

being is free

Who Am I?

intention for being
 story of my life
 shift happens
 kids on board

Tell the Truth

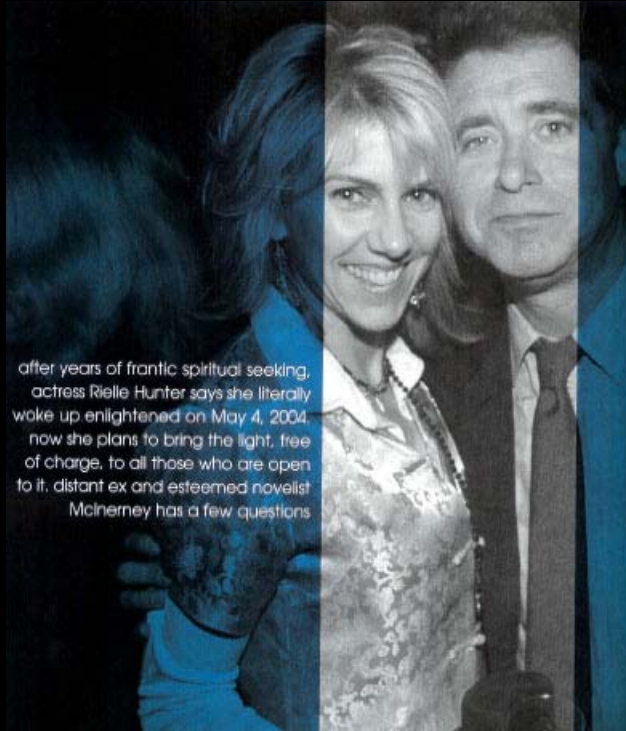
teachings
 tools that rule
 fame i am lives
 forever

Love Everyone

consciousness
 rocks
 tour
 helpful
 wise guys
 contact us

Feed People

need more than a hug?
 gold-givers-ananda
 corporations that
 care
 cool stuff to buy
 what's up with
 the cash?

press**Rielle and Jay**

after years of frantic spiritual seeking, actress Rielle Hunter says she literally woke up enlightened on May 4, 2004. now she plans to bring the light, free of charge, to all those who are open to it. distant ex and esteemed novelist McInerney has a few questions

From BREATHE MAGAZINE JAN/ FEB 05

After years of frantic spiritual seeking, actress Rielle Hunter says she literally woke up enlightened on May 4, 2004. Now she plans to bring the light, free of charge, to all those who are open to it. Distant ex and esteemed novelist McInerney has a few questions.

The way I remember it, I first met Rielle Hunter in a nightclub called Nells in early 1987, although the circumstances of our first meeting seem to be in dispute (see below). In my defense I can only say that events of that decade are not always as clearly etched in memory as we might wish, and neither of us was living a very sober or reflective life back then. At that time Rielle's name was Lisa Druck, and when she wasn't out at nightclubs she was taking acting classes. We dated for only a few months, but in that period I spent a lot of time with Lisa and her friends, whose behavior intrigued and appalled me to such an extent that I ended up basing a novel on the experience. The novel was called Story of My Life, and it was narrated in the first person from the point of view of an ostensibly jaded, cocaine-addled, sexually voracious 20-year-old who was, shall we say, inspired by Lisa. I certainly thought of Alison Poole as a sympathetic and ultimately endearing character. One of her most striking traits was her obsession with truth-telling and her horror of being lied to, something that I certainly took directly from Lisa. When Lisa moved to California and got married I lost track of her, though I was reminded of her whenever someone would ask me, at book signings and lectures, what I imagined happened to Alison Poole after the book ended whether I saw her as turning her life around or not. Through the grapevine I picked up occasional

reports from the West Coast. I heard that Lisa had changed her name to Rielle, that she'd gotten divorced, and that she was increasingly engaged in various spiritual quests which she attempted to explain to me when I finally ran into her; all I could tell for certain was that she was a far happier person than I remembered. Recently she returned to Manhattan and one sunny afternoon in Washington Square Park, attempted to enlighten me on the subject of her own enlightenment.-- Jay McInerney

Jay McInerney: When I last saw you in New York, you were a party girl, sort of a bad little New York party girl.

Rielle Hunter: Bad? What do you mean bad?

JM: Well, you were a good party girl. Bad as in naughty [laughs]. You had just come to New York and you were trying to be an actress and you were running around town...

RH: ...doing a lot of drugs.

JM: ...doing a lot of drugs, yeah.

RH: Imagine how we met -- no big surprise there [laughs].

JM: Well, as I recall it was at the night club Nells.

RH: It wasn't at Nells. In *Story of My Life*, which I just reread, you said that the two characters met at Nells. So somehow in your mind you probably think we met at Nells.

JM: Well sometimes after you've written the fictional version of events they actually become more real than the events that inspired them.

RH: Oh that's terrifying. That's so terrifying.

JM: Would you consider your time in New York to have been ill spent, or is that sort of part of the journey?

RH: Yeah, I personally don't consider any time ill spent because I utilize everything that comes my way. It's just my nature to take what comes my way and do something with it that's positive and transforming.

JM: It's kind of weird to me because I wrote this book that was partly based on you and your friends...

RH: What do you mean partly?

JM: Well, I mean partly. It's a novel. I freely made up when I needed to.

RH: You did freely make up but so much of it was real.

JM: Yeah it's not necessarily a great thing to be close to a fiction writer. For me you're a little bit frozen in time, a little bit Alison Poole, the 21-year-old party girl in that book who runs around New York going to night clubs, doing drugs, and abusing credit cards. And I'm sure that your life wasn't that simple or that extreme or that wasteable.

