

When my first book was published I'd look blank when asked about my research.

I guess it was a stock question because it was fantasy and about vampires and faeries. I'd read the genre of course, was a fan of it, and when it became evident that I was actually writing a book, I looked further into the myths, the legends.

But as to anything else? Vampires and faeries? There were clear limitations as to what non-desktop research could be undertaken.

A year on and with the publication of my second book, I am being asked that question again. Only this time when I answer, there's no blank look. Research? For *Romancing the Soul*? Yes. I got past life regressed...

The responses to my answer are mixed. Wow! I've always wanted to do that. What did you see? Who were you? Or, my favourite: that's insane! Nobody's ever asked me perhaps the most telling question though. Do you regret it? My pause would likely give me away.

I don't regret writing the book. I loved every second of the writing process and it needed to be written. But as for the research? The regression itself? It gave me the confidence to proceed without experiencing it for myself. And I'm honest, I was intrigued.

For me, exploring the concept of past lives was to do with providing a possible explanation for that déjà vu stuff and how we can take an extreme and illogical liking or disliking to someone on first meeting. Could we have encountered them before?

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Sarah Tranter was regressed to past lives as part of the research for her book

window: a bright yellow cornfield blowing in the wind. I can even feel the breeze on my face as she opened the window, hear the sound of the wind whooshing through the crop. I can feel her sense of peace. Her relief as she jumped. Still seeing that cornfield in her mind as she plunged downward.

I was a man in the second. I couldn't pinpoint when but it felt a hell of a long time ago. I was somewhere far from home. It was hot. I wore one of those male dress things and there were sandals on my blistered feet. I held a sword in my hand and felt the weight of another across my back. I stood in a coastal mist lit bright by an invisible sun and could hear the sea crashing against rocks far below. But I could smell burning. In fact, was it the sun or fire providing that light and heat?

It's my own fault of course. Nobody made me go and I'm pretty sure I went for the wrong reasons. There are enough people out there that say past life regression has helped them.

Don't get me wrong. My experience, my 'memories' haven't blighted my life or any-

thing remotely as dramatic as that. I just don't feel comfortable with them. Neither do I like the way they seem to haunt me.

The characters, the 'memories' are demanding further exploration. Inevitably really. I suppose. I tell myself firmly that's the writer in me. Nothing more.

Romancing the Soul by Sarah Tranter is published by Choc Lit. The paperback costs £7.99 and the ebook is £2.48



The thought of turning 50 might lead many women to the edge of a mid-life crisis.

But it doesn't worry bubbly presenter and former *Celebrity Masterchef* winner Nadia Sawalha.

In fact, she's positively looking forward to reaching the milestone. "I'm excited about being 50," she says. "I dreaded 50 in my teens and my twenties, but now I feel I've got another whole lifetime to lead."

It wasn't all plain sailing during her younger years. She faced traumas, including three miscarriages, body image issues and a short-lived first marriage – but now the smile is broader than ever as she looks to the future. With a thriving career as a regular presenter on ITV's *Lorraine*, *Sunday Scoop* and *Loose Women*, plus several food columns and the release of her latest book *Greedy Girl's Diet Second Helpings!*, the world's her oyster. She's not sure yet how she's going to celebrate her birthday with her husband, television producer Mark Addley, and their two daughters Maddy 11, and six-year-old Kiki, plus two older stepdaughters.

"I haven't had a birthday party for 30 years, so I'm seriously considering having a big party with amazing food, fire-eaters and belly dancers, but then I might chicken out, because what if people don't turn up? I'd be so embarrassed and mortified."

"I'm thinking of sending out the invitations now, so there's no time to chicken out," she says. "Or I might just go off with my husband and the girls to somewhere gorgeous, but I definitely want to do something."

She says she's not worried about ageing – because she can live vicariously through her 20-year-old stepdaughter. "She's just so beautiful and strong. I love to listen to every detail of what she's doing and I live vicariously through her when I'm sat in the kitchen, but I'm so glad I'm not 20," she says.

"It's like when she tells me she's going to a rave at New Year. I think, 'I'm so glad I'm staying in with my kids!'"

Sawalha admitted that her weight's yo-yoed over the years, and things reached a head when she was trying to cope with the heartache of three miscarriages, going back to work so soon after Maddy was born and finding her frantic schedule overwhelming.

"I felt fat, unconfident and guilty for being at work and not with my baby. So I did what I used to do then when I was unhappy. I overate," she has previously said.

"Nobody ever mentioned my weight but it was, 'Oh, isn't she jolly' – a euphemism for fat bird. I knew what they were thinking, so I wouldn't look in the mirror. But the weight wasn't just on the surface, it was a sign of what was going on underneath."

