



Knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door



Swirls of light: Róisín Fitzpatrick recovered slowly after the brain haemorrhage in 2004, over a period of six months, but the intensity of the experience inspired her to become an artist. DAVE MEEHAN

Anne Cunningham on an Irish artist's

account of her near-death experience

In March 2004, the day after her 35th birthday, Róisín Fitzpatrick suffered a brain haemorrhage which almost killed her. She was at home in Bray, Co Wicklow, when very severe headaches hit her in paralyzing waves. She knew immediately it was serious and called an ambulance.

She was taken to Loughlinstown Hospital and then to Beaumont Hospital. While lying in Beaumont's ICU, she had a near-death experience, which was to change her life completely.

She describes it in this book as being pulled from her body, towards "a gentle, shimmering light". She found that her excruciating pain had vanished, and felt that she was floating, weightless, in a light that surrounded her like millions of glowing sparks which formed one whole "unified expanse."

She still struggles to find words for this experience, but she likens it to being in a snow globe, which is spinning light particles instead of snow particles, and then being freed

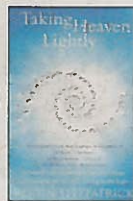
SPIRITUALITY

Taking Heaven Lightly

Róisín Fitzpatrick

Hachette Ireland, pbk, 300pp, €14.99

Available with free P&P on www.kennys.ie or by calling 091 709350



from the snow globe, surrounded by endless, infinite light. Rather than simply seeing this energy, she felt that she was a part of the energy. She writes that the energy consisted of a feeling of profound, infinite love, and writes: "... this euphoric love is all that exists. This is who I am. It is my deepest truth..." She describes being pulled from

her body and being thrown back into it three times in quick succession on that night. "Answers came to me," she writes. "Irrespective of the question, the answer is always the same – love. I absorbed the answer when I was immersed in the waves of this universal consciousness."

She says that while it is difficult to say how long her near-death experience lasted it came and went during that night. In the end, she says, she made the decision to come back because her parents were still alive and she did not want to go before them.

This is the kind of stuff that can be difficult to take seriously. There have been a number of books here and abroad in recent years which have dealt with near-death experience, so many in fact that it is now referred to by the acronym NDE. It's a bit like the angel books, a sub-genre all of its own. The authors of these books are fre-

quently a bit on the flaky side, which makes them less convincing. The interesting thing about this book, however, is that the background of the author is anything but flaky. Far from being an angel-kissed lightweight, Róisín Fitzpatrick was an international banking heavyweight when she was in her twenties, hopping on flights between London, Brussels and Geneva with the nonchalant frequency that many of us hop on the 16A.

She worked at the United Nations, the European Commission and the European Bank, not places usually associated with flaky thinking and alternative realities.

Her hectic and pressured lifestyle back then was affecting her health, however, years before she finally had the brain haemorrhage. She ignored the warning signs until she eventually collapsed in 1993, and subsequently spent several years suffering from,

and recovering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. During her slow recovery, she began searching for answers to the big questions, and found solace in ancient Celtic wisdom and in places like Newgrange, Knowth and Loughcrew.

After visiting a spiritual healer, she began to believe in a source, as she called it then, later calling it the universal consciousness. A return to her old lifestyle "no longer aligned with my soul's path", and so she embarked on a four-year homeopathy course, qualified, and set up her own homeopathic practice.

So when the brain haemorrhage hit her in 2004 and she was at death's door, she was probably more attuned to appreciating what was happening during her near-death experience.

She recovered slowly after the brain haemorrhage, over a period of six

months. But the intensity of the experience inspired her to become an artist, working with crystals on silkscreens, in various Celtic-themed swirls of light. She has been highly successful in her new career, having had exhibitions of



Far from being an angel-kissed lightweight, Róisín Fitzpatrick was an international banking heavyweight when she was in her twenties

her work in Boston, New York, Chicago and Washington DC. She has spoken widely about her NDE and her subsequent spiritual journey when opening her art exhibitions, possibly by way of explaining her images. This book is her written account of those experiences. *Taking Heaven Lightly* is, in parts, slightly reminiscent of John O'Donoghue's *Anam Cara*, in that it explores ancient Celtic mysticism, and I imagine it will find a similar following.

There's a lot of really flaky stuff out there on the NDE topic and other areas of spiritual experience. Angels are getting stuck in people's hair, and our dead relatives are trying to frighten the daylights out of us, if you believe all you read. With that in mind, I approached *Taking Heaven Lightly* with extreme caution. I am relieved to report this isn't one of the flaky books. But how convincing you find it will be up to you.