience is that I feel a permanent connection to spirit. I feel that connection is permanently with me and it's inside me. It's not something I have to look for, it's inside me all the time.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I am. When I have quiet time I can take myself back to that sensation. The other night when I went to bed and couldn't sleep I started a visualisation. I fell asleep and woke up with the same sort of clarity of everything that's possible, that anything is possible.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

I used to have the chatter a lot but since then it has really quietened down. I suppose I was used to operating at a high stress level, mainly because I have a full time day job and a part-time one at weekends, and I have small scale business as a Reiki healer. I used to have a lot of mind chatter about where I was meant to be. But that's really quietened down.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes, it has changed. I actually never thought that death is more than an end to the physical body. When my grandparents died I wasn't upset because I didn't think there was an end. The same when my father died. I didn't feel that was the end of his energy. That's how I feel about my own death. I used to worry about it, about how I would die. But now I don't worry. It's nothing something to look forward to, it's just another step on

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's kind of raised me up a level if you like. It's really a building block for me to move from

Interview Transcript – P5

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

This was a process most obviously in response to a big, fat midlife crisis (about age 41), during which my marriage nearly broke up. Professional failure was a factor. We moved here for my wife's teaching job. As an English PhD I taught low-level college courses half-time for 19 years before I retired. In the 80s I published two novels and later a memoir, among many rejections, all worst-sellers. It was if the cosmos was saying, very gently, 'Relinquish attachment to outcomes, or else.' I was invited to become detached by outcomes. I never had any big cosmic visions, never had a face-to-face teacher. I didn't have any conscious interest in spirituality before then.

It was very gradual and gentle. A process, not a violent experience – I just started reading and contemplating. The break was the point at which forgiveness just ceased to be an issue at all.

Meditation was a factor. It was scattered at first, then an intensive 3.5 year period using a 7-level set of discs 'Awaking from Dreamtime' supposed to open energy through each chakra in turn. I don't know how much of a factor that was aside from meditation itself. I have no formal practice now. I live a pretty meditative life in nature, with the words and the water, especially fishing in running water. Relative social isolation

I now live a very surrendered life. I have no further ambitions. At this point there is nowhere to go. Service is a part of my life. I participated in raising three grown sons, now aiding my wife though early/mid-course Parkinson's.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I see life as a dream (a lucid dream, from here), and my own life as a fiction, the stupefyingly boring, to an outsider, 'Ed Show.' Below that, Who am I? Just am. That's about it. None of that obviates the need for right action, of course, since sweet dreams are so much nicer than nightmares. The Great Chain, or as Wilber puts it Nest of Being—Spirit-as-Matter, Spirit-as-Life, Spirit-as-Mind, Spirit-as-Soul, Spirit-as-Spirit--sounds about right to me.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Not so very much. I had never had much interest in material things, although it definitely grew weaker. I do like high-quality fly rods, but I'm only interested in material things for a purpose.

Q: What other changes did the transformation bring?

I was carrying out a longer of anger which exploded into the crisis I was talking about. Back in the day I identified the ego unquestionably. I no longer do so, which is at the heart of the transformation. I suffered from depression and anger – then reconciliation was a slow process of healing.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I would say that given the current state of human evolution, the most destructive people are simply playing parts which can't help but be played (not to condone destructive action). Or if we're all in Earth School and I happen to be a grad student, why would I look down on someone who happens to be in 3rd grade? Though ideally that someone would not, as so often happens in American politics, be running the show. I have no enemies, never have had, can't even imagine what an enemy would be. Anyone can drift into the orbit of a destructive individual, of course, and that can raise an ego storm, but the baseline remains: that we'd just danced a few steps of the cosmic dance together. Forgiveness is not an issue—nothing to forgive. Or it would be like forgiving my teeth for biting my tongue, or Claudius for being such an SOB in Hamlet.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Sure. I hang out with the dogs a lot.

Q: Do you find that a lot of thoughts run through your mind when you're not busy?

Not nearly as many as before. Anyway, they're just thoughts—clouds drifting by. The point would be to let them drift; not invest life-force in them.

Q: What do you think are the most important goals in your life?

I don't have any. I have preferences.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I don't identify consciousness with form, or 'I' with 'Ed.' That said, if I got a terminal diagnosis I'd probably get completely hysterical, just like everybody else. My assumption though is that I'd then return to baseline fairly quickly. By the way, see a great book on that by transpersonal psychologist/hospice nurse Kathleen Singh, *The Grace in Dying*.

Q: After the transformation, did you make any changes to your lifestyle e.g. your hobbies, your job or career?

Nothing obvious—I retired a few years ago; perhaps more than before, I get out in the woods and on the water at every opportunity. If by some chance this is my last time around on this sweet earth, total immersion is best.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Well, define 'permanent.' I can't imagine returning from 'Just am' to 'I am this, that, the other.' Of course brain damage can break down the visible personality in a hurry, but I don't think that speaks to anything fundamental.

As a final note, I don't take credit for any of this. To whatever degree I might be called 'enlightened' (and I hope I've made it clear that I'm as subject to ego storms as anyone; they just tend to clear out more quickly, and I'm aware enough of what they are that they're less—I'll say not—destructive to others)—I don't think you get that way unless you enter a given incarnation poised for lift-off; born on third base. Please take this as meant, as whimsy: I sometimes feel that in a previous life I was a hotshot guru beset, however, with the sin of pride, resulting in malfeasance of no doubt the typical varieties, and reaped therefore karmic 'penance': a life, this one, of humble anonymity . . .

Q: How do you identify yourself? Do you feel an all-encompassing empathy?

Sure – I'm a citizen of the cosmos. I don't have any sense of regional or political identity – and around where I live a lot of people do.

Interview Transcript – P6

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

My transformation has been a gradual one, and is still in progress today. Although there was a turning point which was brought on by emotional suffering. I was 18 or 19 at the time. I wasn't happy at all. You could say I was depressed. I had crashed my car. I hated my job. I hated the way I looked. I was overly ambitious. All I wanted to do was make music for a living. I would spend hours and hours making music in my bedroom, sending demos off left right and centre. I would visualise myself every night on stage performing my music, with thousands of people dancing and enjoying themselves. The thing was, my dreams just weren't happening fast enough for me. I truly saw myself as a victim of life.

On this day I took my two family dogs out to get some fresh air. Something which I did regularly. I would spend ages just looking up at the stars at night and letting my mind wonder. My family thought I was crackers. On this occasion it was about 12 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue. There was a slight cool breeze and the sun was doing its job and sending its rays for free. I let the dogs off the lead and let them run around like a couple of hairy mentalists. It was then that I found myself looking at a tree. Not a special tree - in fact, it was quite a poor example of a tree. But I found myself staring at it. Glued to it. Then something shifted. Like a switch had been turned on. The tree became the most beautiful thing I had ever seen - ever. It shone new colours. But not only that - I became one with the tree. To such an extent that I no longer existed. All that was left existing was everything! I saw the oneness of life. My identity along with all of its insecurities, ambitions, goals, and fears, melted away like ice in the desert. To this, all I could do was laugh. I laughed my arse off for a number of minutes. It was wonderful. Whoever was walking by must've thought I was smoking something.

When I had calmed down and 'come down' a voice in my head said. And it wasn't my voice and it came uninvited - 'See everything as if for the first time.' 'That's it!' I said to myself.

I thought I had been given the secret to life. Or at least a piece of information nobody had. I have 'seen things for the first time' a few times since that first occurrence and every time I'm

filled with awe. What I felt when I looked at that tree, you could say was love. Or God.

That experience has opened me up to many many more awakening experiences. At that time I was just getting interested in philosophy, astrology, meditation, Buddhism and self observation - and also Chinese Gung Fu. I was about 18/19 years old. What I experienced was a complete one-ness with everything, which resulted in my suffering dissolving, along with my identity. This opened up a can of worms because I had to find out what I had experienced and nobody I knew had the slightest clue what I was talking about. Previous to this I used to like sitting by myself. I used to lie on my bed doing nothing. I used to gaze up at the night sky and let my mind wander. I think it was that inkling to stare, to look, to observe, mixed with my intense feelings that caused this spiritual awakening to occur.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

From the age of six I've been fascinated by the paranormal. I can remember going to the library in Junior school and getting a non-fiction book on ghostly encounters whilst the rest of my class got story books and comics. My mum says I started to write ghost stories in front of the TV when I was around this age. I've always had this 'there has to be something other than this' mentality.

So from a young age I was aware that there was more to life than what we can see with the physical eyes. Then came the X-Files and I was hooked. Then came astrology and self-help books, plus philosophy. It was Bruce Lee that got me into self awareness and 'spirituality' as we know it (Zen, Buddhism, Taoism). I must've been around 18 or 19, around the same age I had the experience on the hill.

Q: Were you doing meditation or any kind of spiritual practice when you had the experience on the hill when you were 19?

Yes. I started to love being by myself. I used to lay on my bed in silence, much to my dad's

confusion. I can remember turning off my bedroom light, lighting a candle and just staring at it for ages. I used to use incense a lot too. As mentioned above I've been into the paranormal since a young age.

Q: And did you have any psychic experiences then, or since then?

Yes. I can confidently say (and I know how this sounds unless you've experienced it subjectively) that my deceased granddad visited me in my sleep. He looked incredibly well and happy. He was surrounded by this amazing light. It was like a room of golden light; no walls, no boundaries. He opened his arms and I went closer to him. He hugged me and he told me he loved me and said not to smoke. I awoke with a smile on my face.

I've had many experiences with regards intuition. Sometimes hearing a voice, but usually it's seeing images projected on my mind's eye. The images are always correct. Just last week Alison and I went to the garden centre, just to stock up on bird food, the little buggers eat a lot. And as soon as we walked in I had a feeling I would see Joan, a volunteer at the hospice. I didn't give it a second thought. Just as we were heading towards the checkouts, there she was!

Q: Did you have a religious upbringing?

I didn't have a religious upbringing. My mum would watch Songs of Praise, that would be as religious as we got.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I've acquired this thirst for knowledge. My initial experience left me with the message, 'See things as if for the first time.' From then on this is what I've practised, among other things. Before my experience I hardly read books. Now I'm to the point of obsessed. I started to ask questions. Who am I? What/who is God? Does he/she exist? What is death? Is there something after death? Do I have a purpose? The moment when I realised I was God and my purpose was to be, was a fantastic realisation - I can remember, I was driving home from work and it just hit me. The person I thought I was is an illusion. Brilliant. But to see this in every moment is very hard to do. My journey so far has made me see how miraculous every

moment is, how wonderfully perfect the whole universe is, that there is no such thing as accidents, how everything is as it is and it always will be. My experience has led me to inner contentment and an intensification of gratitude; to be filled with awe when I see a flower, a cloud, a bird, a person. But - this involves effort on my behalf. It's almost like an 'Awakening Switch'. The more I practise turning it on the easier it gets and the longer the experience is.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed? (Less interest)

Without a doubt. I went from 'I need things to make me happy', to 'Things aren't all that important'. Through self observation I saw that material possessions didn't fill the gap within. What did fill the gap? Knowing that the gap didn't need to be filled. The gap disappeared when I was content with what was. It amazes me how people go through their whole lives clinging to their possessions, protecting them, falling out with people over them. I was 17 when my first car got stolen from outside my parents' home. My dad came bursting into my room asking where my car was. I told him it was outside. He woke me up so I was very tired and trying to figure out what was going on. He opened my blinds and pointed to the space where I had left it. He said it must've been stolen. I got up, looked outside and said, 'Yup, it's been stolen. OK.' I think my reaction wound him up more than the committed crime. I just couldn't see what the fuss was over. It had been stolen and that was that.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I think I'm much more open and honest with people - sometimes to their dismay. I want to help people with their own suffering and also, sometimes to *my* dismay, share my views and opinions where I shouldn't. I have tried to change people in the past and this causes friction, not only between myself and them but also within myself. I don't take life as seriously as I did and I think this helps my relationships as I'm more relaxed and less anxious.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Doing nothing is still doing something, and it is one of my favourite things to do - to be. I find it to be a solitary activity because, unless it's an organised group, the majority of people find it hard to be in the company of others and do nothing. We think we have to fill the silence with nonsense chit chatter because silences are awkward.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

This is similar to the 'Awakening Switch' I mentioned before. When I put in the effort to see the beauty all around me, to be one with everything where no thing exists, to see everything as if for the first and last time then compassion organically arises, but not only that, love arises. I looked at a woman on my walk the other day and I saw her as myself. I saw her as the formless wonder behind the physical form that she thinks she is. I was instantly filled with love (which is God, in my eyes) and I wanted to cry and hug her, but I didn't. What a feeling though. So to me, love is always present but is covered with layers of fictional dramas, egoic tendencies and mental noise.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc

I really don't know. None of the above. I don't even salute the British flag as I see it as causing divisions. When you've experienced one-ness all labels seem silly.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Yes. But I (again, with effort) turn my attention to my breath or the movement of my body or the aliveness of the moment and watch thought-chatter quieten into the background. Then observation and the input of the other senses seem to absorb more energy than inner noise.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes, but I think this is due to my interest in what lies beyond the point of death. I looked at a tree last year and instantly saw that I was the nameless witness witnessing what was, and I just knew that that was what never dies. 'That's me' I can remember saying and laughing.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Permanent in the sense that I know that with effort I can bring about feelings of joy, contentment, gratitude and awe. The feeling of one-ness (that brings with it the ultimate experience of love) involves the most effort, I find. I completely understand how sermons in the past have been about observing the mystery and beauty of a flower, or hearing a bird sing. Words just seem to get in the way when it comes to this spirituality malarkey, but most of us need them to show us the way. As long as we don't get lost in them we should be fine. Back to the question; I can't see myself suddenly wanting to become a 'top businessman', obsessed with possessions and becoming numb to the beauty around me. I still suffer but it doesn't last long. After something has happened - some kind of conflict - we enter what I like to call 'Recovery Time'. This is how long it takes us to get over the event and to stop reliving it. To be aware of the Recovery Time is the first stage. Then with practise you watch it get shorter and shorter, until there comes a time when you've got it down to a few minutes, seconds. Then even better, as soon as it's happened you let it go.

Interview Transcript – P7

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

In my case it was much more gradual, working on it for many years. The insights had been growing and I'd got an intellectual understanding of what I was seeking. I'd read all the books and got all the language and the belief systems. But it was the events of 10 years ago which gave me the final push which helped me realise the truth of everything I'd been reading.

In March 2000 my wife Jean was diagnosed with advanced and untreatable lung cancer. By September she was dependent on oxygen and couldn't walk more than a few steps without becoming breathless. We knew there was little time left but she wanted to live to see another Christmas with our son Gareth, who was then 17 years old.

On 22nd October Gareth went out in a car driven by a friend to travel to Lewes for a half-term party. On the way the car spun out of control, rolled over and hit a tree. Both boys were killed instantly.

The news produced an understandable decline in Jean's condition, and on the day of Gareth's funeral she was too ill to attend. Later that night she died at home in my arms. I had to arrange two funerals within a month, and operated on 'automatic pilot', simply doing what had to be done each day, registering the deaths, organising the funeral directors, putting notices in the paper, sending letters, fending off the press, etc.

I became very familiar with grief and loss. Almost overnight I had lost two important roles in my life: I had been a husband for 22 years and a father for 17 years. The sense of who I was had been stripped away, and I was left staring at emptiness. I recognised that grief is mostly self-pity, a very distasteful emotion. I also recognised the truth of impermanence and change. There were tears and pain, of course, but I knew that if I turned towards the feelings of emptiness and despair and explored them, rather than resisting them, I would be able to move on. Within the emptiness there was a stillness that somehow reassured me that 'all was well'.

These events pulled me up short. It was a trigger, stopping me in my tracks, forcing me to take stock of my life. I was no longer a husband, no longer a father, I haven't got a job. What does it mean?

I could see through much more easily the illusion of separateness. All those years I'd been looking for a pair of glasses which I was already seeing out of. The idea that all was one had been an intellectual concept, but now it's become real. It's what it is. I can't imagine not seeing it now.

So there was no single life-changing experience. It was a steady gradual development which came to a head with those deaths ten years ago. It shattered the thin shell of my ego. It sounds mad but it's the best thing that happened to me

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I did practise meditation since being a teenager, starting with TM in the 70s. I was working in London and got involved in the Buddhist society there. I went to retreats. I became interested in the applications of mediation and mindfulness. I currently teach mindfulness to medical students and health professionals. In recent years, the last 10 or 20 years I haven't had a regular meditation practice. I see the whole day as a meditation. Meditation is simply being aware of the present. I try to meditate all the time I'm awake.

As a child and teenager I felt a sense of general unease as a child, a sense of not really belonging. I didn't feel comfortable in my skin, having to be a person. It was only when I read Krishnamurti in the library when I was about 16 that it changed. I sat down and read a few paragraphs and I felt as if I was being electrocuted. It's a very strange sensation, almost a shock of recognition. It just resonated so strongly with me.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Life has become a lot easier. I'm able to live more in the present moment and value that. Attachments that I had before have been loosed a great deal. Worries about money, about

future work, about relationships, have lost their strength. I can see through the illusion of separateness. Now everything that comes along is okay. I can say yes to life whatever it brings whereas before I used to have conditions.

Thoughts still arise and feelings - sensations like pain and discomfort come and go. But I can see through them much more easily now. I'm happy to sit back and watch those thoughts and feelings come and go.

It gives me a sense of ease. Life just seems easy. There are still problems; it's not a state of bliss. Moods come and go. But I can see it, I'm aware of it. I can let it go. There's a sense of appreciation of the simple things - a simple cup of tea, looking out of the window, the sunshine on the leaves, the wonderful green of the trees. I never bothered to pay much attention in the past. I'm struck by how fresh everything seems, how wonderful it is to be here at all. There's a sense of wonder, like a young child - I've got it back. I can appreciate just walking out the front door, feeling the wind on my face.

