

garden and chatted, she said, 'Menna, why do you think people draw back from following their path and achieving enlightenment?' Thinking about my own life, I replied: 'Mum, it's men, money and chocolate.' What I meant was, we always look for external things to make us happy instead of trusting what's on the inside. We both laughed and she said, 'That would be a good title for a book.'

As 2007 dawned, I still hadn't written that book and things between Artur and I were not good. I suggested we try a two-day workshop called Instantaneous Transformation with spiritual coaches Ariel and Shya Kane. The Kanes say that enlightenment can happen when you simply listen, because it helps you focus on something beyond your own negative inner voice, which I found hard to believe. But somehow, as well as truly appreciating what the other person had to say, I completely let go of all my self-criticisms. That workshop changed my marriage, and when I came home, *Men, Money And Chocolate* poured out of me in two weeks. It felt as if the words had been given to me, as if I was channelling some kind of literary spirit.

I assumed the book would get snapped up by a publisher, but that didn't happen. I had to self-publish and trudge around bookshops, but I managed to sell 1,000 copies.

I believe the universe wanted me to put the effort in to get results, because when the publisher Hay House saw what I'd achieved, they agreed to publish the book. Today, I get emails from readers all over the world saying it has helped them find peace and happiness, and that makes me feel fantastic.

All my friends with their brilliant careers used to pity me. But now I'm doing what I love. I live in a house on the wooded side of Cambridge. Every day, I get up, go for a long walk and let nature inspire me. When I meditate, write or wander outdoors, I feel a connection with the universe. Even when I'm writing, I look up at the sky and say thank you without even thinking. I feel that force looking after me all the time.

I've written a sequel called *Men, Money Chocolate And You: Recipes For A Magical Life*, which is a collection of inspirational articles about relationships and weight loss. Again, it was delivered by some kind of magical source in three weeks, and I'm now into my next novel.

Thanks to my experiences, I believe in a creative, nurturing force we can all tap into. Fear and self-doubt are such strong forces. And if I hadn't had those wake-up calls, I'd be in an office now, utterly miserable.

Follow Menna's blog at www.mennavanpraag.com. *Men, Money And Chocolate* by Menna Van Praag costs £7.99 (Hay House). *S&D* readers can buy a copy at the special price of £5.99 by calling 020-8962 1230. Offer ends 30 November 2010



'I wanted to be a love angel'

Artist and love coach Cate Mackenzie, 41, from Chelsea, London, talks about the important of love in her life

There was an abundance of love in my life when I was a child, even though my dad, Colin – a foreign correspondent – was away from home a lot. I was extremely close to my parents, especially my mum, Tina, who worked in fashion. We had a special link and, along with my two younger sisters, Tara and Georgia, I adored her. We lived in a huge house in Battersea, South London, and my mum enjoyed filling it with people, usually very creative people.

My sisters and I joke now that Mum collected 'problems'. Mum provided temporary accommodation for everyone from travellers to Chilean refugees, and there was plenty of hot tea and good advice. I loved the colour those people brought into our home. Dancers, poets, rock bands... they all found our home to be a safe, creative space. I remember the writer Quentin Crisp coming for lunch, and I lost track of the countless novels and songs written round our dining table. Our street was incredibly sociable, with dinners and parties, and drinks in people's gardens. We were close to our neighbours, but no one more than Countess Esther Benckendorff. She'd put on reggae music, and we'd dance around in her kitchen while she made us tea and toast and asked us about our day.

I was nervous on my first day at secondary school – I had a real sense of things

changing. Esther took me that day, held my hand and wished me good luck. But a few weeks later, her husband died, and she took to her bed with flu. We barely saw her for months and then she, too, died.

After that, things changed very quickly. First, the visitors stopped coming. Then Mum sat me down and explained she and Dad were getting a divorce. Within weeks, I'd moved with my mum and my sisters into a smaller house, and although Dad lived just round the corner, we saw him less. Suddenly, life seemed drab, and the only way I could deal with it was by shutting down emotionally. I was 12 years old.

