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**Opening Extract from...**

# Many Lives

Written by Stephanie Beacham  
with Owen Smith

Published by Hay House

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# *Many Lives*

Stephanie Beacham

with Owen Smith



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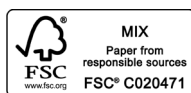
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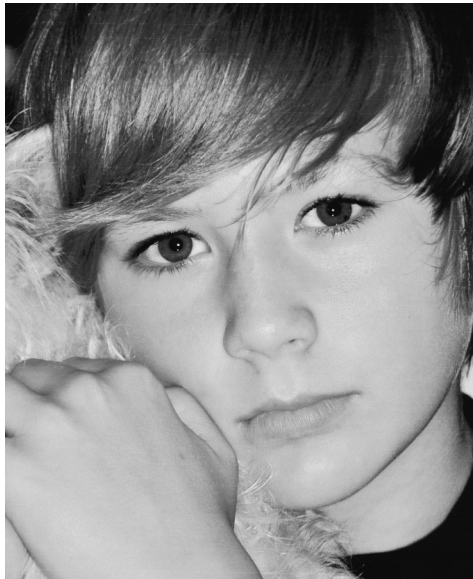
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## A Foreword from Jude

I think that my ‘Glamma’ is a hard-working, thoughtful and loving grandma. The most loved being to a grandson, as she well knows. But because of her heart, she is making it through life well-mannered, wise, and smart to become not just an outstanding actress, but also an amazing grandma. I usually spend time with her in Malibu, but because of this book there have been quite a few twists. She wakes up at 4 a.m. to write it. She looks like a monster in the morning: swamp green skin, tired eyes and witch-like hair. It is giving me nightmares, but usually she is one of the most glamorous people I’ve ever seen. I love her with all my heart, and when you read this book you will, too. This is Stephanie Beacham’s many lives.

*Jude Penny (age 11)*



*Jude, photographed by Judy Geeson*

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# Foreword

This is an excellent autobiography, enjoyable to read, beautifully observed and intelligently written with three streams. There is the great actress of stage and screen, the devoted mother and the perfect textbook on how to apply spiritual love in everyday material life.

Like millions of others I have for many years admired Stephanie's performances in all forms of the art, though, admittedly, have often been distracted by her beauty.

When I was told that she would be coming into *Coronation Street* to have a relationship with my alter ego I was absolutely thrilled, over the moon, but also a little nervous. She had done it all – acted with the greats and was a totally dedicated, through-and-through professional. She also had a reputation as a no-nonsense actress, which is something I respect.

We started filming by the canal in the freezing cold. My dog was supposed to fall in the water and Stephanie would rescue her from her barge. The film crew had to break the ice,

and then realized that it would be too cold for the dog. So they tried throwing in a stuffed one, but it looked ridiculous and everyone burst out laughing. We got on well. I immediately felt safe with Stephanie – there was something reassuring and comforting about her.

A replica of the barge was built for the interior scenes and we thought at least we would be warm, but no, it was built in a prefabricated building with no heating. So between scenes a little warm room was found for us, and there we sat, ran our lines and talked.

I loved talking to her about the people she had worked with, especially Marlon Brando, with whom she became great friends. Stephanie told me about her daughters and her grandson. I could tell from what she said that she was the rock of her family, how much she loved them and that they were her life. I could see how strong she was, and how calm. We would all count ourselves lucky to have someone like that looking after us.

I was pleased that she could tell me about these things and the time we had together was gentle. Although we never actually talked about our mutual spiritual understanding, it was eloquently expressed.

In performance she was brilliant. Absolutely there, and all I had to do was respond. I felt totally relaxed when acting with her, enjoying her dedication, truthfulness and generosity.

Then tragedy struck. Sara, my wife, who was my rock and did everything for me, died suddenly and unexpectedly. Filming stopped and I was away for three weeks. When I came back, it was too early and I was still feeling raw, but I did not want to keep everyone waiting. At that time, in the state that I was in,

I could think of no better person to be with than Stephanie. She helped me just by her presence, and the quiet way in which we carried on with our scenes. I believe that everything is meant to be and, as Stephanie says in the book, we were there for each other in those difficult times.

Stephanie is a very spiritual person – she is psychic and knows about angels and fairies, but she is also totally grounded. She knows when and how to bring these things into the physical world to help ease the way. These are difficult things to express but she does so simply, and in a common sense way.

She writes in a clear, straightforward manner that is a delight to read. What she has to say about her life is fascinating and intriguing, and what she has to say about philosophy and spiritual matters is a lesson to us all.

When a good person writes a good book, and writes it well, we are entertained whilst receiving great truths. This is such a book.