A period of psychotherapy followed – and now it's a genuine smile which lights up the screen.

And she remains one of the few women to go on a diet and stay slim long-term. The self-confessed 'greedy girl' lost three-and-a-half stones and kept the weight off, selling the secrets of her success in her first book, *Greedy Girl's Diet*, which sold in its millions.

Her follow-up, *Greedy Girl's Diet Second Helpings!*, features chips and sauces, peanut butter and banana flossies, bacon and egg muffins and other foods not normally associated with dieting, but Sawalha swears by her approach.

"This is the food I've eaten for the last three years, this is the food I lost three-and-a-half

stones with and kept it off." She tried all the 'cutting out' diets over the years and none of them were effective long-term.

"I did every single one of those diets and I was just dieting my way to obesity, because when I came off them, I put all the weight back on, plus a bit more. There has to be a way that you can eat forever."

Coming from an Anglo-Arab 'foodie' household, food and family have always been intertwined in her world – and she's keen that the body issues she has faced in the world of celebrity don't affect her daughters, so has no qualms about showing them how make-up artists can transform a dowdy mum into a glamour queen.

"I was on *Lorraine* last week and my 11-year-old daughter came with me. She sees how you are transformed. I wake up looking like death warmed up and she says, 'Mummy, it is like magic!'"

"I'm in a really privileged position because they (her daughters) know the con of the media and that people are made-up to look so much more beautiful than they are, so they're not messed up about images in magazines."

"It's always interesting taking them to work and seeing what they observe and what they don't."

She continues: "People say to Maddy, 'What's it like having a mum who's a TV presenter?' and she can't identify with what they mean."

"I used to have the same thing with my sister, Julia, when she was at the height of her fame with *Press Gang* and *Absolutely Fabulous*, but you can't answer. She's just my sister."

Now, she's hoping to spend more time with her loved ones.

"My daughter Maddy's letter to Father Christmas started off, 'I hope you're not too stressed with all the work you've got on'."

"In the run-up to Christmas, my husband Mark and I were so busy because we've got our own production company as well."

"I was doing *Lorraine*, *Loose Women* and finishing off the book, working six days a week."

"That little note made me think, 'Right Nadia, you're stopping over Christmas. I lay around and watched films back-to-back and ate cheese, Branston pickle and crisps. Maddy said to me, 'It's been so nice to see you relax'."

"TV is only TV," Sawalha adds. "When you end your life, nothing is going to be written about anything you did, but who you cared for and the time you spent with them will last forever, passing on through generations. She taught me a great lesson."

"I am determined this year to spend more time with my family. We-as parents will often say, 'Oh, I'm terrible, my poor kids', but think about 'poor yourself' as well."

Greedy Girl's Diet Second Helpings! by Nadia Sawalha is published by Kyle, priced £14.99.



With her Greedy Girl follow-up now sitting comfortably on the shelves, Nadia Sawalha has a lot to smile about

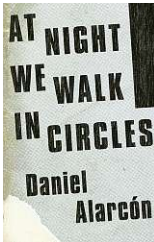
Books reviews



The People in the Trees by Hanya Yanagihara, is published in paperback by Atlantic Books, priced £12.99.

Loosely based on the true story of physician Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, Hanya Yanagihara's debut novel is a shocking exploration of whether a man's personal flaws caned out his professional achievement.

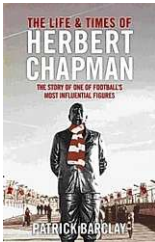
The bulk of the novel is narrated by the Nobel Prize-winning protagonist Norton Peralta, who writes his memoirs of travelling to a tiny Micronesian island called Iwiviva, where he studied jungle-dwelling people.



At Night We Walk in Circles by Daniel Alarcón is published in hardback by Fourth Estate, priced £18.99.

This is the fourth book by Peruvian-born novelist Daniel Alarcón who was recently named by *The New Yorker* as one of the best young writers in America.

Its nameless narrator recounts the story of a young actor who flees his falling family life to team up with his playwright hero and revive his most famous work – a play about a sadistic president who abuses his staff and family. They travel across an unnamed country, marked by a civil war.



The Life & Times of Herbert Chapman: The Story Of One Of Football's Most Influential Figures by Patrick Barclay is published in hardback by Weidenfeld & Nicolson, priced £20.

Born into a poor mining village just outside Sheffield in January 1878, Herbert Chapman seems an unlikely figure to lay down the template for success which was to be followed by many great football club managers since, including Matt Busby, Bill Shankly and possibly the greatest of them all, Sir Alex Ferguson. But Patrick Barclay distills his vivid tale.