At my lowest point, I began to say a prayer every night. I'd been raised a Catholic, and although I wasn't particularly religious,

'After my gran died, I began painting hearts. Each one reminded me of the love that was present in my life, and I vowed to grow in love'

I was thankful for the sense of faith and unconditional love it had given me. Every night before bed, I'd ask, 'Dear God, in heaven above, please show me your sweet, sweet love.' Slowly, quietly, I began to embrace a more spiritual existence. I started meditating and using angel cards, but I knew I needed to connect with the universe, and realised I could do that through love and creativity. By the time I was 18, I knew my purpose in life was to be a conduit for love – to grow in love, channel love and help others embrace love as a way of life.

I started in small ways. I began making Valentine's cards each year, not just for my romantic interests, but also for friends and family. I believed that everyone deserved to receive a little love on Valentine's Day.

As well as wanting to spread love, my other dream was to be an actress, but my parents, who knew many unemployed actors, encouraged me to do a sensible degree. So, I found myself at Manchester Metropolitan University studying sociology, which I hated. I stuck with it for two years and then, amid protests

from my family, I dropped out for another course that would train me to be a community artist, leading workshops and teaching dance and drama to sidelined groups in society. In 1993, at age 23, I started working with disabled people, young offenders, recovering drug addicts, the homeless and women's groups.

Over the next decade, my work took me up to Yorkshire and back to London. Then, in 1998, I had the chance to do an arts foundation course part-time, and hearts were a running theme. I made a love room, a love chair and love films. Each installation helped me feel more connected with the universe.

Around the same time, I reached another turning point. I met up with two friends in a café in the Kings Road, Chelsea, which

astrologers believe is the heart chakra – or energy centre – of London. As we sat talking, I told them I wanted to be a 'love angel' and help more people to become empowered. Soon afterwards, I began leading Open Your Heart workshops, where a mixture of dance, writing and art would let people reconnect with what's really important to them. I also started work as a love coach, helping people to clear any fears and realise their dreams.

Then, in 2001, my granny Kay Fonseca died. She was a rock, not just for me, but for heaps of people who knew her. I'd spent all my holidays with her, and you could just turn up at her door and she'd welcome you in and feed you.

I felt myself begin to shut down, like I had when I was 12. So I went out, bought as many



canvases and paints as I could afford, and began painting hearts. They were different colours, shapes and sizes, some in patterns, some alone, but each one reminded me of the love that was present in my life. Each time my brush touched the canvas, I remembered my vow to grow in love and to help others do the same. I realised then that each day we ask for things – a better job, a bigger house – but more often than we would like to admit, they're not the things we actually want. Having a big house is achievable, but it won't necessarily make you happy. You have to manifest your highest truth, and that comes from your heart. My highest truth was to be a love angel and with my paintings in front of me, I asked the universe to help me spread love around the world.

Each morning after that, I woke up and sought guidance from the universe. I asked, 'Who am I? What is my purpose?' and I listened to the answers. That formed my focus for the day, and it still does. I started running workshops to help others find their

heart and then use it to download the highest vision of themselves.

Earlier this year, nine years after I asked the universe to help me spread love across the world, I was contacted by Ikea. They had seen my heart paintings, the ones I did for my gran after she died, and they wanted to reproduce them as prints and sell them in 72 countries, from China to Canada. That was one of the most powerful offers I've had because there and then, I saw the universe at work. I'd used my heart to focus my intention, and now it was manifesting before my eyes. That's proof enough

for me that I am the creator in my life – we all are. You just have to be conscious of what you are trying to create and to do that, you need to wake up to the truth inside. **SPIRIT&DESTINY**

• Cate runs workshops and events across the country. Visit www.catemackenzie.com



Loved-up baby with Granny Kay and Mum



Cate (top left) with her mum and sisters



Countess Esther was a mother figure