I didn't have any ambition anymore - that all slipped away. I wasn't worried anymore about how I appear to colleagues, about publishing articles. One day I might write a book, but there doesn't seem to be any urgency.

Did you have any psychiatric difficulties - any disturbances - following your shift ten years ago?

I was fortunate that I had a frame of reference, an intellectual one. I could understand it all very clearly, from my background in Buddhism and the idea of impermanence. So I didn't have a crisis about my own mental health

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed? Less materialistic

Oh yes. It was changing anyway but it accelerated over the last 10 years. I'd be quite happy to empty my house, to live as simply as I could. All I need is a bed and a chair. I like my books and my music but apart from that, nothing. I reduced my hours of work at the university and I've freed myself from a lot of admin and course leadership.

Yes, I still enjoy nice things – a nice bottle of wine, a nice meal, but I don't have any anxieties or real desires that bother me anymore.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes. I think it just feels warmer and more comfortable from my side. I don't now how they see me, but from my side there is less possibility of friction or disagreement or conflict. Things that might have annoyed me or irritated me don't affect me at all. I just let it go. I actually do see people as spiritual beings, as forms of energy. When I go into a classroom they're not 20 separate people, they're a mass of bubbling energy which I can try and connect with and share things with. It feels more comfortable because I don't have an ego which I need to protect and defend. Without that worry everything seems a lot easier, so I can be more friendly and relaxed.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes, I'm happy to sit in my garden and just watch the flowers and listen to the birds. I can happily listen to music and read for hours. I am less sociable than I was, not that I was ever party-loving, and am quite content with a simple life. I can relish a simple cup of tea, and marvel at the sheer miracle of being here at all.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

I do. That was something that I'd been reading about over the years. I can be moved to tears just watching the news hearing about people's tragedies. My heart is a little bit more open, more sensitive to the suffering of other people. I feel more inclined to donate to charities. I've been thinking about doing voluntary work.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

Yes but when we describe it we're into dualistic language again. When you describe it you've already separated it. It implies there are two things. It's like the waves on the sea –

we feel that we're all separate waves but we're all water, we're all going to sink back into the sea. We're forms of energy moving through form. The energy is one but its expressions are various.

Time has changed in that it's always now. Everything that I'm aware of arises out of this awareness. The world arises in us. It's also a mystery because we can't describe it.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I do find a lack of identity. People used to ask me 'What do you do?' and I used to have a label ready. Colleagues still have their diplomas and certificates up the wall but I don't. I don't even call myself English, or a male. Everything else seems unimportant. I don't have strong opinions about politics. I don't support a football club anymore – I used to support QPR. Now I just watch football matches and I just think 'I hope they all win.' I enjoy the game for its own sake. A lot of people hang on to these things because they need to identify. We go through life collecting clothes but what it's covering up is nothing. It's the fear of nothing that terrifies the ego. It spends all its time protecting itself from nothing – 'I'm a Christian, a social democrat' - all to avoid looking inside.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Yes - the mind still chatters away – that's part of being human. Someone calculated that we have about 70,000 thoughts a day. So that machine is still there. Sometimes I need to listen to it because I have things which need planning - going shopping, paying the bills. It's a useful machine. I can pay less attention to it now. It's like walking into another room, with the TV playing in the background. I don't have to pay attention to it. Before thoughts that were emotionally charged used to come up and I'd get hijacked by them, taken away on trains of thoughts into the future and the past. I don't do that now; I tend to get less caught up in it now. Moods still occur. Some days I feel happier than others, whether that's physiological I don't know. Sometimes I feel grumpy, but it doesn't last. In the past I might have thought 'I want to be happy, I don't want to be grumpy.' That would just prolong it, it would just feed it. If you don't feed these feelings and thoughts they just float on by.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes. I was never very scared of it anyway. I was familiar with it - as a nurse I've seen plenty of people die. The actual thought of death doesn't hold any fears at all. Like most people I'm a bit concerned about the process of dying, hoping it won't be too painful.

But the thought of death, no. I have to ask myself 'How is this going to die? What is going to die? If it was never born, how could it die?' If I'm part of everything in terms of energy, then the energy called me is just going to transform into another form of energy, which is eternal. In that sense no fear of death at all. I've planned my funeral and it didn't worry me at all. I could die today and not have any fears or regret.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

I can't see it going back; once you've moved on you can't go back – things will never be the same as they were. My worldview has shifted so much I can't imagine it going back to the way it was. Even though moods and feelings come and go, the way I'm viewing life generally, that's permanent.

Interview Transcript – P8

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It was 7 years ago. There were a few things leading up to it. I was a complete sceptic, a militant atheist. I'd been depressed for quite a few years before then, although it was nothing definite. There was just a lot of stress leading up to it. I'd been in a very close relationship with a friend and it had got to the point where it was suffocating and breaking down. I was also drinking quite a lot and taking drugs, living in quite a self-destructive way.

It happened very suddenly, one night. I'd taken ecstasy but only a small amount. I ended up having a proper conversation with my friend. She was great – it was a very deep honest conversation. Suddenly I felt a rush of love, like I was burning up. My whole body was being flooded with light. It was a realising that everything in my life had led up to this point. It got scary when I went to bed. I closed my eyes and I was going to down a portal. I could blue electricity around me. I felt like I was dying.

After that my whole senses opened up and I found everything overwhelming. I was completely blown open too fast. I had no filter. I was so open and so delicate. Whenever I went out it was very chaotic. I was having psychic episodes but I didn't understand them. I could sense other people's thoughts.

I thought I was going bonkers, but I was aware that I was going bonkers, and I had a sense that I needed to work through it, that it would play itself out. It lasted for about two years, before it started to stabilize. I was working in a bookshop at the time but had to stop because I was ill. I was diagnosed with ME. I was too ill to go out.

The past 7 years has been about integrating the old and the new. Over the last three or four years I've reached a more stable state. I've worked through the chaos and I don't feel vulnerable anymore. I feel a lot more peaceful and stable now.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I feel a completely different person. I used to be very cynical and intolerant and judgemental. I was also anxious and neurotic and insecure. I'm a lot more intuitive and in touch with myself, a lot more aware of my own energies. People are so surprised at how sorted I seem. People who knew me in the past can't believe that I'm the same person, they're amazed at how calm and centred I am. Now I'm really happy being me. I used to feel a general anxiety all the time.

I still have psychic experiences sometimes, like pre-cognitive dreams. Sometimes I just know things without knowing why I know them. And sometimes synchronistic things happen.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I was never really materialistic, but I would say that I'm even less interested in material things now. The whole material world sometimes seems like an illusion.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes, a lot more compassion and understanding. If people are behaving in a certain way, I'm aware that there are reasons why they're like that.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes, completely. I'm working hard to be more active. It's really easy for me to do nothing, just be in the moment. Now I feel a sense of urgency – you're not here to float around. This is a phase of integration – I feel that now I'm going to move into a new phase, a more active phase, of trying to engage more with life.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

I feel a desire to help, especially to work with children. Because I trust the universe, it seems like things happen easily for me. I feel like I'm given opportunities, and it's up to me to put

the work in, to realise them. I want to become a healer – I'm training as a reflexologist at the moment.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

Yes, I feel massively connected to my inner self, my higher self, and I struggle when I lose it. And I feel very connected to other people, even though I'm more discerning.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I don't see myself as any of those things, I don't have any sense of identity in that way. I just see myself as this energy. I see all other people in the same way, as expressions of the same energy.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Nowhere near as much as I used to. A lot of the time my mind is very still. Sometimes thoughts pop and disturb me. Thoughts can be very interesting sometimes, when I'm contemplating spiritual matters. But generally my mind is still, which can sometimes make life difficult, when I should be being active. It makes doing things very difficult sometimes. The plus side is that I hardly ever worry about the future or the past. I'm very focused on the present.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Totally. I used to think there was absolutely nothing. I thought people who believed in life after death were idiots. I started having past life memories, and to remember in between my lives, and I remember planning this life, then I realised that there will be life after this. So I'm not afraid of death at all –in fact in some ways I think it's something to look forward to, a kind of liberation.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Definitely. There were times when I wondered if I should be diagnosed with a mental illness and start taking tablets. But now I've worked through all of that – the delusions and instability – and I've come out of it into a much more stable and calmer state that feels permanent. It would be impossible to go back.

Interview Transcript – P9

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

When I was younger I was raised by my mom. My grandpa was a minister, so I grew up in a very religious environment, but the spirituality wasn't attached to their religion. He was a minister but so many things went on in my house. My uncle molested me and I had difficulty getting my mother to believe it. Someone in the church molested me too. I raised my kids away from my family because I wanted to give them a different way of living. I wanted to give them different values.

I've always been spiritual; I always believed in a higher power. I wasn't convinced of the things I was told in the church. I could ride past a place and automatically feel connected to it, and maybe two to three years later I'd end up working there, and the place was so familiar to me. I had awakening experiences – I always felt different but I didn't really know why.

I had problems with alcohol and drugs as a result of being molested and trying to work through that. I grew up in an environment where we didn't talk about what happened, acted like it didn't happen. I got a boyfriend early in high school and got pregnant – in those days you couldn't get back into school when you were pregnant. They had to pay for me to go into another county and put the baby up for adoption. I was a preacher's kid so whatever I couldn't do when I was at home, I did when I left. I partied my butt off. But I was never arrested. I did reefer and smoked and drank. I barmaided for 15 years. When the decision came to get clean, I just knew that I needed to stop. I knew. I just made a decision to go ahead and stop. I started going to AA and NA meetings. That was 21 years ago and I've never relapsed. I went into the program and I surrendered. I had a sponsor – my first sponsor was blind and she had 31 years clean she was always so happy and so grateful – we would do meditation and readings together. She would talk about how beautiful it was that the sun was shining. Her gratitude was the gift that she gave me – to find gratitude to everything.

The biggest turning point was when I got clean because it allowed me to see and to be the person I always wanted to be, to really be in contact with reality – to be grateful to see the

beauty in the world. Being in NA and AA, I still travel and sponsor people, and it's just given me so many instructions and spiritual principles. Surrender and trust in a higher power. I surrendered to the fact that I needed a new way to life. I was not resistant. I try to tell people in the programme that resistance is what makes it difficult.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I live in the present and I know you cannot walk forward into your future and keep your head turned behind you'll stumble and fall. Life is like that. I can't hold on to the past. The past doesn't hurt anymore. I live in my forgiveness – even my uncle who molested me, I forgave him, and I forgave my mother. I'm at peace. I'm free, I don't worry about a thing I don't have anything to worry about. I don't live with stress. Prior to being clean I did it with reefer, but now it's just through being clean.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I've given up my house. I always owned homes but now it's just me. My last house I just put it into bankruptcy. I went out of town for my job and when I came back people had damaged the house. I became eligible to move into senior citizen accommodation, and I have a nice one bedroom apartment. I was leasing cars for 12 years; I had to have a new car every year and I had to work two jobs, sometimes 2 and a half jobs, but I made a decision to put my last new car in bankruptcy. I just don't need a new car every year. I'm debt free. I have one year on my bankruptcy payments.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yeah, because I only work part-time. I'm happy to have the time to just enjoy my situation and see the beauty in life. I'm happy. I don't do a lot of television. I like to read a lot, to do meditation. I travel and speak a lot. I do enjoy my own company, I really do. In the course of all of this, I spent seven years of celibacy purposely, because I wanted to see if I could apply spiritual principles. I didn't want other people to bring baggage in to my life. I spent a year in silence and I really enjoyed it. All in all I spent seven years meditating, fasting, cleansing, the whole nine yards. It opened up the avenue for miracles to happen in my life. It removed all the culture and the chaos and the baggage and other people's stuff. I opened the avenue up

for all the good to come through.

Q: Do you still experience ‘thought-chatter’? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn’t occupied?

My mind is very peaceful. There’s not a lot of clutter in there. There’s always going to be challenges in life; nothing is ever going to perfect. But it’s not what you go through, it’s how you go through it. I don’t view things as bad or difficult. I’m thankful to be alive.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I’ve become more at peace with death. I had a lot death when I was very young, but I believe that death is a part of life. It’s just a transition to a different state.

Q: Do you feel a strong sense of empathy with other people?

I do – I feel a strong sense of compassion. I love people. I love helping people, love encouraging people, love being around people. I don’t like people being around people who don’t encourage my spirituality. I steer clear of negative people.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

I feel it is permanent. And I’ve been able to share it with so many other people. When my daughter found me we stayed on this high. Every time we’re together it’s like ‘oh my god!’ and we always talk about how good we feel. So many things to talk about, so many feelings that we share. The love that my children give me – oh my god, I never thought there was so much love in this world. After 46 years I just want pour it all on her.

Interview Transcript – P10

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

When I was a younger, I was very interested in anything to do with the truth, very inquisitive. I spent so much time developing myself that eventually it turned into a business. I spent years working on myself and eventually other people wanted to know how I could help them with their problems. I achieved quite a bit of awareness but didn't have spiritual experiences. I did have some strange experiences though. For example, once as a kid I saw a mad dog running down the street and I said to myself 'That dog is committing suicide' and the dog ran out into the middle of the road and was ran over. I could see that the dog had had enough and wanted to die. There were a lot of those psychic experiences. I could see ghosts and spirits. I could see names and energies colours coming off people.

When I was 45 the big change happened. You could talk about the external conditions which were happening then – I'd been divorced, my business was failing, I was under a lot of stress. But from a different perspective nothing makes anything happen. Nothing caused it because nothing happened.

In 2003/4 I started crying a lot for no apparent reason. Things began to stop and slow down. And along with that came this realisation that the quieter things got, the more stillness I experienced, the more peace I experienced, the more my mind started to disappear. Then in 2005 when I was working at home, I began to cry again. That led to a sensation of pins and needles through my arms and legs – at which point I thought I was having a heart attack or stroke. And while I was going through this terrifying mental process of the fear of death and non-existence, a passage from a Zen monk came to me: 'all fear is illusion, walk straight ahead.' I realised at that point that I had a choice. I could struggle with it, or I could let go – let go into the experience and go with whatever happened.

At that point it was like a set of dominoes falling over. I began to let go everything in life - my business, home, my children, my marriage, my body. The last domino fell and I went into

this state of bliss. All mentation disappeared and everything began to radiate this stunning sense of beauty, stillness and silence. That lasted for about a year.

I was incapable of working, doing anything even feeding myself, lost weight, I couldn't relate to anybody. After that my mind started to return, my identity started to return. And when it did I went into a state of panic and terror. It was like being abandoned by God. Like going from colour to black and white. The sense of separation returned, the sense of being a you and me. The dualistic perception was back and with it this terrifying fear of what had happened. That went on for about 6 months and then eventually I started integrating both of them, living in both domains, and that has taken – well, it's still going on. I'm still working on it. I've been in and out of mind for last 6 years. The sense of peace and stillness is always pervading. It's difficult to function a lot of the time, the things that require mind, organising. It's inconvenient in a linear western world when things are run on schedules, to be in a non-linear state.

It took a little while to learn how to navigate without a mind. I would walk into walls and stuff. It's difficult to delineate you from everything else. You become aware that you have a body but you clearly see that that body is not you. It's a wind up toy. You have to relearn to navigate.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Yes. There's no attachment to material things, which is a relief. Before I was attached to my body, to success, or what I wanted to become. The only problem with attachment is that everything is impermanent. It means suffering.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes. I would say that I can see things for the way they really are. I can where people are really at. I can see how much people suffer.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I love it. Thinking is highly overrated. I don't have a problem with thinking, but if you can't distinguish your thinking for what it really is you're going to suffer. The ego is just something has developed over millennia to help us survive.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I have no sense of identity. If you a sense of identity, you cut off the alternatives. I don't consider myself American or Canadian. There is no particular place which is home. There's an all-pervading still silence, and it's always there wherever I go. I used to walk out to the rubbish bins at the end of the apartment block - when I used to drop rubbish in the bins, I was struck by the overwhelming beauty and bliss of that area.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

My mind is very quiet most of the time. Some days I suffer. It kind of works. There is nothing there apart from a still silence, a very peaceful still unifying silence that permeates everything. Then you ask a question and the faculty of speech is triggered. It's beautiful but inconvenient.

Q: What are the most important values in your life?

Being of service to all things in all, in the name of the highest good. To serve humanity, that's my intention.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes certainly, because of the lack of attachment. It doesn't mean that I want to walk in front of a bus. There's an aspect of me which is interested in staying alive but it's not a problem. I've confronted death many times, but certainly in this place it's not a big deal. Most of the time I have no fear.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes. Not just permanent but infinite. Permanent is too small a term.

Interview Transcript – P11

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Both. There were definitely peak moments that changed the baseline going forward and there were also a series of those. It seems to have both been sudden and gradual.

I spent a decade in the military and I left quite suddenly and felt I had to go because it was changing from peacekeeping to Afghanistan. I was idealistic and I had a sense of loss. So I left and then I was diagnosed with PTSD and major depression to do with my military service and that was the single biggest factor in my spiritual transformation. It was a complete loss of me as an intelligent person, me as a functioning person, me as a person except as a blob on the couch. But it was also freeing. It was frightening but there was full surrender to whatever was going to happen - my body forced it. Even while I was still in the military, I was really burnt out. I took myself to the doctor because I thought I was crazy. I was in the bathroom five times a day, hiding. I had no control over my emotions. I felt out of control. I would start yelling and screaming. I went to the doctor and he told me that I was depressed. I said I had to go back to work early because it would have been the end of my career. I went back before I was ready.

I wasn't a willing seeker – I didn't know anything about anything the new age. All the shifts that happened were spontaneous, not sought out. For a good ten years in the military it was humbling or deconstructing the ego. A lot of suffering.