*William Roache MBE*



# Prologue

Having been on this planet for nearly 65 years, I want to capture in words a few morsels of a rip-roaring roller-coaster ride of a life before short-term memory loss or some other excuse stops me. Writing a book had crossed my mind briefly at the turn of the millennium. In the preceding few years my parents had grown old and died in front of my eyes. I'd become an orphan and my priorities had changed. As my mother had approached the end of her life, it became far more important for me to speak to her every day than it was to be in a hit television series. Then in 2000 I became a grandmother. I moved out of the city and back to the coast and decided finally to give up on men. I retired to the seaside and got a dog.

But the book didn't happen and I just gave up men for a while, because then I met Bernie. Perhaps I'd thought the ride was going to slow down, but it had too much momentum and happiness can arrive at any age.

During the Noughties I did some of my best theatre: *A Busy Day*, *Elizabeth Rex* and *Master Class*, all with Jonathan Church

directing. I toured the UK with Simon Williams in his *Nobody's Perfect*, and Sir Peter Hall's name was on the *Hay Fever* poster but I don't think he even came to see it. I worked on four films and parts in two filmed series, and did *Bad Girls*, *Coronation Street*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Celebrity Big Brother*, to name just a few of the umpteen things I did for television. Not a very convincing retirement. I'm a grafter and I don't stop and probably never will. As for my poor dog, I got another one to keep her company.

I fell in love with the theatre and acting as a teenager and, nearly half a century later, the love affair continues. I still find the whole process of putting on a production fascinating. Michael Winner once said to me, 'My dear, nobody needs the film industry except the film industry.' I don't think that's true. Theatre, films, music and all the arts are capable of nourishing the soul and opening the heart. Mankind needs that food. I need that food and I feel very blessed that I've been allowed to join in and play.

Everything I've done has been of its time. It's been a magical ride that only happened because I was born when I was. The war was over. It was the perfect time to be born – when it was safe to be a child. There was an innocence and a sense of freedom. I'm a product of that age.

I could have been the poster child for the 1950s, and the 1960s pointed me towards where I am today. In the 1970s I co-starred alongside a pair of screen legends, and then got blacklisted from Hollywood. The big characters I played on screen in the 1980s were totally of their time – Connie's hot-wired living and Sable Colby's shoulder pads. In the 1990s the buck stopped with me and my life changed emphasis, but without slowing down.

On the first night my parents moved into their marital home my mother cooked a chicken. She hadn't cooked one before and she left the giblets in. The next morning she was amazed because the servants hadn't cleared it all away. It took until it happened for her to realize that she didn't have servants. Just as I was a product of my time, she was a product of hers, but liberal and progressive rather than staid and oppressed. She made me believe I could do whatever I put my mind to, and supported me throughout.

I've tried to do the same for my children, being ever aware of the difficulties they faced having a mother with a public profile. I also had to struggle with the responsibilities of being a single parent. It's directed the professional choices I've made. I know I've done less good work than I could have done. I discovered that if I was playing really big roles, I wasn't able to be a good mum. I don't mean high camp Sable Colby. That was just lipstick thick; involving fabulous bitchy lines and Oscar Wilde delivery, but it wasn't emotionally draining. It was far more difficult to combine motherhood with deep and complex characters. So for the most part I didn't play them, until after the millennium.

After I was separated from my husband, John McEnery, at the end of the 1970s, I had a choice to make. I knew I only had energy for children and work, or I could go for children, a new husband and a little bit of work here and there. I would have lost my independence. I'd put my faith in that set-up once before and it hadn't worked. So I chose to make my life without a man; determinedly independent – foolishly independent, even.

As a child my favourite Ladybird Book had been *The Sly Fox and the Little Red Hen*. Throughout my life its positive line in women's independence has inspired me: “Then I'll do it myself,”

said the Little Red Hen.’ I grew up with second-wave feminism. I cherish my independence. I’m of my time.

But I’m not a serious person. I’m a lightweight. I’m a jackdaw who picks up shiny stones. I’m a spiritual bungee jumper. And I’ve got into some sticky scrapes that have meant I’ve had to develop a practical set of tools to get myself off the floor whenever I’ve been down. Earlier in my life there was an element of ‘seeking’, but mainly because I had to find answers to help me solve my problems. Without the answers, and the toolkit I was able to develop with them, I would have sunk.

There have been a few moments when I’ve felt truly touched by God. I’ve seen the fabric of the universe and it’s beautiful. More than anything, those moments set me on a spiritual search of greater depth. They made me realize that time is an irrelevance. I’ve no idea how long those moments lasted, whether minutes or seconds, but each sent ripples across the whole of my life, as if those moments have never ceased.

