

Don't worry, be happy!

‘I am finally living the life I was meant to live’

Career burnout led to a new direction for Caroline

I was an awkward kid. Growing up in middle class England, I was bullied at school for my lankiness and red hair.

I was shy and a lot more intense than my peers.

While they were obsessing over pop music and boys, I was absorbed in fairy tales and contemplating the meaning of life.

My family weren't particularly religious or spiritual, but I found myself fascinated by life's mysteries.

I remember confronting my mother when I was 13.

"What is the purpose of life?" I asked.

"You go to school, get good grades, get a good job, earn a good salary, and then you get married and have a family," she said.

"And then you die?" I asked flatly.

"Well, yes," she admitted.

I made a vow then and there, that if "getting on with things" was the purpose of life, I would make sure that I filled it with adventure.

So I got good grades, got a job in the travel industry, and found a husband.

The marriage didn't last, so I threw myself into my career.

In my late twenties, I landed a job with Virgin Atlantic Airways – the company

headed by billionaire Richard Branson.

Working as a national account director in the company's headquarters in London, the Virgin work hard/play hard culture really rubbed off on me.

When my father tragically died in a car accident when I was 27, Richard Branson was one of the first people to call home and ask if I was okay and if we needed any money – he was an amazing boss.

Two years later, I was sent to South Africa as head of sales and marketing to set up Virgin's first operation there.

It was to be a huge challenge at an exciting time in the travel industry, so I grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

The next five years were spent working long hours, brokering deals, mentoring and training staff, and building the Virgin brand and reputation.

South Africa was an amazing place to live in the '90s. The climate was great and I lapped up the outdoor lifestyle.

I travelled frequently, was on the A-list for every party and owned a big four-bedroom home on a large rural property with a swimming pool.

I was really living the dream – or so I thought.

On the outside, I was this



Richard Branson was an amazing boss

driven, focused, vivacious, career woman, but on the inside, the unanswered questions about life's meaning created worry and turmoil.

Looking back, the signs of severe stress and burnout were obvious, but I ignored them.

I struggled to sleep as I tried to keep up with the pressures of work and the conflicts that raged within.

I started having car accidents, all of them my fault. Again, another sign of the stress and strain I was putting my mind and body under.

It all came to a head one day when I was 35, six years into my contract in South Africa.

Virgin had organised a

massive event in Cape Town to announce the launch of an additional flight to London with 500 corporate guests.

I was co-hosting the event with Richard Branson and other Virgin executives. I should have been the life and soul of the party, but all I felt inside was darkness.

I was depressed, and those nagging questions wouldn't go away.

"What am I doing here and who am I really, without this fancy title on my business card?" I wondered.

I decided something had to change.



It took two years to write my book

AS TOLD TO KRISTINA RAPLEY

Leaving Virgin, I started up my own consulting business, meaning I had the freedom to set my own hours and work load.

I went through a long process of counselling, healing and attending as many workshops as I could, in an effort to discover who I was and what had brought me to this low point in my life.

My life has taken a whole new direction

Attending a seminar one day, I met an amazing man who answered so many of my questions about life and the universe, in a way that nobody else had been able to.

That day was the start of a seven-year spiritual adventure with this man as my teacher and guide.

The journey, like any journey, had its ups and downs but also its rewards – so much so, that I decided to write a book.

I never set out to write a self-help book; it just "downloaded" in my mind during an exercise class one day.

It seemed everything in my life was willing me to write it, and

after everything I'd learned, I knew not to push those feelings aside.

I'd recently connected with an old flame who was living in New Zealand, so I moved here to be with him in 2011, aged 46.

Moving to the beautiful seaside town of Sandspit, north of Auckland, I sat in a café day after day for two years and

poured my heart out onto the pages.

Stop Worrying, Start Living: A Guide for the Spiritual Worrier/Warrior was officially released in March this year.

My hope is that it will help people who find themselves in the same position as me – tired and burnt out, searching for answers about the bigger meaning of life.

The success of the book is presenting many opportunities, which I'm excited to explore; I think I am finally living the life I was meant to live.

My 20-something self would have fallen off her chair if she'd known life was going to take this unexpected turn, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Life sometimes has other plans for you, don't fight it forever – you don't know what you're missing!

Caroline Ravenall, 48, Wellington.

For more information about Caroline, visit her website www.spiritualworrier.com

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Caroline's tips to stop worrying:

- **Live in the present:** Worry tends to fall into two areas – guilt about the past or fear of the future. We can't change the past and the future hasn't happened yet, so worry is a pointless exercise; besides, it only gives you wrinkles!

- **Control stress:** There are thousands of tools out there to help you deal with the stresses of life. Find one that works for you.

- **Simplify your life.** Our lives are so complicated these days; find ways to take out the excess noise and clutter.

- **Listen to your gut:** We let logic drown out our inner voice – quite often to our detriment – in an effort to get to the top. Listen to that inner voice; it's there for a reason.

- **Develop a platform of beliefs.** It doesn't have to be spiritual or religious, but find a way to make sense of life and why things happen the way they do.

- **Accept that life's not perfect.** No matter how much we strive for the perfect life, bad stuff is going to happen. So is a lot of good. One can't exist without the other.

- **Stop comparing yourself to others.** You are 100 per cent unique. Don't follow the herd. Listen to your own voice. Your own journey will unfold as it should.

- **Depression is not a sign of weakness...** it is a sign of strength. It says you have been strong for too long. Pay attention to it – it's your body trying to tell you something.

- **Eat right.** Worry and stress are often caused by an inadequate or poor diet. Watch what you eat, get enough sleep and exercise.

YOU CAN FIND CAROLINE'S BOOK IN STORE AT WHITCOULLS.