A lot of suffering and then spontaneously things would happen. Around 2008 awakening experiences started to happen. One time I was watching a movie so my mind was off. I was walking in the winter - the sun had come out and it was so warm. I just stopped on the sidewalk and relaxed and took in the sun. I opened my eyes and the world looked different. It was alive. It was infinite aliveness. Everything was bright. Even the space between everything. The colours were incredible and the flowers looked happy. I looked down and I realised I *was* the sidewalk. I moved into the side walk. I almost lost control of the body. I started laughing. People were passing me but I didn't feel self-conscious. I was amazed at

what was there the whole time. It was the biggest best joke. It took me 20 minutes to turn the corner; I just kept stopping and seeing everything.

That was the first real intense peak experience I had. I'd experienced flow as skating that was more of a diffuse ease.

I moved into a stable state about March of 2008. The experience that really changed it into a more continuous state was attending the school of the Work of Byron Katie. I got a full scholarship to spend 9 or 10 days with her in LA. And she had us challenge our stories in a variety of ways. By the middle of the period there was just no stories, no mind. I found myself. We just had to walk around and name everything we saw with a first generation name. 'It's not a fancy car – it's car - it's a post.' I was just noticing, just watching instead of labelling, and from then on there was just no mental chatter. I found myself looking in the mirror and it was like I was seeing my face for the first time. I was apparently this person wearing this strange body. I couldn't see any problems; I didn't believe in things, so I ended up having to remember how to conceptualise things. It was little destabilising but it was the perfect environment.

For about a few months following that there was a real state of bliss. It was difficult to speak – I lost the capacity. It took maybe 30 seconds or a minute for the word to come out. It felt strange to talk. I was very present, so present that words were superfluous.

After a few months there was more return of mind, more return for a capacity for speaking, intellectual functioning. The last couple of years has been a deepening, an integration, a coming to understand with conceptual terms. There has been a return of the ability to focus the mind. Now everything is a choice - how deep do I go into the vastness? If I want to have a disembodied peak experience of nothingness I just have to sit still and close my eyes. Or if I need to work on something then I simply have to choose to narrow my focus to the task. Sometimes the mind is loud and sometimes quiet but it's almost always running, unless I do the choosing of the deep nothing state where there is no form.

I don't really choose it though. I could go back to blissing out, but it doesn't feel congruent to do that. It feels like I would be opting out of human experience. Right now that isn't my path. Since the Byron Katie thing there a real ongoing sense that everything is always alive.

I can sense the vibrations in any solid object. The deep aliveness of space is so amazing it takes your words away.

When you're present all the time every day seems full. A day seems to last for such a long time.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I was indoctrinated with religion as a child so when I was older I wouldn't go near the church. I craved for something in religion but I didn't pursue it further.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Definitely. I used to shop and be addicted to home and garden television. I wanted to be an interior designer. I was obsessed with objects and creating peace in space. I was looking to possessions as a way to feel better but now I don't need to feel better. There is no attachment. I gave away all my books; I don't need things.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes. I used to be on guard, ready to defend myself against potential criticism or judgement, always self-conscious, wanting to be seen in the best possible way. To be found wanting would be like death. I was in a judged sport, figure skating. I learned early on that I got more love if I achieved things. I learned who you behave, how you appear, is like a currency. I was always aware of myself, how I was being perceived. All of that stopped. I could just see people instead of focussing on what they thought of me. I was just listening, with so much less judgement, just allowing them to be themselves. That meant that some people fell away; they needed more engagement from me. I wasn't going in on their stories.

There was more compassion too. I feel so much more patience and tolerance. I used to be intolerant

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

It's really strange - if I don't get to do nothing my life runs in a flow. It does whatever it does. Whatever comes up, comes up. I don't have much structure. It needs to be spontaneous. I used to have 25 minute increments of tasks. Life was never being lived because it was always carrying out previous plans. I was exhausted for years.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

I don't feel connected to it. I feel like I am it. Everything's connected – there can't not be connection. There is nothing to transcend. The space that holds the computer is the computer. And other people – the same thing that looks out of my eyes looks out of their eyes.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

Sometimes the words are convenient – yes, it can be useful to have identity but it's not what I believe. It's just a detail. I used to be a skater, I used to be very intelligent, very efficient, very organised. I used to believe all that crap.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

There is definitely mental chatter but it's quieter, easier to ignore. There's just a radio on in the room, but I don't have to listen to it.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes. In the military, there were times of great fear, potentially imminent death. I had to face that possibility as more than just an idea. How I coped was to hold my breath and not to think about it. I basically accepted that death was a possibility in this job but I didn't enquire. But now death seems absurd, death *is* absurd. Boundaries are absurd. They aren't even real. So there is no fear of death.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

It's a tricky word because permanent implies time, implies the future. But so far in the last three years it has been ongoing - permanent but immensely variable. Within that permanence there has been a settling in. Life brings up the old conditioning but in the moment of reacting I'm aware that I'm still reacting. I was feeling deep grief the other day and at the same time I was feeling deep peace. I haven't had strong emotions since this shift until recently. And it was like cloud in the sky, naturally arising emotion rather than mind made emotion. I only knew how to be lost in emotion, but I felt peaceful in this emotion. What it didn't do is spiral into a story.

There has been a lot of learning. I have to relearn everything. The rules are different. Old feelings and behaviours come up but it feels different. If I notice how dysfunctional it is, an old way of being, then it won't come back. Those old patterns come up and they go 'pfff' and don't come up again.

I thought life was just bliss with you all the time – for months it was like that. For the last couple of years it has been more dynamic. In the last six months it feels like there's a gestation happening, a natural alignment.

Interview Transcript – P12

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yes, it was shortly after my mum died. I initially thought I had gone into shock, but I knew this was different, because at the worst point in my whole life, I was experiencing bliss and peace, and a complete sense of 'It's all fine, everything is perfect.'

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I have had an interest for years, and had experiences and some interest when I was younger, but for many years life got in the way.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Yes, very much so. I am a lot more relaxed about everything. I no longer sweat the small stuff and am very aware that there's no point in fretting over anything. I have a sense that everything happens for a reason, and good and bad is only the way we view it.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I was raised in a family where status is measured by the car you drive, the house you live in, your job title etc, and that no longer concerns me. Now I am aware that if I want something, I ask why first.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I have not discussed my experience with my children, who think I am a bit weird anyway. And I know I nag from habit rather than because things bothers me. I surprise myself because sometimes when my son is out, instead of fretting about him, I wake up during the night and just think 'I hope he's home by now.' I am a lot more relaxed about everything.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes. I have noticed that waiting no longer bothers me. I don't feel the need to clock watch. I take the opportunity to meditate and be still.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Part of me feels like I am buying into people's pain and their illusion, but I am able to emphasise with them and can still acknowledge and remember that I once felt the same emotions.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I've always felt that I didn't want to follow any religion and didn't like reference to God because of the negative connotations associated with religion. But since my experience I now believe there is such an awesome presence who I now call God.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

No I do not. This is a strange one, because I notice the thoughts, because they are set against silence, they are not always there and I no longer have the chatter endlessly,

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

This is the big one. Yes, one moment I was in utter despair. My world had fallen apart and the next I felt the most immense peace and bliss I have ever experienced in my life. I'm not sure how long it lasted, but the effects are still with me. Initially I actually felt such a sense of joy that my mum had gone home - I actually felt joy! Everyone around me was in so much pain, and I wanted to celebrate. This has faded but I still see it as not happening. We don't die, we go home, and it's the most amazing experience ever.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes. I worried that one day I would wake up and it would hit me like a brick. But it is permanent. And I feel like I am in a growing developing phase at the moment. It's not over yet.

Interview Transcript – P13

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

For me it was very sudden - instantaneous really. It happened in February 98. I was grieving. My mother had died. I was lying in bed in the morning; I smelt her perfume and started to get upset. Then I felt her presence and my body went into a type of paralysis or cramp where I couldn't move. There was a lot of heat around my body and a very bright light, but my eyes were closed. I couldn't open my eyes. I was feeling frightened but all the while I could feel a reassuring presence. I remember being very indignant about the whole thing. It felt like I was being reassured but I wasn't having any of it.

I don't know how long it lasted but it ended so gently as if it had been the most beautiful experience. Some part of my body must have come off the bed because I remember a feeling of landing back on the bed. I opened my eyes and every muscle in my body had been pulled. I was very upset. There was a lot of emotion because of the connection with the grief.

Then every time I napped or slept I had a similar experience. My night time experiences were filled with a feeling of an energy rushing through my body with a loud screeching sound, seeing things visions and faces, colours and maps of the solar system, scientific symbols, things I remember from maths at school, formulae. It was just random information at a very very high speed, like a slideshow, showing frames throughout human history. That was when I closed my eyes. In my waking hours I was seeing colours around people, feeling their feelings, reading their thoughts. The next day there would be a new enhanced sense or ability. I would look in the mirror and my face would change, I would look at others & their faces would change. I would know who was about to call me or who was about to turn up at my doorstep. I started having physical empathy. I had a nap and found myself in a hospital where people were speaking a foreign language, and I was losing a lot blood. I had very specific details about where I was. Then I found that my best friend had had a suspected miscarriage in a hospital in Paris. Occasionally there were more pleasant things like angelic presences, an energy form which brought my mother's presence to me and then took her back to wherever she was.

All the while I was very sceptical of my own experiences. I held on to that inner observer at the same time as feeling a lot of fear. Despite the fear at a deeper level I felt quite safe and was reassured (by whom I'm not sure) that this was a spiritual process. I had never read a spiritual book or meditated, never done any spiritual practice, so I had no framework or reference point at all. It was all new. I documented as much as I could but there was so much happening so quickly

That was the first break through, the first breaking open experience. And that intensity lasted for several weeks at that pitch. I couldn't work or do anything. I was working in an art gallery and then I let that go. I did try to go back to work because of financial pressures. I was working for a newspaper but I found that the episodes intensified again and so I just stopped working for a while. I was signed off with depression.

Q: Do you think the experience was triggered by the grief over your mother?

Yes. Me and my mother had a really strong connection. I was her carer so it was as if our connection - which went beyond the physical - remained. I just felt like it pulled me into a different place, closer to wherever she had gone. It opened this massive doorway between me and her. It opened me up to other realms.

A lot of the experiences were quite uncomfortable and dark. All kinds of different thought forms and energies flooded through. I started to develop physical symptoms which stopped me in my tracks and that forced me to reassess. I had a GP up in Bristol who was very open and exploring psychosomatic conditions on the side. He was the perfect doctor for me basically. He said 'I'm going to put a label on it to sign you off but I'm not clear exactly what's going on.' I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, or somatisation of the central nervous system as a result of trauma. I couldn't work. My body was in pain. I was fatigued but couldn't sleep. I didn't sleep properly for about 8 months. I had memory problems, and problems with concentration and confusion, particularly in the early stages. I was on a short term memory cycle of about 30 seconds and everything was just sort of slipping through my mind. That occasionally happens now; it depends on how busy or over-stimulated I am.

That's when I started looking into local healers. What really helped integrate it all was going along for healing on a regular basis - hands-on healing, Reiki. That seemed to turn it into

something very positive. It became more stable and integrated. I had one session of Reiki and I slept for 18 hours. It took 2 to 3 years to feel stable and finally understand what was happening.

Once it stabilised I realised I was left with abilities that could help other people. I started to get a sense of what the purpose of it was and what good it could do for others. With enhanced sensory awareness I can read what's going on with people at the unconscious level, and help make those things conscious and help transform them. There's an awareness of energy or vibration or consciousness, an ability to read that fundamental level of reality, what's going on beneath the surface.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed since your transformation?

I've realised that there's a lot more to life than all of that. The life I was leading was based on income and having a steady job, pleasing my family, following the social rules. I've certainly been through my own intense process of healing and growth, loving myself more, discovering perhaps what my natural gifts and abilities are and using those more in the world. There's also a more expanded awareness and a realisation of our context in the universe, an expanded understanding of the journey of the soul and the continuity of consciousness, an understanding that physical life is just one dimension of reality.

I walk between two worlds a lot of the time. I'm learning to enjoy physical reality and family life, and just the simple things in life. That's become heightened - an appreciation of everyday life. I always had a sense of beauty but it's become more heightened now. There's certainly a connection with nature and because of the openings and awareness of energy and vibration and I can certainly delight in nature and feel its forces and its cycles. When that first happened I thought I was losing the plot, when I thought I could almost feel a tree speaking to me, but now I realise I was just picking up on the energy.

I've chosen now to work for myself. It's very important for me to follow my own rhythms and cycles, whereas before I was disconnected from that, pushing myself based on timescales and diaries and expectations. Now I'm more authentic and more aligned and in tune with who I really am.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

There is a lot more compassion, more respect for boundaries, and more awareness of the 'other'. Kindness is top of my list, and truth is really important to be, being more authentic. It wasn't on my radar before.

I went through a phase of not wanting to be around people who I didn't resonate with. I found that frightening. Now I find that far more comfortable. I've levelled off to a nice balanced sense of compassion. I have the ability to see everyone for who they really are beneath all the roles they play.

At first personal relationships were very tricky. Because I was feeling so much it was really hard to keep boundaries, not slipping into co-dependency. I was also seeking something deeper. I longed for a deeper connection, something more intimate. Family was tricky; I felt as though I needed to get away from my birth family. I could feel I was changing and knew I had to get away. Probably about a year after it happened I ended up moving away to Bristol. Initially it was to follow a partner with his work but it was exactly what I needed.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I love it! It's my favourite thing. I always liked it but it's more the case now I feel that I pick up a lot of other people's thoughts and feelings and 'stuff' and can easily get pulled off centre and outside of myself into other people's issues. So the quiet time and the still time is very important to me to recharge. Over-stimulation is something I have to be aware of. That happens very easily. I chose to live in the country because I find crowds and noise and movement over-stimulating to my system. Living quietly gives me a heightened awareness to help other people.

Q: Is your mind quieter than it used to be, or do you have a lot of thoughts running through it?

It's been through cycles. Before it happened I had that surface mind chatter constantly. I could get beneath it with painting and drawing. But as an adult I started to neglect my quiet

time. Prior to this experience there was more mental chatter, but art was my way of accessing the peace in the deeper mind.

Post-transformation it was a different type of chatter - psychic chatter, intuitive information overload. The quiet time helped, the meditation time in nature. Now I would say I get both types of chatter. I can have the mental chatter if I have projects on the go. I can have psychic chatter sometimes if I've been working with clients or been around crowds of people. I can't access the intuitive when my mind is chattering, I find it hard to go from mental chatter to creativity but easier to go from psychic chatter to creative pursuits. Either way sitting down to paint or draw or going outside for a walk really helps me get centred again and to quieten my inner world.

Q: What do you think are the most important values in your life?

Altruism is very important to me. I had to be careful when it first kicked in. I had grown up with a selfless people-pleasing mother so I had to be mindful that it didn't go too far. That's always been an energy around me; I've always tried to serve other people in some way. Because of this my journey has also been about learning to take care of myself, making sure that I don't over-extend or neglect myself. Now I feel a very strong sense of purpose and sense of spiritual calling. I feel called to serve the evolution of human consciousness, to support others through 'awakening'.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yeah absolutely. That's been a theme in my life. I've lost lots of people, probably every 18 months someone in my life has died. Death has become a huge part of my life because I have an experience of interacting with people's consciousness beyond death. The fear of it has gone. Now I understand it as just another incarnation, another phase of existence. It seems very real to me. I still feel grief on a human level when people go but I also know that they continue in some form. I'm aware of them as part of the everything. So yes it has changed

Q: After the transformation, did you make any changes to your lifestyle e.g. your hobbies, your job or career?

I took a while. I was in a phase of just coping with the fall out of the change and the new senses and abilities. At a personality level it didn't change instantly. That started later as things started to percolate and sink in, probably around 2001. I felt like I had changed down to my bones changed my relationships, choosing different friends and different work. Up to that point it was probably just managing and making sense of it.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yeah. Definitely a shift in consciousness and in identity. What was interesting was that I moved back down to Devon (my home town) and was fully expecting to walk into the room and for family and friends not to recognise me. I felt so different, like a completely different person to be honest. All my internal frames of reference have changed. I no longer experience life as a random sequence of disconnected, separate events of which I am merely a passenger or victim. I experience life as an interconnected co-creative partnership with some kind of intelligent force or ever-present sentiency. I live as a timeless soul enjoying my physical experience. That is my daily reality.

Interview Transcript - P14

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

I would say it was a gradual process. Even as a child there were many spontaneous spiritual experiences. I didn't see things as separated. I was accused of not having a strong opinion because I saw the loveliness or the commonness of everything. I didn't understand how others thought of this whole separation issue.

But my real spiritual development started in my mid-20s when I was working for British Airways. In Britain we all worked for a common purpose. There was a real atmosphere of camaraderie. It was heaven. When I stepped on to the aeroplane and we waited for the passengers you had to be so intensely present. There was no time for little me, for ego to come in. It was the best spiritual practice. Just pure presence the whole time. It suited me very well, a wonderful devotional practise.

Another key point was that I happened to be in Calcutta when Mother Theresa died. I had read all her work and I felt very close to her. I felt her presence strongly around me and still do.

I emigrated to the US in 2001 and after a few months of marital bliss I fell into hell, basically. After the co-operative atmosphere of mutual purpose, serving people, I fell into an atmosphere of post 9/11 separation, a huge competitiveness in this town. Everyone asks you what you do. If you're not a lawyer, you're a lobbyist. It was a huge blow to my self-esteem, which was a good thing spiritually but quite hard in some ways. I really missed my old job, my family, all I'd left behind. All of a sudden I was on the ground.