I’m a collector of joyful moments. The ticka-ticka ticka-ticka of a child’s roller skates on paving stones is as good a mantra as any to lift the soul.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE CHAPTERS

1) *I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost... I am hopeless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes for ever to find a way out.*

2) *I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I'm in the same place.  
But it isn't my fault.  
It still takes a long time to get out.*

3) *I walk down the same street.  
There's a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in... it's a habit.  
My eyes are open.  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.*

4) *I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.*

5) *I walk down another street.*

POEM FROM *THE TIBETAN BOOK OF LIVING AND DYING*

BY SOGYAL RINPOCHE

## *Chapter One*

# Many Lives

Things can happen to us in our lives that defy all logic: something in a sentence, a daydream, a vision, a visitation; it could be that you suddenly find yourself in the presence of angels. When it's happened you ask yourself how long it lasted. It could have been minutes in our linear time, or just seconds. We think in such linear terms, but we are not linear. Our lives are not linear.

Sometimes we can go through months and months, with time just passing by. Then suddenly there's a flash. The detail of those months might be lost and forgotten, but that flash will stay with us for ever.

We're so interested in time, so caught up by time. We use a linear notion of time to try to pin down the magic of existence. Time stretches and loops. Our lives stretch and loop. Our existence *is* magic.

The question that dances like a firefly in my mind is: are we following a pre-written chronicle of our lives that's unfolding as

a surprise to us but that is as planned as a Disneyland ride? Or do we have free will, and a set of lessons to learn, which, if we don't get them the first time, will come back in a different form until we do?

My life has been a magic ride that could only have happened because I was born on the very day and at the very time I was. I don't think it was an accident that I was a child in the 1950s, that I *lived* the 1960s, had children in the 1970s and then came to represent, through my part in *The Colbys*, the 1980s. Are we just watching the unfurling of the inevitable or are we able to change everything, about ourselves and our future? I'm not one of the great thinkers; just someone experiencing and looking, and finding it all so incredibly interesting.

Everything in my life has been of its time. I went from a little deaf girl in Start-rite sandals in the 1950s to a voraciously inquisitive young woman in the 1960s; then from an actress and film star to a desperately struggling single mother in the 1970s. In the 1980s, the on-screen characters that I was best known for stood for that decade, while in the 1990s I went on a journey which, some years earlier, three psychics had, quite independently, told me I'd follow.

I had already started that journey way back. I don't even think it had started in this life. Like all of our lives, if you could line up each moment and look at them as if through a prism, taking them in from different perspectives, you'd see there were no contradictions; you'd see how it all connects. Just like a good haircut, everything joins up.

## ***Angel Friends***

Flying has been a theme in my life for ever. As a very young child I can remember walking along the back of the sofa and thinking that if I carried on walking I'd be able to lift off straight into the air. I believed I could fly.

The idea of having wings wasn't strange. Angels were not alien.

Every night as a child I'd go with my two angel friends and we'd fly around and do good deeds for people. They were my night-time friends: two fairy angels. We might see an old lady who needed her shopping carried, or a cat stuck in a tree that needed rescuing. We were good flying people. I thought they lived in my pillow because they came out and played when my head was resting on it.

A memory-trace carried with me into this life from before I was born, perhaps.

## ***Mary***

Being Church of England was just who we were as a family, it went with being English middle-class residents in a safe, comfortable, quiet and leafy suburb – in Barnet, North London. 'The nearest I want to get to church is the garden,' my father used to say, 'and I'm very happy to tend it.'

My mother was a spiritual person by nature. She maintained her own faith, which included a belief in an afterlife. For her, the C of E was good for christenings, funerals and weddings but it wasn't where her spirit really lay. She was far more open and investigative; spiritually restless. Unlike people who suddenly take



up a definitive religious position just before death, my mother let it all unravel. When she was dying I asked her, ‘Do you know where you’re going next?’ With a child-like twinkle in her eye, she replied, ‘We’ll just have to wait and see, won’t we?’

Our parents sent me and my older sister Diana, who we called Didi (pronounced dye-dye), and my younger sister Jenny to a Catholic convent for our primary education. It was run by an order of French nuns. Our parents’ decision to send us there was totally pragmatic. They knew we’d get the best education at the convent; at the very least, we’d learn good deportment and French.

I hated it at first; with its strict rules and regulations and a uniform that was meant to be kept neat and tidy at all times. In winter we would wear a scratchy green tunic, shirt and tie. The tunic was only cleaned once a term, and by the time the holidays began it was egg- and paint-stained. My tie would be tied just once at the start of term and then hung in a loop on the end of the bed at night, so all I had to do was slip it over my head each morning. I remember the desperately cold winters of the 1950s. So cold, we always dressed under the bedclothes. In the summer we’d change into green checked cotton dresses; our white knee-high socks held up by home-made elastic garters.

