

TAKING HEAVEN

One afternoon in 2004, Róisín Fitzpatrick's life changed forever when she suffered a near fatal brain haemorrhage and encountered a near death experience. Luckily, Róisín lived to tell the tale and, in the years that followed, worked at turning this adversity into a positive life change. Today, having integrated her passion for what she describes as "the beauty of the eternal light" with business skills developed in her former career, she is now an internationally successful artist and has written her first book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*.

Just one day after her 35th birthday, Róisín was busying herself at home alone in Bray when she was suddenly struck with an excruciating headache. Knowing it wasn't a normal headache, Róisín realised that it was serious and immediately called the ambulance.

Managing to maintain consciousness long enough to make her way downstairs to open the door, Róisín was on her knees by the time paramedics arrived. She was taken to Loughlinstown Hospital where it was confirmed she had suffered a brain haemorrhage and was immediately transferred to Beaumont Hospital. It was there in the ICU unit that Róisín went through an experience that was to transform her life entirely.

In that very moment, Róisín felt something she had never felt before. "A beautiful, radiant light embraced me in a love that was very pure and unconditional," she explained. Suddenly free from the excruciating pain as she left her physical body, Róisín experienced a "profound sense of peace" which she explains was "utterly blissful" and centred around light and love.

That night, Róisín went in and out of this experience. One that she believes is difficult to put into words as it is not quantifiable in the terms that we are used to. She explains that the place she went to is one that is made up of "a vast timeless expanse of blissful love with no sense of time or space".

Apart from the sense of love and light, the most striking thing for Róisín was that she suddenly felt that she understood that all of us exist in a place of pure energy and light that goes on even after we die.

She explained, "When you're in school we learn in physics that everything is to do with energy and motion, which I never really

understood, but after this experience I got it. I was brought to a place where everything forms pure energy". This, Róisín realised, was an explanation of the deeper meaning of life as understood by Buddhists and old Gaelic teachings. "I realised we're always part of this eternal light, putting on a coat of skin muscle and bone when we're born and shedding it when we die. Then we go back to that place of eternal light and energy."

Due to the vast size of the energy each of us is made up of, Róisín remembers worrying about how she would be able to fit all that energy into her body. The experience was so blissful, that she didn't want to leave, yet she was torn as she wasn't ready to leave the world or leave her parents behind either. Once her decision was made, Róisín says she immediately found herself back in her physical body again. "I was feeling all the pain of the brain haemorrhage and the fear of being in the body that may be disabled in some way from the brain injury."

What she went through in hospital that day is an experience that has stayed with Róisín, giving her a profound sense of peace which was witnessed by those who came to see her in hospital over the following days. That peace was also a great source of comfort and help to her when her parents died just ten weeks apart.

Róisín explains that while she still misses her parents, she no longer has any fear of death and is comforted by the knowledge that they are only physically gone, merely moving into this place of light. While Róisín acknowledges that some people may be more open to these experiences, prior to her near death experience, she was a self-confirmed atheist. With a fast paced career, working with United Nations, the European Commission and the European Bank, Róisín had "zero belief" in a larger perspective on life. "I used to have to be able to see it, feel it or touch it before I would believe it existed." After she recovered from the brain haemorrhage however,

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medication or brain trauma, she visited a medical expert in the field of near death experiences, Dr Bruce Greyson, who verified she had indeed had a near death experience. She admits that she herself would have found her experience difficult to comprehend in her earlier years. "We're brought up in this society where everything is very rational and we have to be able to explain it, justify it and rationalise it," she says. This, she adds, is the greatest difficulty because understanding what she saw is like trying to quantify the unquantifiable and measure the immeasurable.

Wanting other people to be able to enjoy the same understanding she experienced, Róisín decided to tell her story, researching ancient Gaelic customs and sites like Newgrange and relating them to her own experience. She went on to publish her written account of those experiences in her new book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*. This book she hopes will show people that they don't

need to have any fear of death and by understanding the meaning of this light. "We can transform our lives from ordinary to extraordinary in ways we can't imagine."

Taking Heaven Lightly by Róisín Fitzpatrick is published by Hachette Ireland and out now. Visit Roisinfitzpatrick.com.

Róisín embarked on a very different path, explaining that her whole perception of life changed. She labels the experience a "near life" experience for the change it struck, making her determined to live her best life now in a world free from the fear of death and what comes next. Integrating this newfound love and light into her daily existence, she began a successful career as an artist of the light, trying to recreate the beauty of the light that she experienced. She cites George Bernard Shaw who said, "You use a glass mirror to see your face and art to see your soul".

Róisín has since held 11 exhibitions in America and it was there, while giving talks to explain the story behind her art, that she began to share the story of her near death experience. Up until then, Róisín had found it difficult to talk about what had happened, as she felt we don't have the vocabulary to explain what she experienced. Wanting to confirm her experience hadn't being the result of any