I dedicated all my time to meditating, about three hours a day, doing every spiritual practice under the sun, Mahayana Buddhism., emptiness teachings, studying *A Course in Miracles*. Eventually I got into non-duality. ...I was having more and more prolonged blissful experiences and I was also more and more working with shadow work and actively integrating all soul aspects together. My life as I knew it came completely to a halt in 2007. Funnily enough, I didn't see it coming at all.

After years, I was finally able to detach myself from British Airways innerly. I simply wasn't fit enough physically so I was let go. I thought I'd fall into this vacuum but I found something new, volunteering for an international book review column and was greatly enjoying writing which I'd done all my life anyways.

But within a month, in December 2007, sleeping and swallowing stopped. And it went on for three years. Ongoing, it's much better, there's definitely some level of recovery but for the last two years it looked like I was actually going to pass away, from an absolute lack of sleep, sometimes none at all, sometimes one hour in a week, needing artificial hydration. I was told I probably had fatal ALS or Parkinson's.

At that point spiritually, the question that life would go on was beyond doubt. I knew that. My prayer was that my loved ones wouldn't suffer. I'd had quite an eventful rich life, a lot of things happening. My husband was obviously very distraught, so were my parents, my sisters, my in-laws. I had inwardly surrendered everything, simply everything. I was ready for the next step, whatever that might be, passing into a different dimension.

There were two interesting events at that time. One of them was, that I'd had some contact with an awakened Irish lady Jacqueline O'Keefe. When she was over here in the US I spontaneously invited her for a cup of tea – at that time I could still swallow a little. She came to my little apartment and we sat together and it was like meeting my sister, like I'd always known her. There was absolutely no separation between us. I told her that I found this life way too hard, that I hoped the next life would be easier, and she just looked me in the eyes and said, 'Which next life? This is *it*.' That triggered a huge absolute stillness of mind where everything stopped and it slowly sank in over the next few weeks.

The other experience was while I was in the outpatients' hospital. I was free of suffering at that point, I had surrendered everything and felt absolute peace but I still observed a lot of suffering around me, such as fatal cancer patients. And without any conscious attention – there was no mind coming in, the centre of me had sunk into the heart – there was an inner vow that in the next life, the afterlife, whenever, in this eternal now beyond time and space I would share as much light and beauty with as many other people as I could.

That stayed with me. A few months later I went on a walk and all of a sudden the peace was gone. I was dwelling on my physical symptoms. There was a feeling of self pity and victimhood. Then suddenly my attention shifted from the symptoms to the witness who was observing those symptoms. There was amazement, feeling integrally, seeing once and for all that this witness is part and parcel of what is observed. It doesn't have any inherent existence in itself. Everything dissolved in that second, everything just went, every belief I'd ever held, every concept.

Mind became solely the servant of this that is. And from then on I just walked home and everything was like the first time ever, the snow, everything. There was no prior reference to anything. My chakras opened up, I felt that I could see with my third eye. I became aware of past lifetimes. A lot of people I had known in previous lifetimes came back into my life.

Q: So now that sense of peace is permanent for you?

Feeling at one with everything relatively, and experiencing felt/known Singularity of Existence underneath and inherent of all appearances as Pure Awareness, most of the time there is absolute bliss. A deep lingering peace which is unshakable, which is just anchored. But at the same time there is a knowing that there is something even behind that. That this is not the end of everything. Consciousness is seen as a fertile ground, undimensional, unconditioned.

Beyond that is the absolutely unknowable but it made all of this possible, all of the exquisite forms that we experience. They're seen through as only being different in appearance, for delight, for joy, for experiencing itself as separation, for this charade that love puts on. It's like the snake and rope but there has never been anything other than love, even if it's war, even if it's death – it never deviates for a second, it never could. Love is untouched, it stands alone as pure. It's omnipresent everywhere. What really is, I would say, is pure absolute grace. It is given us freely, we do not have to earn it.

Q: Do you think this transformation was related to the suffering you underwent through being ill?

I would say it was. My dad came from Prussia and suffered very much as a child, not having enough food, fleeing from the Russians. There was this pattern of suffering in Germany, most likely as a direct result of Germany's actions. And there existed always this identification with serving, the devotional path of Mother Teresa as one of my spirit guides, another one since age three being Archangel Michael and lately also Archangel Gabriel.

But I don't think suffering is necessary any more at this time, I'm absolutely delighted that there are so many young souls who are waking up without suffering, who just *know*.

While there is a seeming suffering of others, I do believe it's necessary to call back all these psychological aspects which we see as other people, all these disenfranchised parts and assist wherever it seems that assistance is needed. Even though there's no really no death or suffering, there's an absolute feeling of needing to be of service to others. That's part and parcel of everything. If we don't share with others, if we don't serve, we are depriving ourselves of our fullest potential. It's really the only self delighting in itself, playing with itself. I think it's hugely important to reach out within the One same Heart.

Q: Have you become less materialistic since your transformation?

No, I've never had a relationship with material things very strongly at all. You know, I loved beautiful things – like clothes that were beautiful. I would buy them across the world on my trips. But I absolutely detested shopping malls.

There's now more there's delight in picking out something beautiful. Money has never been important to me. If I have some I spend it, but if I don't have any I don't mind. Material things are just seen as tools, as things which can serve, which are under the service of grace.

It used to go on my nerves that my husband likes fine things but now I don't mind. It has changed in the way it seems there is no minding of material things anymore. There is a dropping of all that. There is an absolute inner freedom.

Q: Have your relationships changed since your transformation?

Yes very much. When I got ill, everything I held dear dropped away. There was a sense of victimhood. I had a huge circle of friends; I was a very social person, I loved mingling with people, although at the same time I need large amounts of solitude.

There was a certain amount of tolerance that people had. With acute illness, everybody rushes to your bedside and is there for you, but when it's a chronic thing it's hard because people don't have the patience or understanding.

There was a lot of pressure from my in-laws, needing a clear cut medical diagnosis and I went along with that because I thought I needed that too and let myself be checked out for 6 months. And they did some gruelling tests ... At that point I had enough and I felt an inner freedom. There is no obligation, I don't owe anybody anything.

A lot of people dropped out of my life, not understanding or simply being too absorbed in their own lives. It turned out to be grace. It freed up a lot of old luggage. There was a time of feeling very very alone and having nothing to hold on to and not being quite comfortable, for maybe 8 or 9 months. But that was about surrender as well. I thought 'Okay, so be it.' A whole new group of people stepped into my life – I would call it a soul family. That has taken over old friendships. There's loyalty, deep love and still a such a delight in correspondence with my family and with the soul family there's an added feeling of resonance, yet mostly, this felt/seen knowing all as that one essence doesn't make any distinctions.

Regarding relationships, I'd say that my relationships were always present and authentic, always loved people and interactions in a straight, honest way, being fully present, anything else a waste of time. I'd just say that I used to much overextend myself all my live socially, and that stopped, a lot of friends I had been intensely present with and considered dear friends turned out to probably be more acquaintances and slowly dropped away with the chronic illness the last few years before I started getting better, and that turned out to be a good thing, didn't even feel like a loss, but was just some superfluous that had to go, and the real, lifelong friendships lasted through it all, plus, yes, a whole group of an ancient soul family entered my life again in often surprising ways where there's great resonance.

What also happened is that the false concept often prevalent in human life of 'Oneness' meaning 'One with someone' rather than Singleness, Presence or Awareness clarified itself

totally, which made for healthy boundaries where none had been existent before, used to absorb anybody's energy much too easily humanly as a Pisces before, and knowing/feeling the sameness of what is, is dissolving old karmic contracts slowly that are not necessary or valid anymore.

Q: Do you experience random thoughts running through your mind – what I call ‘thought-chatter?’

My mind is quiet most of the time. To use my mind, I have to zoom into a task. My mind is still, but it's still used as a tool. It takes an effort to remember something. It feels like memory is only ever now as well. If you ask something about the past or about the future, it takes some effort to go there. It feels like it's superimposed on the now, like movie stills, but it never touches the now, it never touches the screen in any way.

Q: Do you find it easy to do nothing?

Very much so. I find it very freeing – I like being by myself. But lately there has been a great delight in music again. Because of the lack of sleep – too many neurons firing – I used to have intolerance for noise. But now there is a huge huge enjoyment in classical music again, any music, even in the noise of a sledgehammer, which is even perceived as beautiful, the airplanes going to the national airport above our house – a beautiful beautiful sound. Even people shouting, neighbours having an argument, anything.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes it absolutely has. There is no fear of my own death anymore. I can see that this body is only a form; it's only transient, it's not going to last forever. May it last for as long as it wants to last, as long as it can be of service then it's going to be laid aside.

I've stared death in the eye about four times; I surrendered to it. That was naturally my path. There is no fear of other people's deaths either. I used to be traumatised at the idea of other people's death, such as my father's, but when the actual time came when he was close to death in the ISU earlier this year, it was beautiful to see that that fear was groundless. The love was so much stronger; there was no power in death, none whatsoever.

Even with my friend Annie--over the last 3 and a half years I've feared so much losing her, after 24 years of friendship. They used to be our neighbours in Berlin. I always thought 'How will I live without my dear friend? What if she died?' And then she did die but it was fine. There was just absolute gratitude for the seeming life that she had, knowing that it doesn't end, knowing that she's still there.

There is no more fear of either my death or of the death of beloved ones anymore. There is just a knowing that life is eternal, and it's like tuning into different radio stations. It's harder for the ones who are left behind actually.

Q: Do you think the transformation is stable and permanent?

I think so. But there is no I that thinks. There is not really a caring about that. There's an absolute openness, a trust in the present, a realisation that whenever that openness is closed down temporarily by some old conditioning trying to rise up, it's painful and it stagnates everything, it doesn't let life flow but it immediately drops again by itself. There's just an absolute openness and in that openness, everything happens by itself and right guidance arrives by itself and is followed. And if it's not followed there's an inner prompting to go back and follow it. There's a feeling of rightness doing certain tasks. There's an absolute welcoming of everything that is.

Interview Transcript – P15

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yes, it was over 8 years ago. I was seeing a Hakomi Therapist and was doing body work to connect with extreme trauma from my childhood.

Q: Could you describe your transformational experience?

Something changed for me. I didn't know what it was. I felt different – I felt like I came in, that I was looking around at life nearly like I hadn't seen it before. I was more present in life and I had a feeling like I knew things. I was aware of the silence and stillness under all that was happening, but then I wouldn't have had the words or language to describe it. I had this knowing that everything was okay. Colours seemed brighter, more alive. I would walk in nature and feel I was part of it – like I was walking with the trees. I wanted to hear the music of Mozart and listen to it from my stomach. Sounds strange but true. It was the silence between the notes I wanted to hear. Everyday ordinariness had more meaning and depth and life opened up to me in the present moment. It really had to. I could only be in the present moment. There was a paralysis and terror in me and I was frozen. And all I had was that sense of Presence, my breath, and I didn't have to listen or believe my mind as much. I would tune into this sense I had inside me of I am-ness. It was a very challenging time for me. This was my anchor, the only thing I was sure of and I had no choice but to follow it.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I would say I was searching all my life but didn't know what I was searching for. I had suffered with what was diagnosed as depression from the age of 17 and I guess for most of my life I have had an interest in self-development. I was never religious and would not have seen myself as spiritual but can tie in and recognise events in my life now as being spiritual.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Yes, I see nothing in life as I used to see it. I see myself as part of something much bigger that has its own rhythm intelligence and design. These last years have been about surrendering to this source of life, letting go of the past and coming deeper and deeper into the present.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Yes, while I still like nice things and material things I can appreciate them from a different place and am not driven to have things or possessions. Since awakening I started to paint and write and hope to publish soon, along with doing another art exhibition. I have not gone back and could not go back to 'normal 9-5 work' so I have had to take a leap of faith there and trust in life providing for me as I believe being an artist writer and poet is my 'calling'.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Again there have been huge changes in my relationships and many of my old relationships are gone or have changed radically. I found I had very little in common with a lot of people who I knew. I am divorced now after being legally separated for a number of years. After I awoke I spent a lot of time alone and I wanted it that way – felt I needed to make space for me to call myself back to my own life as I had been invaded and had very little idea of who I was. That was very difficult but over time I have renewed some old relationships in a different way and let some go completely. I have also gone on to meet new and like minded people.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes | I am very happy to do nothing – I don't seem to get bored anymore or have to need to be something or just go somewhere for the sake of it. I can be on my own for long periods of time and doing nothing and that is ok with me.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Yes, one of the major effects of awakening was coming to a place of love and forgiveness

for those who abused me and the understanding that came about what was going on. I began to see all that happened in the light of the bigger picture. A great love grew inside me for them. Really a powerful place to be – seeing where they had acted from and how it was never really personal, though within that I had to honour the part of me that was wounded. As I let go and continue to let go of the story of who I thought I was, I grow in compassion for myself and others. Another thing I learn is to temper that compassion and empathy with good common sense and balance it with my own needs, and to see just to do what is possible is enough.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I was born into a Catholic family but don't see myself as Catholic but while I resonate with a lot from Buddhism, Paganism and the Mystics from Christianity and Sufism I don't see myself as any of that. I am Irish and feel Irish but don't. I don't totally identify myself with that either and would say I identify with the whole human race and within that I am Irish and would learn towards the mystical end of Christianity.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Yes I still experience thought chatter but now I get a 'choice'. I can drop into the Silence and the expansiveness and into my body or I can witness the thoughts and not listen to the stories or believe them. I call it 'not taking up the knitting' and knitting a new story for myself. I have had to unravel a lot of stories I made up for myself over the years.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes I have lost the fear of death. I don't see death as the dying I thought of before. I guess when you connect with the eternal indestructible part of yourself you know it is the body dying.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes I do and it is – because the old me has really gone and this is who I am and going deeper and deeper into who I am and letting go is on-going.

Interview Transcript – P16

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yes, March 2, 1993 at probably 8:30 am, Eastern Standard Time US. My vision came to me through out a psychotic experience.

My daughter was born with some pretty awful birth trauma - the details of which aren't that important. It developed into a crisis when her brother was born when she was just shy of two years old. I was spending every possible waking moment trying to attend to the needs of one child or the other but it wasn't working. She was going down right before my eyes. If you have never seen a depressed two-year-old, it is a sad sight, and I was frantic. I didn't know what to do! She had no interest in her books or toys. She tried to disrupt any activity between my son and me. I was just ploughing through one day at a time, trying to do my best to fulfil the needs of both of these children and failing.

I entered in retrospect what was probably a psychotic state. I was suffering from depression. My mind was fixated on scenarios of misunderstandings and suffering and torture of millions of children and I stopped sleeping at night, my mind just kept spinning these stories. I spent my days just holding my children and crying with them. I started hearing voices. A voice told me that what I was doing was impossible, I could not save my children, they were doomed, all of society was against me, and if I persisted then I would lose everything, my husband, my friends, family. I would be all alone. Well, I told these voices in my head to go to hell, that I saw a clear path to save my daughter and that they could have her over my dead body.

Needless to say, after four nights of not sleeping I was not in great shape. Physically I was wrecked. My sinuses were completely clogged, and my lungs were very congested. I was talking in whispers, because my throat was so tight. My husband was very alarmed and was threatening to get me some help. I had ceased to function. No groceries had gotten bought, and no laundry got done that week.

It was now the first week in March, a Tuesday morning, and my husband got up and he was getting ready to go to work. He couldn't find any clean socks and this made him extremely

angry. He is the type of guy who never shows anger. I'd never ever known him to be angry, but I was more insightful this morning. He thought he would make this into a joke, and he started to throw the dirty clothes around. Shannon laughed and started to throw the clothes also. I sat on the edge of the bed holding my son, stone-faced. My husband said, 'Come on, it's funny, why don't you throw some clothes also!' and I responded, 'You just don't get it do you, she doesn't think it is funny, she is terrified. She laughs when she is scared to death and she is scared to death of your anger'. This knowledge just 'came' to me. That did it. He literally exploded. With a cry of absolute despair he left the bedroom, slamming the door and then he proceeded to destroy the house. He ripped curtains off the walls, he threw things down the stairs. I'd never seen anyone go berserk like that before. His explosion, and the release of his anger freed something tremendous in me! It was at that moment that I had an experience of enlightenment.

This experience came with feelings of such perfect joy and peace. I remember thinking afterward 'so that's what I'm supposed to feel like!' This experience was multidimensional. It was physical. I felt a tremendous amount of energy coursing through my body and with the energy came healing. My sinuses cleared instantly, and my lungs cleared out and started working perfectly again. I watched this instant healing with amazement. It was intellectual. The final puzzle piece dropped into place. It was 'eureka' of course!

Spiritual knowledge was revealed to me, I 'knew' it in an instant, and am still to this day learning in a linear conscious fashion what was revealed to me in that instant. I also felt like a ton of stuff went blowing by me and I didn't pick up on most of it - though I have spent 17 years actively studying and seeking to put this information together into a state that can be perceived with the human mind and heart.

This was the beginning of a remarkable time when a spiritual guide started to have conversations with me. I learned first hand that one has to go through hell before you get to heaven. I also understood about why mystics have talked about 'for all eternity'. In a mystical consciousness, within that one instant, you sense forever and ever, and are forever changed. I guess that was also what was meant by being born-again, to see with the eyes of a child. It was amazing that these forgotten teachings from a Christian upbringing were springing to life for me. I had never 'got it' before, looking at it in a logical way. I had conversations with the spirit guide about Jesus, about the movie 'Sophie's Choice' and about being a good mother.

My daughter likes to play 'bear cave', where she covers her head with a blanket and pretends to be in a cave. She and my husband were sitting with their heads under a blanket and my daughter excitedly called for me to come join them. The voice in my head told me 'Go over there, there is a nice surprise for you,' so with some excitement I walked over and we got under the blanket also (was carrying my son, as usual). The whole family was there in semi-darkness and I remember looking from shining face to shining face. Everyone was very happy. Then I saw rays of light stretching from each person to each other person. The web of family connections was as plain as day to me, the rays looked like laser lights of a golden-red colour, some seemed stronger than others, but each of us were connected to all of the others.