I enjoyed the religious aspects of the convent. The day was punctuated with prayer. There was chapel in the morning, prayers in between each class and at the end of the day, and we said grace before lunch. There were statues of Our Lady and of Jesus Christ throughout the school. A crucifix hung in each classroom and paintings depicting scenes from the Bible were hung on the walls. As a young child I was in awe. I took it all very seriously. I treasured my blue plastic rosary kept in a little blue egg.

During break I'd retreat to my secret places of sanctuary. In the winter months, or when it was raining, I'd slip into the little side chapel. I'd make the sign of the cross, genuflect and take my place in a front pew, then spend the rest of our 20-minute break-time praying. I didn't pray to Jesus or to God, but to the Virgin Mary.

When the weather was fine I'd skip down a path in the school's garden to a small grotto where there was another statue of Mary. I was entranced by her blue-and-white dress and the calla lilies that she held. I was drawn to her. I felt that we had a special relationship.

The Holy Trinity didn't work for me: there was a God in the clouds who spoke with a voice of anger and judgement; then there was Jesus who seemed to have a nice life but then died in agony for our sins; then there was this bird that was called a ghost that radiated light and that people wore on badges. I didn't get it. Mary wasn't angry or judgemental like God and I didn't really understand what sin was, especially mortal sin. I couldn't understand why a baby who hadn't been christened wouldn't go to heaven. The bird didn't seem like anything you would want to talk to and God seemed so fierce. Not like Mary.

In the chapel, which was a place of silence and reverence, I never spoke out loud to her, but in the garden I would. I'd chat to her about so many different things, and she'd speak to me. They weren't conversations I was having with myself in my mind. I remember them as dialogues; they were real. I talked to Mary and she talked to me. I could see and hear her. Mary was my friend and I loved her.

I didn't know why sometimes I couldn't hear things properly but I could always hear Mary. I loved the peace and calm of her

grotto and the chapel; away from the babble and confusing noise of the playground.

The nuns had noticed that I spent a lot of time in the chapel or down the end of the garden in Mary's alcove. Late one afternoon, after I'd got home from school, my mother received a telephone call from one of the Sisters suggesting, in a softly spoken and gentle way, that they believed I'd be a good candidate for conversion. I think my mother was a little surprised. She was aware that I'd shown an interest in religion but thought it was just a passing phase. She also knew that the nuns were always on the look-out for new recruits and wasn't at all comfortable with the idea of me being corralled into committing to a faith I knew little about. Far too elegant ever to offend anyone, however, and also of the belief that you should never argue with those of the cloth, especially nuns, my mother listened till the Sister had finished, then simply said, 'That sounds just lovely, Sister, and I expect that you are right, and if Stephie does want to pursue this when she is a little older then that would be simply wonderful!'

They didn't call again.

### ***Curiosity Saved This Cat***

When I was a teenager I was out most evenings. On Mondays I'd go to the church youth club and jive to Everly Brothers' and Bobby Darin records. On Tuesday evenings we'd all meet at the Black Horse pub and then go to Barnet Jazz Club, where they had live music and we could spend the evening long-arm jiving to Acker Bilk and other traditional jazz bands. On Wednesdays we'd

head to the further education college for more dancing, and come Friday we'd be at the Finchley Jazz Club for short-arm jiving. The only night I didn't go out was Thursday. I stayed in to wash my hair. Saturday morning it was up the Devon Café, at the far end of Barnet High Street, to find out where the party was Saturday night. On Sunday afternoons I would spread all my books out over the dining room table and do my homework for the complete week while listening to Radio Luxembourg.

When Geoff, my first boyfriend, came along, I calmed down; my parents saw the advantage. My reports improved, I started to read and develop an interest in culture and art; if only, at first, to be able to keep up with Geoff in conversation. Geoff and his friends opened my mind to a whole new realm of concepts and ideas and I was there, absorbing it all. I was learning from them all the time: what to read, what to question and what to think. In many ways my relationship with Geoff was as much an education as it was a romance. He and his friends fed my hunger for knowledge. I was very lucky; I wanted to learn. I wanted to know everything. It was just what I needed.

Things do seem to happen at the right time.

New words like 'hypotheses', 'philosophy', 'agnostic' and 'atheist' came into my vocabulary. Suddenly, talking to... wait a minute? The Virgin Mary? Put those childish things behind you and think about 'logic'. If you can't see it – does it exist? Reading about Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung; discovering that there were societies which had abandoned religion for ideologies of human communalism. I was ready to challenge everything, and I wasn't afraid of anything. Searching, questioning, examining; I had no fear in rejecting what had gone before.