

Light After Life

IN 2004, AN UNEXPECTED BRAIN HAEMORRHAGE LEFT RÓISÍN FITZPATRICK FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE. BUT AS SHE LAY IN THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT OF BEAUMONT HOSPITAL, AN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE CHANGED HER PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE AND DEATH FOREVER, WRITES JESSICA THOMPSON.

Death is something that affects us all. We all die and at some stage in our lives, wonder what happens after we die. But for Róisín Fitzpatrick, who was seriously ill, she claims a near-death experience saw her drawn out of her body and enveloped in a radiant light. It was there, in a blissful vision of the afterlife that she experienced a most powerful transformation. Her remarkable experience is now captured in her new book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*, which suggests that the 'light at the end of the tunnel' theory might not be too far from the truth.

It all started in 2004 when, without any warning, she suffered a life-threatening brain haemorrhage. "It was the day after my birthday and I was at home on my own and I turned my head and suddenly I had a blindingly excruciating headache. I started to get hot and cold sweats and was feeling very, very nauseous and I called the ambulance." Róisín managed to stay conscious until the ambulance arrived and brought her to the ICU in Beaumont Hospital where she was told that she had a very high risk of dying. Róisín could salsa dance for hours on end. She didn't smoke and she hardly ever drank alcohol. To go from being so fit and healthy to literally facing death was very frightening to her.

"I remember feeling utterly terrified, like I was just standing on the edge of the unknown – the edge of an abyss and I didn't



know what was going to happen." That's when Róisín says her life changed forever.

"The next thing I knew, I was floating and I felt a beautiful, radiant light. And at the same time, I felt embraced by a warmth that was so loving. It was like a pure love that I had never felt before. And there was a silence – a hushed silence and a profound peace," she says.

The most bizarre thing, according to Róisín, was that her thinking was more lucid than ever, but she was no longer in her body. "I remember thinking, if I'm not in my body, then who am I? What am I? And where am I? Is this death? And if it is, bring it on – it was fabulous!" She describes the light as a "beautiful, white, iridescent light" that transformed into waves of energy – and she was part of it – she was the one with the eternal light. "I recently learned that one of the Gaelic

Taking Heaven Lightly is available in Eason, Dubray and Waterstones bookstores around Ireland as well as Charlie Byrne's and other independent bookstores in Galway.

ways of saying 'may you rest in peace' is 'solas síoraí', which literally means 'eternal light'. And that's exactly what I experienced," she says.

"I felt I was always one with eternal light and I realised that we always continue to exist. It's like you just put on a coat of skin and bone and muscle when you're born, and you take that coat off when you leave, but you're always part of the eternal light." Since the experience, life has become really simple for Róisín who says that this pure energy is the essence of who we all are when we let all the drama of everyday life fade away. It made her realise that society's teachings are no longer important.

"I didn't have my house with me, I didn't have my car, I didn't have my mobile phone, I didn't have any of my university diplomas. I didn't even have my body. It was so basic. I was pure energy. And I realised that this is the deepest truth of who I am and who everybody is. So we're so much more powerful than we could ever imagine and we could transform that energy into creating our best lives."

"It was really enlightening. It really changed my whole perspective of death, and ironically it has given me the freedom to live life because I have no fear of death whatsoever. And really, the only thing that matters is to connect with this love and light and live this in my life. So I became an artist – the Artist of the Light," says Róisín who previously worked as the liaison between the European Commission and the European Bank for privatisation projects. But after her life changing experience, Róisín became an artist. She now uses her art as a physical manifestation of the pure energy and radiant light she experienced in the hospital that day. "When I came back, I found it too difficult to express in words what I had experienced so I shared it through art," she says, explaining that it was only after people urged her to explain what the art was about that she started to get more and more comfortable telling the story. She now uses clear crystal on white silk canvases to recreate the beauty of this light.

"There's a beautiful quote by George Bernard Shaw, 'use a glass mirror to see your face, use works of art to see your soul'. And that's the intention of my art – for people to see the beauty of their own soul," says Róisín.

Róisín's intention is to have her art hanging in public places "so that people can just walk in and, no matter what's going on in life, they can just stand in front of the piece and breathe and just feel that power and feel that light connecting with them. Because we are really so much more powerful than we can begin to imagine and we can tap into Solas Sioraí – this eternal light that we're always part of.

"And when we do it, it doesn't mean that life is easy; there will always be challenges in life, but we can find the strength and the courage to move through them."

The public artwork is mostly in America, though Róisín has had exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic. There is a permanent piece hanging in Richard Branson's Spa Resort, just outside New York, and another in Fitzpatrick's Hotel in New York. Her work can also be seen in the Glucksman Ireland House and in the Irish American Heritage Museum. But if you don't want to travel to New York to see it, there's also a piece at the National Conference Hall in Dublin.

Following the very successful launch of her book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*, which was attended by US Ambassador Kevin O'Malley, Róisín is working on her second book, entitled *Solas Sioraí*, which will delve even deeper into the eternal light she experienced. She has worked with Dr Bruce Greyson, a leading Near Death Experience medical expert, who verified her experience as genuine and, along with other leading experts, guided her in her research.

Taking Heaven Lightly has been praised by many experts, including Dr Bruce Greyson. "Experiences like Róisín's have now been validated by hundreds of scientific studies around the world and provide evidence that consciousness is more than the brain, and indeed, that we are more than our bodies. As a guide to enhancing your own spirituality, *Taking Heaven Lightly* is a love story in the most sublime sense."

Through her art and her book, Róisín hopes to change people's perspective of death so that we can start to live life in a positive way, because in the end, that's what's most important. "Yes, it was a near death experience, but really it was a near life experience because from this, I understood the true meaning of life."



"The next thing I knew, I was floating and I felt a beautiful, radiant light. And at the same time, I felt embraced by a warmth that was so loving. It was like a pure love that I had never felt before. And there was a silence – a hushed silence and a profound peace."