I was in an altered state of consciousness, though I was still very much in control in normal consciousness, it was living a life of duality where I could see from either perspective at will, spiritual, or physical. It was an incredible time that I will never forget, and can still access. I felt like I had broken through a barrier, and I was talking back to people left on the other side, and I so wanted to grab them and pull them through with me! I remember feeling a tremendous sense of urgency that I had to write a book and get this information out to 'save the world'. My spirit guide gently informed me that my job was to simply take the best care I could of my family, let the rest of it go. I was plugged into the collective unconscious, and I could recognize pieces of my vision in other people's writings, though it is interesting that each person transmits these visions through their own personal filters. It helped me realize that once I thought about these issues with my logical mind there was danger of distortion. The many 'spiritual' experiences that I had had previously to this experience I had never connected with, since they didn't fit into my world view. They now immediately took on tremendous significance, as I realized how every moment in my life had lead up to that moment.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

Yes and no. I had several numinous spiritual experiences as a child, but thought of those things increasingly as an interesting novelty that didn't relate to what I thought of as spirituality. I was raised Catholic, went to Catholic school, so very drilled in traditional Catholicism. I loved school and learning stuff, I have always been an avid searcher, reader

and studier of life. Prior to 1993, I had the hard scientist disdain of spirituality and psychology, as fluff.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Hard to explain. In some ways profoundly, in others much the same just with more joy, confidence and relaxation. I remember thinking when I was about 30 that there was really nothing I felt like dedicating my life, energy and enthusiasm to, except environmental activism, and that seemed so hopeless and pathetic next to the huge corporate forces bearing down. So after 1993, all that stuff is put into this much bigger context. You see the silliness of these corporations like misbehaving little boys and see their insignificance on the grand energetic, time and space scales that living beings like the Earth experience life. It is such a delicious amazing experience, it's like you've seen the end of the movie, and it's perfect, and so have that gleeful sense of watching the movie with others who don't know what the end is, so they are all uptight and tense, and you can just enjoy their struggle. This also created a lot of alienation between me and other people though. I had a lot of struggle learning how to talk about these issues.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Not really, I always felt like I was a hippie born too late. I live frugally, but raised two children as a single parent.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

For a while it got much worse. I wasn't skilful at empathy and compassion and communicating. I think people who have these experiences within a religious tradition have a lot better guidance and help with relationships with people. I was really blown apart and needed to do a lot of work and seeking to integrate and figure out how to live with this new person I was. I was very confused and often too honest.

However, I now am in the deepest and most amazing love relationship of my life. I find I don't compromise, so prefer fewer more authentic and congruent relationships. I think I

simply needed to learn better social skills. It's up and down. I find I threaten some people, but relate better to others. Still a challenge.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes and want more time to do just that. Of course it's not doing nothing, it's breathing, and listening and being open and connecting to something peaceful.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Yes and no. It depends on which voice I am identifying with. There is a tender one with a heart broken open that is just that. There is also the Great Mother voice that these ideas belong to a very different level of being. It's like a Mobius strip where the deeper you penetrate compassion, the more it looks like cruelty, and the more you penetrate empathy it looks like tough love, full of rabbit holes. I guess it's because the appropriate love you bring to others changes when you perceive them at different levels and different possibilities. It is like when a teacher has an expectation that a student is really bright, she demands more of them, she has a vision of the 'Big' self of the other, not coddling the small self. So really what is compassion if not seeing these tremendous possibilities? But with presence and awareness, not seeing a caricature. So it's not what you do and say, it's how you do and say it, with awareness.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

I certainly feel much more connected than I did before, and I have a goal that I am working towards to again live in that energetic space but from a body-based grounded conscious aware place with life. I think I experienced enough connection to understand how profoundly we are disconnected.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I understand I have parts of all of those things that have affected who my personality but I think I'm getting away from identifying myself at all.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

I still have a lot of thought chatter. I never had a spiritual practice before, so I didn't have the skills to quiet my mind. It's much easier to learn these skills because of this experience. If by thought chatter you mean the incessant anxieties and worries I would say that I have less identification with those parts of my personality. I no longer identify with these voices that make you small, you just, in the words of Alan Watts, say hello to Longnose and Slimey, they will always be with you, but they are more like cranky pets than big scary monsters that keep you shivering in the corner.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes definitely. I find myself not only not at all afraid of it, and actually really looking forward to it. Being in that 'outside of time/outside of space' place, I guess you'd have to say it's like stepping outside of prison walls, of which it will be very nice to go back home again.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

More than likely. My enlightenment experience happened in 1993. It's like saying, is birth permanent? There are some things that are done and can't be undone.

Interview Transcript - P17

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It's been both to be honest – I've had kind of 5 or 6 moments of clarity which revealed themselves in a way that was unprompted and unexpected. The first of those was actually as a medical doctor. I'd just finished working quite a long shift and was just taking a few moments to close my eyes on my bed and there was just an awakening to something I struggle to describe, but just a clear sense of what was true. To put it mildly, that rocked my world and in that moment I had a clear sense that I should move beyond conventional medicine and follow a path based on trusting the universe had other work for me to do and the following day I resigned from my medical job. I was all set up to have a flourishing career as an A & E Consultant. I gave my life direction up to something I couldn't name.

That was about ten years ago. Then for 7 years I went through my dark night of the soul. I suffered from depression and addiction, low self-esteem. My original addiction was food and that went into work and alcohol. What I was really searching for was wholeness or fulfilment. But kind of peppered throughout those seven years again I had moments of clarity and openness, but they rapidly disappeared. There was nothing that stuck. I did the usual spiritual seeking, went through a whole bunch of teachers, trying to find something. I occasionally got a glimpse of higher states, but the real breakthrough came from a breakdown. That was about 3 years ago, when I was in the prime of my work, appearing regularly on TV, doing talks throughout the country. I became aware of a deep deep sadness, a hole in my soul. Before and after appearing on TV, I was in floods of tears.

At that time I was considering taking my own life. It was an extraordinarily painful process. It culminated in a moment when I was on verge the splitting up with my wife. She said to me, 'I'm going to go out shopping and if you're here when I come back we'll work through this.' She closed the door and I fell to my knees and said, 'If there is a God, I give my life to you.' At that moment I experienced a deep sense of serenity, knowing that my life was absolutely perfect. I was okay as I was. My work on the planet was to wake up and to do whatever I need to do from that place of awakening. I went into a treatment centre in the US and what's happened over the last three years is that there has been a natural embodiment of my true self

and my greatest challenge has been to deepen that and to not get back into the old egoic patterns. I have come to experience a deep sense of well being and gratitude which is with me most of the time now and the underlying tone of my life experience has shifted from one of emptiness and seeking to one of a deep sense of a living presence within that is both magnificent and also very ordinary.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

Yes I did. I've always had an interest in self-development. I always had a really curious mind, as did my father. We would always talk about life after death, UFOs, spiritual growth. I've always had a sense of curiosity and a deep sense of fascination with life. We have so much to discover about life. The greatest part of my unfolding has been a deep sense of curiosity and a desire to know. I had a very strong spiritual ego; I used to go around pretending I knew it all. Now I just do not know. One of my spiritual practices is embracing not knowing.

At the time of my breakdown/deconstruction/transformation I was working hard and drinking hard. What was interesting to me was that I wasn't doing any kind of spiritual practice. I did have an appreciation of the spiritual but my life was too cluttered. I was caught up in my head, in my egoic mind.

I used to do a lot of personal development workshops, a lot of spiritual meetings, meditation practices, basically trying to find out who the hell I was. I was very much drawn to the shamanic path, and I came to understand that really my path of awakening is very much through the darkness as opposed to trying to escape the darkness. My soul was inviting me to move through my unprocessed emotions and to come through the dark in order to embrace the light. I learned much about embracing my humanity as a doorway to divinity as opposed to the classic spiritual bypassing, of just meditating to zone out. I realised it was much more about an embodied spirituality. That was a challenging time because I'd go to these spiritual retreats but what I was seeking was altered states of consciousness and of course they never stuck. That was even more frustrating, as I could have some experiential taste of something that was truly mind-blowing and then return to a feeling of deep emptiness, and not knowing who I was.

But now I have naturally moved to a whole new state. I have a stable authentic sense of who I am, independent of what's going on in my life, independent of what my thoughts and feelings are. I have developed a deep appreciation of simplicity and a deep desire of space and simplicity.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Very much so. I was driving a £70,000 Jaguar, just absolutely insane, and now we just have one car between all of us, a Peugeot and I love it. I was absolutely focused on a being a millionaire, I don't know why. I think what's shifted is my focus, on what I can get from life to what I can give to life. My main spiritual practice is resting my attention on presence. That's how I experience it. There's been a complete shift. But I also recognise that where I've been is just perfect, and it was all part of my unfoldment.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

My gosh – it's unrecognisable. My kind of pre-awakening relationships were very much egocentric i.e. what can I get out of this relationship? Very much dishonest at times, very fear-based. Today most of the time – I do slip back into old patterns sometimes - I'm very much more present in relationships. Very honest - I feel nauseous if I withhold truth, and also I'm learning to communicate with people in an adult way as opposed to the immature adolescent.

And also if I have to in a nutshell say what is the 'outside source' of my own personal awakening, it would be my intimate relationship with my wife. I've really come to appreciate the relationship as being a pathway of awakening. It's through our relationships that we test each other's resolve, work through issues, our shadows reveal themselves. It's through my relationship that I think my emotional and spiritual maturity has unfolded, and my relationship is my continual greatest source of challenge and my greatest source of delight.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes. That's something I've had to learn and prioritise, but yes I am. The times when I have the deepest experience of presence is when I simply allow what is. Those moments are so deeply nourishing for me. I don't now have a formal meditative practice, I just sit and allow.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes, it has. The thing is, during my dark night of the soul I at times wanted to die and the reason for that was simply an emotional avoidance strategy. I wanted to die because I wasn't willing to feel what I was feeling. Now I embrace death. I don't really recognise the term. Rebirth, maybe.

Interestingly, since my relationship to death has shifted, my relationship to life has transformed. Now I'm just passionate about life. I've embraced the principle of death and its potential immediacy, and it makes me acutely aware of and embracing of life. That's been a big shift. But in a way I don't care what happens when we die. It's what's here that matters. It's great if there is life after death, but it's what's here that matters.

Q : After the transformation, did you make any changes to your lifestyle e.g. your hobbies, your job or career?

I think one of the single greatest changes has been in the shift in the nature of my work. I practice as an integrative medical doctor and now I'm blessed that the vast majority of patients who come to see me are on a path of spiritual awakening. Their disease has been a wake up call and I've been able to guide them through the process. A lot of my work has been supporting them through their unfolding as opposed to fixing their symptoms, helping them to grow up and wake up. And that is just joyful. My work is now completely congruent with my own understanding and experience of what life can be about. That's just a blessing. And also my health has been taken to whole new positive level. I feel wonderfully well, a sense of aliveness and peace and serenity.

I've also noticed that the relationship with my daughter has shifted. I can almost use her as a barometer of my path. Three or four years ago I found it very hard to be playful and spontaneous and child-like. I was very controlling and impatient. But now most of the time –

sometimes I have a bad day - I'm just present, allowing the child-like part of my personality to come through.

Q: Do you feel a strong desire to help other people?

That's right. I just have a deep sense that all of us can wake up and evolve, in whichever beautiful way we can. It's not a choice but a need of our time. There's a sense of urgency about it. Sometimes I'm blown away by that sense of urgency. Through my work and through my talks I'm sharing my experience of waking up, and that's what I'm supposed to be doing now, and I'm thrilled by that. I don't care about the experiences anymore. I don't pursue them anymore. I'm interested in doing what I'm supposed to be doing. The focus is on service now.

Q: Do you feel a strong sense of connection?

Oh yeah. Connection's not even the right word. I just experience a vast presence which is just infinite and pretty mind-blowing. Especially in nature, or even at times when I'm in London walking to my clinic. But it's so much easier in nature because nature is the perfect embodiment of presence. Nature pulls us into presence.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes I do now and it's probably only over the last 6 months that I've felt that. It's now more dominant and if I shift out of it, I'm very aware of it and I can easily shift back into this sense of well-being and presence. There's a sense of well-being, and I'm finding that as my work is much more aligned with it, the experience of presence remains. When you're rooted in what I call true self, you're in a state of pristine balance and awareness, and my experience is that the perfect response to the situation naturally arises. This state is absolutely the most pristine optimum way of being in the world. A higher level of intelligence unfolds through us, and that's surrender.

Interview Transcript – P18

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

In 2002, my daughter Caroline died. She was 8 years and 8 months old. She died slowly from a seizure disorder. Her father predeceased her unexpectedly in 2000. It was after my daughter's death that I started seeking an explanation.

When my daughter first got sick I saw a counsellor who told me not to take my thoughts seriously, the thoughts which were accusing me of bad things. I became more interested in finding solace in other avenues and once I moved to San Antonio I was still going through a lot of depression because of my daughter's death. I knew that my subconscious mind had a lot of pain in it; I was trying to get rid of that pain in order to live. I felt so overwhelmed by life. I started listening to a CD about reprogramming the subconscious mind and message slowly got into my mind. I started feeling more peaceful. The insights started becoming more my baseline of how I received experience – it was very positive.

Just before I first had this experience I started processing periods of silence, when I would look at things and every thing would be silence. Where I live is very pretty, with a grove of trees and a fountain. I would see it as if it was the Garden of Eden. I started noticing the silence. I was in a situation I wouldn't face. I was crying. It came to me how quiet everything was. Out of that silence I acted wordlessly. I realised what I had to do and I did it. I was able to get over it in a day that was it.

The actual transformation happened in 2007. The precise moment was while crying in deep sorrow. I became aware of an immense silence. I lifted my eyes, and all was very quiet.

While in that extreme silence, I acted to resolve the situation that was causing the confusion, the distress. That period of pure realization lasted about 7 or 8 months.

The first realization is an ongoing process. That happened in time, in the past, but the realization is of the true nature of time. The timeless quality of reality.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I didn't know anything about eastern religions. But I always had a sense of 'What's wrong with me?' Why can't I go along with this story that everything is great, that if you try hard and have an education and all these things, you're going to find meaning? From a young age I was very much curious about life and the world. I was exposed to different religious traditions, and saw right through them. So by age 12 or 13, already, I was on my way to classifying myself as an atheist. Even younger, I remember making up my will that there was something, some ultimate wisdom that could be understood, and I would realize it.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

15 years ago I had this insight one day when I was recounting all the things I had – isn't it weird that if you get them you always want more? I was never very materialistic, but I became even less interested. On material things, I would say I buy things of better quality with a view to longevity of the item, in mundane things such as shoes. I own no car nor other major possessions, nor even a personal computer, though that I will soon. I care for the things that I do own and I'm satisfied with them. I own pretty furniture and have a tidy flat. I care for two cats, watch no TV, use public transportation. I do listen to music and the radio quite a bit. I enjoy my job, as a shoe shiner.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes. My relationships have healed. For example, my surviving daughter left home for a while in high school because our relationship was so troubled. She came back right after my awakening experience and since then it has really improved a lot. She actually made this connection, when she came back she was going through a difficult time – I would look at her and ask her 'what time is it?' I will check my wrist and say 'The time is now!'

For the larger part of my experience I am living in a state of presence that is really all inclusive. I mean a deeply meditative state. I am functioning, doing my work, but in such a relaxed meditative state. There are no barriers, no judgement, just meeting people as they come into perception, just interacting with the situation.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I don't feel any identity like that, although because I'm a woman, I do identify with my experience as a woman. Occasionally I suffer from identifying with my desires and expectations of living this biological reality. The difference is, I suffer for a very limited time, because awareness always intrudes and says 'Get out of your head, look around, center yourself.' Actually it says nothing...It simply arises, and it's God looking out of my eyes.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

No thought chatter. It is as if something physical shifted in my brain. Even now my mind is pretty quiet – I sometimes imagine things but that voice has faded away. I used to have a constant stream of chattering thoughts.

The other change is that I have incredible amounts of physical energy. Presence and awareness heal the body. I have lost close to a hundred pounds in the last 3 years.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I would probably be shocked if I was told I had one day to live but I'm not afraid of death. We're just like little fireflies –bursting forth from this main energy. We're just sparks and we go back to that source and we spark some more

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes.

Interview Transcript – P19

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

I was reading *The Power of Now* and looking at the space in the room when I suddenly felt my mind clear and I felt lighter as though all my problems had gone. Even though exhausted from lack of sleep (my baby was 8 months at the time) I felt rejuvenated and refreshed. I felt pure joy and peace and a love for everyone and every thing. It was pure bliss. This actually lasted about three days. I remember the moment it started to subside, my partner made a comment to someone that my 'head was in the clouds'. I had been so happy and relaxed but when he said that, the self-doubt began to creep in and I wondered if I had been behaving strangely. I realise now that I hadn't – it was his perception, and really nobody else had really noticed anything different, just that I was in a good mood maybe.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I went to a spiritualist church in Glasgow when I was a teenager, it was after my mum died and it was specifically to try and find out if I could get a message from her (which I didn't). I often thought of going back to one but never got around to it, or couldn't find one once I moved to Canada. I didn't believe in God per se but had hope that there was something after this life. I also believe I saw a ghost as a child. We were brought up with bible stories but after my mother died I didn't want anything to do with organised religion (we weren't really church goers anyway). About 10 years ago I saw a Reiki Master who practised Shamanism and I asked him to try and contact my mother. I felt her cheek on my cheek and smelled her perfume. I felt it was real but afterwards questioned whether it was just auto-suggestion, etc. I was always interested in spirituality but didn't do anything about it. Fear always held me back for some reason. Now I am really exploring it as much as I can.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I feel like I have more courage to do what I believe in now. I am going to trust my instincts more and my inner knowing, rather than listening to what others think is the right thing to do. I have gone back to being vegetarian. I want to do what I can to live sustainably and will be

more active in helping others. I am not content to just sit back and watch things happen and say to myself, that is the way of the world. I want to do my small part to change the world we live in. There is so much unnecessary pain and suffering and I don't want to be a passive contributor to that insanity anymore. I also am very enthusiastic about my creativity. I was always interested in creativity when I was younger but thought I was supposed to do a more 'meaningful' type of job. Now I am feeling free to do what my heart tells me and want to pursue my creativity.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

When it first happened I had the urge to give away a lot of my things. I decided I didn't care about having new things or lots of material objects for decoration. I had been having a personal dilemma about whether or not to split with my partner but one reason I held back was that I would lose the nice house I live in now. The pivotal moment for me was when I realised that it didn't matter if I went to live in a small apartment with no possessions, as long as I had my children then I knew we would still be happy without material objects. I realised that truly all they need is love (which sounds like such a cliché but I think that's what it boils down to). I know without a doubt that love is all that matters. I know now that going shopping for new clothes, etc. will never bring me fulfilment as a person.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

It improved my relationship with my partner to an extent because I took a good look at my own behaviour and realised the problems were not all his fault. I learned to look at things differently because my mind was trained to look at things one way, so I am more flexible in a sense. I am more tolerant and less judgemental of other people. I am generally more relaxed and not as anxious about talking to people (which I had a problem with before). I am not afraid to say what I feel now. I am not as obsessed

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I am not sure what you mean: if you mean to sit and do nothing then yes now I am able to relax more and just look at the beauty around me and can appreciate it without feeling the need to always be doing something. I have 2 young children and am a childminder so I don't have enough clock time to do nothing. On the other hand I feel now that I want to do more to help other people, I have always wanted deep down to help others but always held back. Now

I feel more motivated to do something like volunteer for example. I feel very frustrated about the injustice in the world and the needless suffering, but often feared standing up for what I believed in.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Yes, definitely – much more so than before. I found that when I was younger I was very much more feeling but years of hearing other people's views and rationale for not caring kind of obscured my true feelings. Now I feel strongly again about helping people more unfortunate than myself.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

Yes definitely, not as strong as when it initially happened. When it first happened I knew that we are all the same being if you will, that the earth as an organism and all the people and living things in it are one and the same thing, or all part of the same thing. In a day to day way I realised that all the faults I disliked in others I had probably at one time or another displayed towards other people myself. I felt as though I was those other people. I just knew that we are all exactly the same inside – we are one.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I do not want to be connected to any religion. I feel that we are definitely one.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Yes this has gotten worse again, I have to remind myself to stop and practise meditation, read *The Power of Now* again.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I am definitely less afraid of death now and truly believe there will be something more after death, whereas before I wanted to believe but wasn't really sure.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

I will never go back to the way of thinking prior to my experience but I think I will have to work at trying to keep the thought-chatter away. Thankfully I find Tolle extremely helpful and will continue to practice meditation.

Interview Transcript – P20

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Ten years ago I was 34 years old. During an extremely stressful period of my life I was doing a very intense senior management job that my personality and character could not cope with. My wife was going to hospital for tests on a lump on her neck we were convinced was cancer. I literally did not sleep at all for a week due to worry and stress. Out of nowhere at 5am one morning I had what I now realise was a sudden uncontrolled Kundalini awakening. I ended up spending 6 out of the next 12 months in a Psychiatric hospital pumped full of drugs. The doctors and psychiatrists told me I had experienced a psychotic episode after first discussing possible schizophrenia. All through the initial experience I was sure I was having some sort of intense spiritual awakening experience but knew nothing about anything like that at the time and had no-one to ask. I initially thought that I was Jesus Christ and that everyone else was as well. At least some sort of Christ consciousness within every one. As I lay on a bare mattress in a locked room on a high security psychiatric ward my spine and upper body convulsed as I experienced going back into previous lives to work out issues. This went on for about 2 days but there was no-one to tell about it as the doctors and nurses just look at you every 5 minutes to make sure you are not doing anything daft. I never spoke to anyone about this at the time, least of all the doctors because I knew it just meant they would detain me longer in hospital. I had the experience that I could feel my spine from within my body.

One year ago at the age of 43 I discovered Sahaja Yoga that brings about a very gentle and controlled kundalini awakening and I am now reaping the benefits of the transformation it has made to my life but ten years ago it was all very frightening and unexplained. Gopi Krishna has written that 30% of schizophrenia diagnosis are actually 'spiritual crisis' and kundalini awakenings. Paul Levy of America tells the same story.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality when you were younger?

Not at all. I always had a curiosity about religion but could never really find anything that I really understood or believed in.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Ten years ago it turned my life upside down. The last year has shown me that I was looking at the world upside down. What I thought was important had no importance whatsoever and vice versa.

My life changed quite a lot. I found I wasn't able to work full time anymore. I had to work part-time. I was a service manager at BMW car dealers and I just couldn't do it anymore, physically and mentally. I had a different perspective, a different outlook on life. I guess I was seeking, searching for answers.

It was a little in the wilderness, trying to understand what had happened to me, and trying to adjust my life accordingly. I hoped that there was more than what the doctors were telling me.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Some people get this after a bereavement - you suddenly realize what's important in life and what's not - big cars and lots of money and all the material trappings isn't what life is all about. Now I have lost all material desires. I used to think my life would only be complete if I had a newer faster motorbike and drove my wife mad for years with impulsive purchases of dozens of different bikes. At the time of my original breakdown I was consumed with having the latest biggest car and gadgets. This has all dissolved into thin air. I am not at the stage of treating a pebble and a gold nugget the same but I have no desires now.

Meditation has really grounded me - I never thought I'd be the sort of person who would sit and do meditation, but it's grounded me and given me a sense of perspective on life.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Initially I was very wary of other people and nervous of them. I now understand that we are all the same. We are one spirit. As Mother Theresa used to say, she saw only Christ in all his various disguises. There is one God and one Son.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

It took me a very long time but I now look forward to nothing better than sitting and meditating in thoughtless awareness. It must seem very strange to an Ego oriented person, the idea of doing nothing. Some people cannot sit still and get bored very easily. I don't get bored anymore. I only work 2 days per week and all I do otherwise is read books go for walks and meditate.

In the past, I couldn't sit still for five minutes. I had to be doing something or going somewhere. The transition from that to being able to sit and do nothing is massive.

Q: Do you find that a lot of thoughts run through your mind when you're not busy?

This is very important in Sahaja Yoga. When we are centred and our Chakras are clear we try to get into a state of not thinking or planning at all. It is difficult to maintain all the time but I am only at peace fully when there are no thoughts at all in my mind. It has taken me a year of meditating twice daily to regularly get into this state.

Q: What do you think are the most important goals in your life?

I have only one goal now. To progress to the highest spiritual state as soon as I can. It is a difficult slow process at times but I am heading in the right direction for sure.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I now agree with Peter Pan who famously said that to die would be 'A very great adventure!' I was petrified of death as a child and young man and never understood why every human being did not scream from the rooftops 'what happens when you die?' I was obsessed with the question and could find no answers.

Q: After the transformation, did you make any changes to your lifestyle e.g. your hobbies, your job or career?

I lost all interest in my hobbies and my charity work. I continued my stress free 2 days a week job as it fits my life very well.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

The shift that happened ten years ago is definitely permanent. But I am a long way from abiding in a permanent state of wakefulness. I can go several days in a state of love peace and joy but then it fades away. Meditation is the key and allowing the kundalini to clear the Chakras. Regular cleansing techniques are integral to Sahaja Yoga.

Q: How would you define yourself?

I have no religion as such. I do my yoga and meditation but I would never say I belong to any particular religion or group. Even my love of football has waned. It was a massive part of my life but that desire to belong has pretty much gone. Everyone seems to need to belong to a particular group but I don't need that anymore

Interview Transcript – P21

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yeah, it was about two or three sessions after counselling. The counsellor explained the person-centred approach and she was using transactional analysis inner child therapy. It was 8 years ago and I understood perfectly what she was talking about – I don't know why but I seemed to know intuitively know what she was talking about. Yeah, I had about three sessions when I saw myself as a child no longer and that was when I realised I had a relationship with my child and I kind of grew from there. I felt like I was a new person.

That was how it happened. It was really sad at the time. I'd never realised how much of a bad childhood I'd had. All through my teenage years and my twenties I'd never had the chance to think about it. What happened was that I just woke up one day and realised that I couldn't put up with my mother anymore. Because I had no sense of self-worth it never occurred to me. My mother had a personality disorder. I was so unbelievably traumatised. She had been threatening to kill me. From birth to 33, she was abusive to me. I don't tolerate her now.

I fell in love with the person-centered approach and went on to study counselling at a place where they had a spiritual focus on the courses. After that I went on to study transpersonal psychotherapy. It opened up a whole new world of being able to help ourselves. A journey of emotional growth – I wasn't an adult before.

Q: So for the past 8 years you feel as though you've been on a path of self-development?

Before I was never interested in anything except hiding. I lived a very blinkered life. It's hard to describe. I was just concentrating on keeping myself and my two sisters safe. I never considered anything else. I never had personal freedom – if I went out with my friends she came with me, and I had to be in at a certain time. The closest I ever came to hearing about spirituality is that I was always interested in clairvoyance. I was aware of psychic phenomena but I didn't make the connection between that and spirituality.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I think it's changed in that I've grown up emotionally. I look at things in an adult's eyes rather than through a child's. It's very hard to explain but it's....I tend to look for the spiritual reason in things, in the way they happen. An example recently is that I had been waiting six months for a CRB to start a new job. It came finally and I rang the company and asked them for a start date but the job fell through. Instead of being devastated and disappointed I was very calm. Before 8 years ago when I lost my job I would have descended into an awful depression. I would have made myself anxious. But I was excited when the job fell through because everything happens for a reason, so something good can happen instead.

So I have a trust in the process. It's knowing that you're worthy enough to be looked after. Experience has shown me that I have been looked after time and time again. I have always been rescued. I've learned to trust that life is a process and I believe that in any given moment we're somewhere where we're meant to be. There is a universal energy called God which has our best interests at heart.

I also think I'm more compassionate. I was always compassionate to a degree but much more so now. I used to see pictures of earthquakes and disasters and TV and think 'I'll make a note of that and give some money later' but never get around to it. Now I'm very much involved with the Kindness Offensive. I'm more altruistic. I get up off my backside and do something.

Q: Can you sense the universal energy you talked about?

I have a massive sense of connection with it. I call it God, but it's not a person. I use the term God to make it real. I certainly don't mean it in a religious sense. We're all connected and we're all being looked after, if we're willing to stay in the present moment and not dwell in the past and worry about the future which hasn't arrived yet. I feel connection and a great deal of comfort from nature too, from Mother Earth.

I'm more sensitive to the things around me. I feel as if I have more time. I never had the time to notice things are around me. I was focused on keeping myself safe from harm all the time. My perception of everything has changed. I look at things from an adult perspective, a more spiritual perspective.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I became less materialistic. Before when things were bad I used to find solace in material things, spending massive amounts of money. I tried to buy designer things, just because it made me feel better, even if it was only temporary. Now I find I'm much more laid back. I wouldn't swap this feeling of knowing that the universe is looking after me. I tend to count my blessings for what I've got – if I see something and can't afford it, it's no big deal.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I've found that people from the past don't understand me. People accuse me of being selfish because I sometimes say no – I might have to say no, because now I'm trying to take care of myself. I need to take time out. I'm very giving and generous but I won't take responsibility for other people and their lives. I don't think it does people good to rescue them all the time – sometimes they should stand on their own feet. My relationships are more authentic, and a lot more meaningful, because I can't be arsed playing games and putting on a mask. Sometimes there is a lot of conflict though. For example my 18 year old niece lives with me and sometimes I say things which she may perceive as hurtful – but I'm just being truthful, saying as it is. She'll be making excuses but I'm asking her to take responsibility.

But there has been a lot of incomprehension. Quite a few people who I used to have in my life just see me as selfish and weird. I can't stand them whining about trivial things anymore, and not doing anything about it, like a friend who was complaining about her boyfriend for four years.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I'm quite happy to do nothing. I realise that my need to keep doing and doing stuff was to do with my mother telling me to do things. I'm happy to be on my own, and not to have anything in particular to do.

Q: Do you find that a lot of thoughts run through your mind when you're not busy?

I used to have a lot of thoughts after my change. I couldn't control my thoughts. And it's sometimes like that now, but now I can stand back and witness the thoughts in my mind, thinking 'it's nowhere near as big as it seems.'

Q: What do you think are the most important goals in your life?

At the moment I'm concentrating on staying in the here and now my goal is to do that all the time. My goal is to stop having too many goals. If I try to limit my goals to one at a time, just concentrating and trying to be mindful of the fact that it does me the power of good. If I have a bit of an off day I might start worrying about stuff that hasn't happened yet – my goal is just to understand that it's part of the process. I remind myself that it's all happening for a reason, usually it's some kind of healing crisis – something that I treat myself for.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I never had an attitude to death. I never thought about it. Now I believe that it's not the end of life, but I'm not worried about it. I don't think about it much.

Q: After the transformation, did you make any changes to your lifestyle e.g. your hobbies, your job or career?

Massively – before I was a nail technician I owned a nail salon. After my change I went totally in the opposite direction. The more I delved into counselling the more my nail salon didn't make sense. It didn't make sense. The bigger my view of things became, the smaller it seemed. I didn't enjoy it anymore. I didn't go through all of these changes and have all this empathy just to be a nail technician.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

I think it's very stable and it's impossible to go back even if we wanted to. There are days when I wish it had never happened because life seems to be a little too complicated sometimes. There are the odd days when I think I know too much. But I don't think you can go back. I wouldn't change it even with the complexity. It's like being born again, being really alive.

Interview Transcript – P22

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Yes, I believe so. I had been practicing yoga and meditation since 2002, and experienced a degree of wakefulness. But I was still very much involved in the story of who I was and identified with my past experiences which I used to define myself. I was highly sensitive, easily hurt, and I felt a great degree of emotional pain at times. I felt that I'd underachieved in life, and I frequently remembered painful events from the past. Although I felt that my yoga practice was helping me, I wasn't content or happy for very long.

In November 2006 I went to Mysore, India, to learn Ashtanga Yoga from the late Sri K. Pattabhi Jois. Returning home in February 2007 was very difficult for me. Within 2 weeks of coming home I was admitted to the acute psychiatric ward with my first manic episode for 10 years. I was convinced that I was having a spiritual experience, but the doctors disagreed. I had several experiences where my consciousness seemed to rise suddenly, the energy meridians in my body were energised, and my mind became sharper and clearer. But I had a terrible time in hospital because of the staff's attitude, and persuaded them to discharge me while I was still unwell.

The breakthrough happened on the day I was discharged, my 35th birthday. A friend was running me back to my flat in Glasgow to pick up some things. I felt a shift in my consciousness, something I hadn't felt before. My mind was becoming quieter, and at the same time the world was becoming sharper, more real, and the experience was lasting. I went for a swim while my friend taught a class at the gym, and for the first time in my life I experienced myself as consciousness.

I went home that night still feeling very clear, and my mind was still quiet. I considered not taking the large dose of antipsychotic medicine I had been prescribed because I knew I would lose this lucidity if I did. But I took it, out of respect for the people who were caring for me.

The second profound shift happened in October 2007. I was hiking and camping with my brother in Dunkeld – I missed a night's sleep – and the mania got worse. My brother accused

me of not taking my medicine – the truth is that, I'd never missed a dose. To allay his fears I took an extra dose in the morning. That night my concentration and the medicine side-effects were so bad that I forgot I'd taken that day's dose of medicine in the morning, and took another dose, causing a small overdose. I felt very heavy and intoxicated and I had difficulty breathing. I called my brother at his home, but there was no answer. I didn't know what to do.

When I woke up the next morning I felt extremely intoxicated. I climbed into the shower but I could barely stand and I thought I was going to be sick, so I went back to bed. I could barely breathe, my chest felt very heavy. The world was going dark and it felt like I was going to die. I was terrified.

A memory came to me, a student from my class saying 'just breathe through it.' I relaxed and stopped trying to control my breathing, I stopped trying to force myself to take full breaths, and let my breathing slow down. It became shallow, and slower, until I exhaled and stopped breathing completely. As frightening as it was, I let it happen. I don't know how long I stopped breathing for, but I felt an unusual peace through it.

I can't remember what happened after that. I know I got up and got into the shower and when the water hit my skin I could feel every single drop of water. The medicine side-effects were gone and I was in that vibrant dimension of clarity, laughing my head off, absolutely elated. I realised a profound truth, what it meant just to be alive and to be able to have a shower, and have a bed to sleep in, and food to eat. I met my brother in Edinburgh that night and I was amazed at the quality of the colour of the sky, it had never looked like that before, and the warmth on my skin, it was like the world had been made anew.

I persuaded my doctor to change my medicine, I chose Lithium, and it worked very quickly. The mood stabiliser medicine I'd previously been taking had just stopped working earlier in the year, for no apparent reason, leading to the two manic episodes. I refused to take antipsychotic medicine again.

The thing is, and I found this difficult to understand or even explain to people, is that after the episode of illness I felt like a new person. The things that used to bother me didn't any more. I threw out every possession I had that reminded me of the past. I fictionalised my experience to explain it to myself and others, and believed that on that day when I had the

peak experience in the shower I'd actually died, my life energy had left my body and taken all my old issues and neuroses with it, and had new energy had entered my body. I'd re-incarnated in the same body in the same lifetime, changed.

I doubt if that's the truth, I just couldn't rationally explain why I emerged from a manic episode with better mental health than I've ever had before. I spend a lot of time in the present now, more than I ever did, and I can quiet my mind easily when I want to. My family have often remarked on my positive changes, and my psychiatrist told me recently that I'm one of the most psychologically healthy people she's ever met. I've not been able to tell her that when I recovered from the last episode of mania most of my fears and anxiety were gone.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

I was interested in ESP as a child, as well as myths and legends. As a teenager my spirituality centred on creative writing. I was brought up a Christian, but left the church when I was 19 – I had to admit to myself that I didn't have a relationship with Jesus and I had no idea what it meant to be born again – I didn't think my Christianity was authentic. I started to explore Buddhism and yoga when I was 30 – I enjoyed the philosophy and the practices but I'm not sure if I'd have called them spiritual practices at the time.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

Life is simple. And life is precious. All forms of life are sacred. Life is a miracle, and it is to be enjoyed. Every moment is different; every moment is alive with possibilities. If I was to lose everything tomorrow, I'd be okay. The greatest way I can use my life is to contribute toward the well-being of all forms of life. I don't need to do anything or be desire to contribute to the world anybody, I'm fine the way I am. I spend most of my time in the moment, and in many ways encourage others to do the same. There's nothing lacking from my present situation. I don't feel uneasy when I'm lacking direction or stuck. All of the difficult things in my life happened to get me to where I am today – and I'm very happy with who I am and where I am – so I no longer label experiences as good or bad.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

Yes, I no longer associate material things with myself, they're not a part of me. There's no such thing as 'my laptop' – there's just a laptop. I like beautiful things, but for most things I can live without them. I can't remember the last time I wanted something to the point that I thought about it until I got it. I've got everything I need, and material objects can't add to my enjoyment of life. I'm content.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

My mum commented that my relationships had improved with them and my other family members. I got on well with fellow students, and I no longer worry about whether people like me or not. I seem to be able to get on well with just about anybody, and I have a genuine interest in people which I didn't have before. I don't need anything from anybody, so I can relax and enjoy their company. My relationship with my present partner, Anne-Marie, began around the time of the transformation event. For me I find it difficult to watch her get upset about things which I know are just fears, and her anxiety is unnecessary. And she, especially at first, found it difficult because I didn't seem to want anything – holidays, new house, new clothes, I was happy with a simple life. In saying that I've enjoyed Anne-Marie's company for four years now and this has been the happiest relationship I've ever been in.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Sometimes, when I'm sitting in nature, but generally I like to be involved in activity.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

Yes I do. I always was a compassionate person, possibly because I've had my own difficulties and I have a brother with autism. My compassion has only grown stronger. I feel a great deal of concern for the people I see, in some ways I can see myself as them, imagine what it would be like to have their difficulties, and I experience concern for their welfare. It feels like my heart is breaking at times, especially when I see people with severe physical disabilities. I wish love and happiness for everyone.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

I feel a part of nature, I feel more connected to the plants and trees and animals and the river and the mountains than I do the built environment. I feel a connection with people, but I also feel connected with tree and birds and grass and hills, and the wind and stone walls – there are times when everything seems alive.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I'm reluctant to identify with anything now. I used to read a lot of Buddhist and Yoga and other spiritual books before the transformation, because I was looking for something from them. In the last four years I've only read a couple of those books, because I'm not looking for anything any more. I'm alive, that's the closest I can get to an identity. I share that with every other living thing. We all share the same life force.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Yes, I do, although it isn't as bothersome as it once was, and I don't tend to identify with it. I have to take thyroxin tablets as Lithium therapy causes hypothyroidism, and the thyroxin can intensify thinking. If I catch myself day-dreaming I pay attention to something else, or just accept that the mind is busier than usual.

There are times when the mind is silent, and I'm just watching or listening, and the world is beautifully alive.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Yes, definitely. I've no fear of death any more. I'm not in a rush to die, but I'm not attached to the body and the life and the possessions. Life is a miracle and a mystery, and I'm happy with that.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes, I'm in many ways a different person now, living a different life. I still experience some anxiety, and very occasionally depressive thoughts and feelings, but I usually find my way out of them very quickly. When I showed my partner these questions she told me that the biggest difference she noticed is that I spend most of my time in the present. I feel that I now have a more genuine spirituality, and reverence for everything that lives.

Interview Transcript – P23

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

There was always a knowing of nothingness, always emptiness. But there was a change in the last two years. From being a child, nothing was wrong – I had a deep sense of silence. I've always felt guided from being a kid. From being a child I was never aware of a sense of anything. I was always aware of emptiness. My family thought I was stupid. I was so quiet, I had nothing to say. My head was always empty.

I was from a very religious background – a strict Muslim family – but I had no concept of God because of my awareness of nothingness. There was no central experience. My mum used to say, 'You have no fear. You have no fear of God.'

My experience got deeper in my early twenties. When I was 21, I was walking through the lounge and there was an almighty of unconditional love and the separation and judgement faded away. Everything was just emanating love. Nothingness spoke through that. Everything merged - it was so beautiful. It just expanded the joy I had as a child.

Around that time I met my husband, and it was a serious situation because he was a Christian. He got death threats and we had to leave Yorkshire, had to be relocated to another area for safety. I'd come out of a very isolated background where everything is very controlled. As a female, you were quite restricted, and I was used to it. I was never restricted because I felt free inside. But then I came out into the world and it was like 'Wow!' I'd never really been allowed out on my own – to wear what I wanted, to go where I wanted. It was wonderful. I could see everyone's essence, the joy and love in everybody. A lot of people came to me for guidance, although I wasn't aware of doing anything.

I never questioned it as a child, but when I got to the age of 26 I did start questioning it. I started wondering, 'Why do I have no likes and dislikes? Why is my mind empty?' I hit a massive wall of despair – it could be the dark night of the soul. I wanted to understand it, so I became attached to it. I was bombarded with answers but had no one to talk to. I had no reference points as to what was happening.

But as a result it's deepened, over the last four or five years. I would just sit there and feel ecstatic. The only words I have for it is love want nothing and giving everything. I keep disappearing, keep having glimpses of oneness. There is no time. No past no future, just things appearing and happening, everything just is. There is a massive amount of unconditional love. Love questions nothing.

Q: When did you start to find out about spiritual ideas and practices?

The last five years. If I'd read spiritual books before my dark night I wouldn't have known. There was nobody there having the experience. If someone had given me a book about spirituality, there would have just been joy. Now I'm looking into the books – recently it's been trying to find someone to talk to. I went to see a spiritual teacher – I was still struggling with language.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I haven't really thought about it. What I need comes. I don't have a huge need or want for things. I let things just come as they come.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yeah. It's amazing because I can see their essence and their love or joy. I love being with other people. It's naturally giving. In my dark night, I lost contact with an old friend and she got back in touch recently, and said to me, 'I've never met anybody like you. Your energy has helped me so much.'

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I am happy to do nothing. The silence is so beautiful. In the silence everything is taken care of. It's so nice just to sit and do nothing. That's one of my favourite times. I can just sit in silence for hours.

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

There's sense of empathy and compassion because I love people so much.

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

There's no difference. Everything is part of the nothingness. It's just being. You can go anywhere, even in the city, and feel a deep state of appreciation.

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I feel at home with everything. My husband when we first met – he asked me 'Who are you?' And I said 'I don't know.' I don't feel as if I have an identity.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

Thoughts sometimes arise, but they arise and pass. It doesn't hang around. A lot of the time my mind is quiet.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

I have no concept of death and so no fear of it.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

I've never known any different, although it's changed over the last few years. Someone said to me recently 'How can you know the kingdom?' The way I've looked at it is 'How could I truly know that I was living in love?'

Interview Transcript – P24

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It was both gradual and permanent for me. I took up a practice of noticing my thoughts and emotions and resting in presence all day long on a repeated basis. Not a practice, but living meditation - you do it through your life. It felt gradual in the sense that I was experiencing more and more peace and freedom from limiting beliefs and positions and thoughts. The gradual aspect went on for a year and half and then there were two big experiences. The first one would be sort of like a shift a change into silence when the mind quieted. It was the first time I was really aware of a palpable silence. And a lot of the busy-ness of my mind and the seeking energy fell away. The next day I woke up and felt like I was looking at the world from a place that was behind thought – that's the best way I can describe it. And then for three or four months this sort of seeking energy would resurface every now and then.

Then once I was camping and I started to look at trees and things that were all around me, the sky and the ground. I was looking at the seamlessness of everything. I kept looking for a gap but there didn't seem to be a gap. On the way home I started to experience almost like little sparklers going off inside my body and mind. When I got home I was lying in my bed – I was petting both of my dogs, one on each side, and the thought came up 'consciousness wants to see itself.' My dogs were not separate from whatever I am – there was a lack of those boundaries between myself and my surroundings. Then I just got up and everything looked that way. I wasn't conceptualising, I wasn't narrating. Everything I looked at seemed to have no separate existence from what I was – the absence of all those dividing lines both in space and time. Space was just the dividing line between me and the floor or me and the door. It was as if the sense of time fell away, all those division of the past, present and future. I just remember saying to myself 'all the time I thought that I was Scott!' It fell away. It was a really big experience in my life.

I had some insights into death and time, that we don't really die – we don't really die. I don't have anything beyond that. And then time, when I was looking at my clock – all my life I thought that time was something out there, beyond thoughts, and it seemed to me that it really wasn't. And so for the next week and a half I felt an overwhelming sense of love. It was almost too much for my mind and my body to handle. I felt a pure pure love and that has

remained with me, although it's settled down. It's much more of a simple part of my being. Since then separateness has been seen through.

I do continue to do certain practices. I went a little bit deeper with certain practices and exploration and then at the end I came full circle to just appreciate the everyday. I'm 41. I got clean off drugs when I was 34. My spiritual search started then, when I was 34, a period of time when I was searching. At some point - I guess it would have been around 2005/6 - I started on a more non-dual approach.

I was a drug addict. I had about 20 years of progressive addiction, increasing use, starting to affect every area of my life, even while I was an attorney. I started with marijuana and got into alcoholic and painkillers, and dabbled in just about everything - methamphetamine, crack cocaine near the end. For the last five years it was mainly alcohol and painkillers in excessive amounts.

Q: Do you think there was possibly a connection between the end of your drug addiction and your transformation?

I can't ultimately say. If nothing else, it created a seeker mentality of constantly looking for something. When the drugs were gone it turned to enlightenment, with the same kind of intensity.

Q: Did you have any interest in spirituality or self-development when you were younger?

When I was smoking pot in my early 20s I would read books on eastern mysticism, just dabbling. I had no spiritual practice, just an interest.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

When I was heavily addicted to drugs it was a painful struggle against circumstances and people and the constant use of drugs - need I say more. When I got off drugs frankly I wasn't in any depression. I was in a 12 step programme. The main thing was a kind of seeking. You can't be happy no matter what you're doing and where you are. You could be standing doing

the dishes and have a constant need to get on to the next thing. Your quality of life is so diminished when you can't be with your present experience. It was the same in relationships and my career – trying to change people, moving from job to job, dissatisfaction with work, with life in general.

There has been a natural recognition of my present experience. The anxiety about future isn't really there; rehashing of the past isn't. When something arises I don't experience it the same way. Everything that arises falls away immediately and doesn't leave a trace. That frees my energy up. My energy isn't used in seeking. It frees up my energy to find out what I'm really interested in, just for the sheer enthusiasm of it. So it becomes clear what it is I want to do but not in terms of the future. It's more like what I want to do now; it shows up really easily.

I was the rat on the wheel; going around and around but no idea where I was going. In our culture there's a lot of socially acceptable addiction, with work and money. Addiction can hide out in our culture. People can really be suffering and not thinking of it.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I don't pay attention to possessions, hardly any attention. You can have extreme views in spirituality. If I deny that voice in my head that tells me to enjoy things it can create an imbalance in my life, take me too far into the formless realm. I can't control that balance. All I can do is notice where the imbalance is. I enjoy certain things. I have musical instruments; I play music. We have a nice house but it's not what I'm looking for. My sense of self doesn't come from them. I'm not attached to them.

It's important not to take an extreme view. At one point I did that and I ended up judging a lot of other people who are lost in the material world. I disowned that voice in me. All of those energies of life, they are us – if we deny certain things about our experience, it ends up being an imbalance. That's why I like the middle way. You don't deny material things but you don't stay in the grip of material things.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

I still experience challenges and conflict as an attorney and in my relationship with my family. A lot of things still happen but relationships have been one of the most powerful ongoing practices. There's something about relationships that we haven't fully explored yet. We have not developed the right language yet. It's in our relationships with each other that we develop. For example, I used to hate conflict because it didn't feel good. Anything that didn't feel good must be bad. But when I took a deeper look but I realised it was showing me a lot.

I hunkered down on certain viewpoints and became inflexible. I hid out from my relationships because it can be a painful area. It was easier to stay in a transcendent place, in the formless la-la-la land. But at a certain point you realize that no matter how you see what you see, there are still relationships and people and families. That's what I found in my life and I found it enriching to turn towards things. I've been hurt along the way and I have found out a lot about myself. It's fertile ground for development

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

You know, the way it's unfolded for me, I went from always looking for something, filling up my time seeking something. When that seeking energy died out, there was a little voice which showed up: 'You've got to do something.' When I let that thought be and didn't follow it, I went into a period of 'Oh what I am going to do now?' I didn't pick up my guitar after being a musician for years. I wanted people to like me, I wanted to be known as a great songwriter. And when I went to work during that period...I don't have any ambition to be the best attorney in the world, I never I had that aspiration. But at a certain point I was like 'I don't know what the heck I'm supposed to.' I just held out there for a while and opened myself up to experience. What happened for me was that I found that I do like playing music. It's okay to feel okay about that. I enjoy music just for the enjoyment and doing my job for the sake of doing it. I do a lot of things.

There is no doer – I just find life doesn't have to be about egoic doing; it can be about a different kind of doing. When we get in the world, there are always going to be little inflating moments – there are going to be deflating moments. That's part of the up and down of duality. To accept the moment in whatever way it appears in some place, I had to get really comfortable. I had to get really comfortable in the non-doing aspect of being. That's why I

like the middle way, because that can be a place...I have a tendency to deny, like the monk in the monastery. You have to be very comfortable there but at the same time as being open and comfortable with experience. You can't do it by force of will. I had to find that place of rest that was always here and be very comfortable with that and not take it to an extreme...

Q: What do you think are the most important goals in your life?

The goals aren't real primary for me but I do have ideas about what I'd like to happen. They're not really prominent but I can only tell you what feels right is to share the message of freedom. At a certain point the seeking and the taking change, and in place of seeking you want to help others. That's where all of my energy is spent. What I enjoy is talking to someone and seeing that they are starting to experience freedom. They come to you and they're feeling a sense of limitation and they start to feel a turnaround in their own lives. And also to continue be open to deepening and not boxing myself off from further deepening – all you can do is remain open. The mind is subtly self-deceptive. The most I can do is to remain open, not to just to help people.

Q: Do you still experience 'thought-chatter'? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn't occupied?

That doesn't arise anymore. For the most part, that's just quietened down. Every now and then it arises, but somehow it doesn't have the same fuel that it had.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

The insight that arose is that we don't die. I just felt like maybe we don't exist in the way that we think we do. It comes from believing that we exist in a way we don't understand. The fear of death – a large part of my story was trying to avoid the end of the story. The mere thought of it, my own death, was a paralysing fear. Now I'm not afraid of death but a lot of those philosophical questions about why just don't arise.

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

You know I can't know that. All I have is my thoughts about my unfolding, which can only be relied upon to a certain degree. I can tell you that it *feels* stable. It's been about three years now and it feels stable.

The identity has shifted, in a way it's changed, but I still call myself Scott. Although that name doesn't feel like whatever it is that I am. There is a deep unknowing from me. All of these concepts were empty. They didn't capture me or my life. Before I was so convinced that I was Scott – somehow that concept contained my identity.

Now I have lots of energy. The burden of time isn't weighing on me. My work doesn't feel like a job. When people feel burdened it drains us of our natural energy. I still get tired and I have to take naps or sometimes pull myself away from this or that, but nothing weighs on me.

Interview Transcript – P25

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

Nature was my first way in. That was how I first had an opening when I was a child – although it continued through adulthood as well. I had this experience which was extremely powerful, my best guess is that it was when I was 7 years old. Nature always had a very powerful effect on me. It spoke to me in ways that nothing else really could. That time I was just walking to school and it was a beautiful spring day. I looked at a flower that was on one of the manicured lawns and I almost fell forward because the spaciousness and the stillness was so vast, beyond all mind and conceptuality, so vast that I lost my ground and I lost my bearings. I almost fell over and in that moment I said to myself in my childhood words, ‘I know what the world is made of, I know what never ends.’ I thought it would have sounded strange so I didn’t tell anyone about it.

This was something that always came and went. There were many other times when I knew it. It would always be with nature. Another time when I was looking at a wood I said to myself, ‘I know what is after death.’ ‘I know what never dies,’ I said it again. I just *knew* that. And then throughout my life I would always be able to look at nature and feel the stillness, to feel something beyond all conceptuality.

However, the world in conceptual terms always came back. So I didn’t quite know what to do. I remained not knowing what to do, even in my adult life. There was nobody who knew what I was talking about. I started to read Zen teachings and got some understanding of it but couldn’t create a bridge between these experiences that were totally non-conceptual and the conceptual, having some kind of bridge or integration. After abiding in non-conceptuality I would always come back. I tried going to a Zen temple but it didn’t resonate with me. It was very devotional and strict and kind of like guru-oriented. It didn’t resonate with my experience. So my spiritual experiences weren’t cultivated. It would hit me from out of the blue and I didn’t really understand it.

This was in the 80s – I just didn't know. It wasn't until Eckhart Tolle came out and I got to see that there were more people like him. People were talking about this and through reading this my ability to abide in the non-conceptual grew.

I have a different route now, but at that time it was about stillness and silence and turning your mind away from objects. The conceptual world was a distraction from truth and I would turn my mind away and be able to enter a non-conceptual bliss consciousness – I can still do it now - but that wasn't enough for me. I could abide for long periods of time. It was wonderful being able to stop the mind but it didn't teach me to see through a separate self. I am now able to do that.

I had a split-screen life, going back and forth between conceptuality and non-conceptuality. I would be abiding in stillness and then I could get caught up in busy moments. Being busy was an impediment because I was drawn into the believability of objects, into cause and effect, of appearing very substantial in terms of my conceptual mind, which was still interpreting things as being existent.

That developed in me through being involved in an awareness teaching, Advaita Vedanta – you must turn away from the world into stillness and silence in order to see. That doesn't work for me. For some people the conceptual world dissolves but it didn't for me. So I did something different, I learned emptiness teachings, Tibetan Buddhist teachings. It recognises that withdrawing the mind is not sufficient because we have many experiences of being in a non-conceptual state, such as deep sleep, fainting, in shock. It bypasses the mind and you enter a non-conceptual state. These states are important and they reveal a lot but they aren't sufficient. What needs to happen is that we need to turn towards objects and give attention to phenomena.

There was a confusion – I doubted that that this meant something because nobody talked about it, so I thought to myself, 'Well, maybe I'm odd.' I held it a little against myself. I had a conventional job and I continued with that because it didn't stick and I didn't have any validation of it. Through my adulthood I led a conventional life.

But once when I was reading Krishnamurti, I saw everything that he was saying and I didn't have to read anything anymore. I knew what I was, I knew what he was going to say. That

was a huge moment. There were two months of being in that non-conceptual state. It was very strange. I could experience peace and freedom but it didn't last. Therefore how was it really freeing? I was like a ping pong ball, going between conceptuality and non-conceptuality.

The permanent change began through a couple of friends I met, one of whom was very experienced, a teacher, and another person who practised advaita. We had a little group there, three of us, and we read a lot and we were guided. I was able to ask questions, and began to see through the separate self.

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

There is a seeing through of the falseness so therefore I don't get pulled in. There is no pulling back. I don't get fooled by appearances. It's impossible for there to be a separate self and for there to be a cause and effect. If it comes up it's seen through quickly and so there is no getting pulled into conflict and irritation.

Objects are not a distraction to me because I learned how to see emptiness, to see the falseness of conceptuality, by going through objects. I see the way that the false appearances just don't hold up. There is the appearance that things exist separately as their own things, but it can be seen that nothing has its own essence and even emptiness is not its own thing. Everything is dependently arisen. To be able to recognise the lack of independent existence of all things is a profound non-dual teaching. It's really quite a rigorous teaching.

I would say that there is peace and there is a sense of freedom – that there is nothing that can truly grab you, nothing that can pull you in.

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

It even applies to life and death so certainly not to money. There is no attachment to money because it's not even believed in. The appearance cannot grip you, you can't find it. It's like moons on the water, like a mirage.

I never was really interested in material things it's just that I was not really oriented that way. But I could say – let's say there was a crisis, practically speaking I would do what I needed to do but it wouldn't affect me, because I wasn't attached.

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

What happened to me is that people I would not agree with or maybe not feel connected with or may be judge – I can't hold that. I don't judge them anymore. These appearances and positions come up with are like moons on the water. I would therefore say that I have tolerance and compassion, and there can't be a judgement. You can't hang your hat on these things.

Q: Has your mind become busier or quieter than it was?

I don't mind thoughts but they do not have any pull. I let them dance. I can have quietness but I don't have to be bothered by thoughts either. They're like little puppets. The mind is not my enemy anymore. Looking at it is like looking at a tree. It's just as empty of inherent existence and just as joyful.

Q: Would you say that you have an enhanced sense of beauty?

Everything without discrimination – it just doesn't have to be nature. Now I can look at my remote control and see its emptiness which is to me is beauty, because it is the harmony of everything. It is the not I-and-this mindset. There is no asserting of an ultimate mountain top view. I can see a beautiful interdependence of all phenomena.

Q: Do you feel part of this interdependence?

Yes yet you function – I'm not thrown by it. I can function completely well at the same as being a part of it.

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

I really love my quietude. It gives me the chance to read and delight and meditate in a different way that allows for reflection and for an ever-deepening. But at the same time it has allowed me to be more active. When stillness and silence was my only means of escaping the mental labelling of separateness, then I felt the need to retreat. Now I can be involved in this mystery of life without it having to distract me. I do not have stillness and silence as my refuge. There is no need of something to leave.

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

There is no life or death. This is how things appear but you can't find the beginning and ending, these comings and goings, this body and this mind. I would say that there is a transcending of the fear of death because I don't believe it is existent in a true way, in an inherent way. How can the never born die?

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Yes – it is permanently in the sense that the pulls that were tormenting are no longer there. Is there still a development, and unfolding? Yes. But I consider that the bridge has been constructed.

Examples of Coded Transcripts

P3

1. Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It's been a lifelong gradual process. Transformation is such a big word, enlightenment
Gradual process
is such a big word. My experience has been profound but really really simple, a
simple process
stepping over the threshold from being untransformed to being transformed. It's
something that I've been observing since I was a kid. But I would say that the main
process of transformation has happened within the last two years
process over the last two years

Q: Did you have spiritual experiences as a child?

I had some really unusual experiences, usually when I was by myself, of being a tiny
part of something very very big. Visually it was like being a tiny speck that was being
childhood spiritual experiences
help on top of a giant finger. It felt like I was part of that finger but also slightly
detached. I had that experience a lot, of being very very small in a big space, usually
sense of unity
when I was very relaxed. A really pleasant experience, a very connected experience.
It felt very natural and really good.

Q: How often did you have the experience?

It was a regular experience from being about 4 or 5, right through until just before my
pre-teens. I never talked about it to my parents because it didn't feel like it was
something I had to talk about. I never discussed it with anyone.
Regular until teens

Q: Did you continue having spiritual experiences as an adult?

Certainly. I got interested in psychedelic drugs, a journey of wanting to push my consciousness to its limits. I had some profound experience using psychoactive drugs. I used them as a tool, a way of finding out what was going on.

Spiritual experiences induced by psychedelic drugs

Q: So what is the process of transformation over the last two years?

About five years ago I had an experience when I became seriously ill. My appendix
Serious illness – almost died (caught a bug in hospital)

burst. I was taken into hospital and operated on and I picked up a bug and almost died. It made me more aware of what was going on and the things that I was doing more aware

and I decided to have a bit of a change, which led me to different career choices. I left behind a well paid job in local government and started training in hypnotherapy.

Career change – gave up job

I helped out with my wife's business too but found it was in a bad way, and to cut a long short, we lost everything bar the house. It wiped us out financially. We had to go 'lost everything.'

into massive debt management. It was a really dark moment in my adult life. I thought dark moments

I was going to have to give up my training. I started losing it got really really super depressed.

Very depressed

I was looking round trying to cling on to an idea and I came across a book by John Parkin called *Fuck it*. I sat down and read it in a couple of sittings and it was like having being reintroduced to Taoism. It reconnected me with Taoism and was a really nice experience. I realised that I was doing all the things I shouldn't do, becoming really attached to stuff, viewing too much meaning into what's going on. I needed to step back, so I did.

Needed to step back

Then there was a lovely synchronistic experience when I won a competition at the book, a week at the retreat that the author ran in Italy. It was just a lovely experience

that we would never have been able to afford ourselves, and when I got back I felt great. It reintroduced me to writers like Eckhart Tolle – I don't think I got it ten years ago but this time I did. The real awakening was just starting to utilise the idea of being present more and developing a really good sense of presence. Over the last 18 months a really good sense of presence as I've practised being more present, and not having such a strong relationship with being present as a practice – detachment from thoughts my thoughts, my overall experience of being here right now has been brilliant. I have loads more energy and am excited about everything I do, but not completely attached lots more energy to it. I don't live in a world where I'm hugging trees and not doing anything. I'm superactive and I've found that it's a massively enriching experience. I've had an superactive - massively enriching experience – amazing shift amazing shift in my life.

2. Has your attitude to material things changed?

One of the big problems I had when my wife's business was going under was that I was really embarrassed about the fact that we were having to go into debt management. I just felt terrible. I put myself through months of anguish, because of anguish – embarrassment – depression this construction of how I perceived my ego. It was mad really – I was so depressed I was given anti-depressants. But now I really don't care. There are some things we given anti-depressants can't do. We live completely within our means and I'm really really alright about it. Unmaterialistic – low income What it means is that our lives have opened up to a lot of new experiences. What does having a lot of material things matter if someone is unhappy?

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Certainly my relationship with my children – when I'm with them I'm present. More present in relationships

Likewise with my wife. My relationships have broadened out. They're not quite as intense with my close circle of friends but they have broadened. I seem to have a lot more interesting relationships with people I don't know very well – really nice more interesting relationships communication.

Q: Are you happy doing nothing?

Yes I love it. It's a balance. I meditate - I practise mindfulness. I find that I love Loves doing nothing – loves solitude being by myself. We live right on the edge of the Peak District and the Pennines, close to nature. I love getting out there with my kids and by myself. I love having close relationship to nature moments when there's nothing to do.

Q: Would you say that you have a busy or quiet mind?

One of my big qualms about self-development is that it promotes the idea of quick fixes. I think we're really process driven and the one I follow is one of disengaging thought and observing thoughts and thinking 'Where's that coming from?' And not Able to disengage from and observe thinking being judgemental about it but just stepping away from it. But over the last 18 months I exist a lot more comfortably and a lot more harmoniously with not having so much mind-chatter and I find it now really easy if stuff does come up and I perceive it as not helpful. And I find more that unhelpful thoughts don't arise so much. Less mind-chatter – more harmonious life

Q: Would you say you have an enhanced perception of beauty?

Absolutely, but it doesn't have to be countryside. I see it everywhere. One of the Enhanced perception of beauty – in everyday things unusual things I've experienced is if I'm around a lot of people - for example, last week I was working with a large group of people...One of the things that I really like about being in large groups of people is that I feel totally connected to the group, not just on a spiritual level but in terms of recognising them. I spent 20 minutes looking

connection to other people

around the room and everyone looked really familiar. I'd certainly not met any of them before but there was some kind of visual recognition. I recognised something in everybody I looked at.

Recognition of other people

I have this feeling a lot – a sense of connection. I don't feel mental – I feel very very sane, very calm and very peaceful but great it's also given me really great amount of energy.

Very calm and peaceful – lots of energy

Q: Do you feel a strong sense of purpose?

Not necessarily. It's allowed me to actually not be afraid of trying stuff out, to step

No strong sense of purpose – purpose just to exist

away and stop being fearful of rejection or failure. But I think that my purpose is just

Less afraid of failure

to exist and try to bring up three children as well as I can.

Q: Has your perception of death changed?

5 years ago I was laid up in a hospital, plugged up to a load of monitors, being told it was touch and go. I was shitting myself. It was one of the worst experiences I've ever had – part of it was the fear for my two boys. I knew my wife would get on with it but Fear for family when in hospital

my biggest concern was how the boys would cope. I didn't want to die. But since then

I really don't have any particular fear of it. I feel very calm about it. There are times I

No fear of death - acceptance

would quite be willing to accept it if I was told my death was to come, even though I don't want to die just yet.

Q: Does it feel like a permanent transformation?

It does actually. It feels really good I can't see it changing in the distant future. I'm
Permanent transformation

aware that at some point something is going to happen which will test it – probably
something along the lines of death of a family member or friend. About 11 years ago
aware that it could be tested

when I first started reading about Taoism it gave me a similar experience. It bizarrely
coincided with my mother becoming really ill – we thought she was going to die and
it made the experience really different. Being with her – just me and her – I thought
whatever happens here, everything will be alright. I felt a real sense of calmness – I
sense of calm and trust

felt I was having an enlightened moment. At some point to come – it might be
tomorrow – it may be tested.

My impression was that enlightenment took place and you'd turn into Buddhist and
you'd be levitating across the globe. It's not like that, it's something that's a lot more
real. It's been and continues to be a really interesting experience that I'm enjoying but
Interesting experience – not too attached

am not too attached to, because it feels like a very natural state.

Enlightenment as a natural state – not esoteric

P8 – Coded Transcript

Q: Was there a particular point at which you underwent transformation?

It was 7 years ago. There were a few things leading up to it. I was a complete sceptic, a militant atheist. I'd been depressed for quite a few years before then, although it was nothing
Used to be sceptic/atheist depression
definite. There was just a lot of stress leading up to it. I'd been in a very close relationship
Stress - suffocating relationship
with a friend and it had got to the point where it was suffocating and breaking down. I was also drinking quite a lot and taking drugs, living in quite a self-destructive way.
drink and drugs – self-destructive

It happened very suddenly, one night. I'd taken ecstasy but only a small amount. I
taken small amount of ecstasy
ended up having a proper conversation with my friend. She was great – it was a very deep honest conversation. Suddenly I felt a rush a love, like I was burning up. My whole body was
love
being flooded with light. It was a realising that everything in my life had led up to this point.
flooded with light
It got scary when I went to bed. I closed my eyes and I was going to down a portal. I could
felt like dying
blue electricity around me. I felt like I was dying.

After that my whole senses opened up and I found everything overwhelming. I was
overwhelming – open and delicate
completely blown open too fast. I had no filter. I was so open and so delicate. Whenever I went out it was very chaotic. I was having psychic episodes but I didn't understand them. I could sense other people's thoughts...
psychic episodes - telepathy

I thought I was going bonkers, but I was aware that I was going bonkers, and I had a
incomprehension – going crazy
sense that I needed to work through, that it would play itself out. It lasted for about two years, before it started to stabilize.
stabilized after two years

I was working in a bookshop at the time but had to stop because I was ill. I was diagnosed with ME. I was too ill to go out.

physical illness - ME

The past 7 years has been about integrating the old and the new. Over the last three or four years I've reached a more stable state. I've worked through the chaos and I don't feel vulnerable anymore. I feel a lot more peaceful and stable now.

Peaceful and stable

Q: How has your attitude to life changed since the experience?

I feel a completely different person. I used to be very cynical and intolerant and judgemental.

I was also anxious and neurotic and insecure. I'm a lot more intuitive and in touch with

More tolerant less judgemental

Less anxious and insecure

myself, a lot more aware of my own energies. People are so surprised at how sorted I seem.

People who knew me in the past can't believe that I'm the same person, they're amazed at how calm and centred I am. Now I'm really happy being me. I used to feel a general anxiety all the time.

More intuitive

Calm and centered

Really happy

I still have psychic experiences sometimes, like pre-cognitive dreams. Sometimes I just know things without knowing why I know them. And sometimes synchronistic things happen.

Still has occasional psychic experiences

Q: Has your attitude to material things changed?

I was never really materialistic, but I would say that I'm even less interested in material things now. The whole material world sometimes seems like an illusion.

Less materialistic

Q: Do you feel there is any difference in your relationships with other people?

Yes, a lot more compassion and understanding. If people are behaving in a certain way, I'm aware that there are reasons why they're like that.

More compassion and understanding

Q: Are you happy to do nothing?

Yes, completely. I'm working hard to be more active. It's really easy for me to do nothing, just be in the moment. Now I feel a sense of urgency – you're not here to float around.

This is a phase of integration – I feel that now I'm going to move into a new phase, a more active phase, of trying to engage more with life.

Very happy to do nothing/be in the moment

Sense of urgency/purpose

Phase of integration – more active phase

Q: Do you have a strong sense of empathy and compassion?

I feel a desire to help, especially to work with children. Because I trust the universe, it seems like things happen easily for me. I feel like I'm given opportunities, and it's up to me to put the work in, to realise them. I want to become a healer – I'm training as a reflexologist at the moment.

Altruism - Trust the universe

Q: Do you feel a sense of connection?

Yes, I feel massively connected to my inner self, my higher self, and I struggle when I lose it. And I feel very connected to other people, even though I'm more discerning.

Connection to higher self and other people

Q: How would you identify yourself? e.g. as a Christian/Pagan/Buddhist, an American/British person etc. Or do you identify with the whole human race?

I don't see myself as any of those things, I don't have any sense of identity in that way. I just see myself as this energy. I see all other people in the same way, as expressions of the same energy.

No sense of group identity

Q: Do you still experience ‘thought-chatter’? Does your mind still fill up with random thoughts when it isn’t occupied?

Nowhere near as much as I used to. A lot of the time my mind is very still. Sometimes thoughts pop and disturb me. Thoughts can be very interesting sometimes, when I’m contemplating spiritual matters. But generally my mind is still, which can sometimes make life difficult, when I should be being active. The plus side is that I hardly ever worry about the future or the past. I’m very focused on the present.

Mind still most of the time

Present centered

Q: Has your attitude to death changed?

Totally. I used to think there was absolutely nothing. I thought people who believed in life after death were idiots. I started having past life memories, and to remember in past-life memories

between my lives, and I remember planning this life, then I realised that there will be life after this. So I’m not afraid of death at all –in fact in some ways I think it’s something to look forward to, a kind of liberation.

No fear of death

Q: Do you think the transformation is permanent?

Definitely. There were times when I wondered if I should be diagnosed with a mental illness and start taking tablets. But now I’ve worked through all of that – the delusions had delusions and instability and instability – and I’ve come out of it into a much more stable and calmer state that become more stable and calmer

feels permanent. It would be impossible to go back.

Permanent transformation