RH: When I reread it, I was amazed by the character's need for truth.

JM: That was a theme in the book.

RH: And that's definitely a theme in my life ♦seeker of truth. The book is dark and sad and it's hilarious. It's all of those.

JM: It is. I remember I sent it to Molly Ringwald, who was the actress of the moment and who I was acquainted with. And I remember her being kind of offended by the extremity of the character. She was freaked out by the idea of inhabiting her.

RH: For so many years I had issues with you, feeling violated and flattered at the same time. But I'm really in awe in that the truth-seeking was in me from early on. I still believe that telling the truth is a huge thing but not in the way that I thought it was then. It's not insisting that everyone tell the truth, it's

how you get to the truth of who you are, your true nature.

JM: Does acting have anything to do with this streak in you?

RH: I think my desire to be an actress was in large part "Daddy please love me," the desire to be recognized.

JM: And you moved to LA to act?

RH: I thought I was going to LA to be an actress and to get away from New York because I was doing so many drugs. We always think we're going somewhere for some particular reason, and it turns out that that isn't the reason at all.

JM: Is LA less druggy than New York?

RH: Oh yeah. Actually the reason it was less druggy was because someone referred me to a healer who did a clearing on my energy field. I was in a state of ecstasy for about a week and realized what I was looking for, in terms of medication, was inside of me; it was a higher bliss. With that clearing, all desire for drugs or alcohol vanished. I became sober overnight. And then I became a spiritual seeker -- addicted to higher consciousness, addicted to enlightenment. The weird thing about higher consciousness is that once you commit to waking up, that's all it takes. Everything just unfolds naturally. I worked with that healer for about a year. And then met another healer, and then another, and always got everything I needed.

JM: Well clearly you didn't have everything you needed or you wouldn't have kept...

RH: ...searching?

JM: Searching and going to different people.

RH: I found everything I needed on May 4th.

JM: Tell me what happened on May 4th.

RH: May 4th in... what year is it? 2004?

JM: Yes 2004. What year is it where you are?

RH: There's no time where I am. I'm just right here.

JM: You're being here now as Ram Dass would say.

RH: Yes, our beloved Ram Dass. I am here now.

JM: That was a big book for me in college, but I think it probably had to do with the drugs. It was the early '70s and I was sort of trying to catch the '60s buzz. I had my own period of seeking after I graduated from college. I went to Japan, and I spent more than a year there.

RH: Wasn't Ransom based on that? Your book?

JM: Yeah my second novel. But I spent the better part of a year...

RH: ...which I never read by the way.

JM: ...meditating and working with a Zen monk in Kyoto. It was kind of great. It definitely had an impact. When you talk about your experience on May 4th, is it like what in Zen would be called satori?

RH: Which is what?

JM: Satori is just enlightenment. It's just that moment when everything falls away and you see the world as it is. In Zen it's accomplished through long years of meditation and the study of koans. But of course I don't know exactly what it is because I've never been there.

RH: Well, I was obsessed with higher consciousness for 13 years. It was definitely an addiction and it drove me. I would hang out with enlightened

beings and get high from being around them. I wanted to wake up. I wanted to see the truth of who I was. I would read books and be with these people, and I could not for the life of me understand through logical linear space what enlightenment was.

JM: So how did you know it was there on May 4th?

RH: The actual event was a nonevent. I was at a silent retreat in Yosemite with Gangaji. When I got to the retreat, I was basically a huge bitch. I mean the biggest bitch.

JM: How could you have been a huge bitch when you've been on a path of enlightenment for 13 years? It sounds like until May 4th it was all just a waste of time.

RH: The energy, whether it was bitchiness or enlightenment, is a shift in identification. Reactions still happen in the body, but you don't end up being identified with them as "Oh poor me" or "I'm so mad at you" and then dwelling on them. They come and go. On the path to that veil lifting, there are a lot of unpleasant energies to be purged.

JM: It sounds like a kind of fasting a friend of mine does. She's a real foodie and then once a month she goes through some purification ritual to get rid of all the toxins before she starts eating butter and steak and foie gras again.

RH: There were a lot of layers of debris to be cleared in order for me to perceive, like getting over cross-identification ♦ you have a thought and then you put your attention there and you think that's who you are. You're identified with these thoughts that aren't real. It's quite an interesting thing, this scheme of life.

JM: Okay, back to May 4th.

RH: On May 4th I went to this retreat, and I was a bitch because the moment I got there I was done being a seeker. I could not be a seeker one more day. I was sick and tired of spending all this damn money and time doing this, another retreat. I'd been on billions of retreats.

JM: This has good dramatic shape; your spiritual quest has good storytelling elements. Okay, so you are really sick of it and so this is going to be the last one...

RH: I mean I couldn't do it one more day ♦ much like my marriage. I could not participate anymore. I was just done. I had to wake up, and I wanted to wake up, and I was committed to waking up. And I woke up that night.

JM: What happened? What did it feel like?

RH: It was as if I'd been paying thousands of dollars traveling the world, asking everyone I met where my car keys were and then just looking down and seeing that they were right in my hand. It was that simple a realization.

JM: I'm always doing that. I'm always finding the car keys in my hand.

RH: It's an analogy, okay?

JM: I know. Could you have found the car keys in your hand with less effort?

RH: I think many people do.

JM: I still don't have the physical coordinates, the sensory details of what went on during this particular night. What were you doing? What were you looking at? What triggered this feeling you had?

RH: Oh, I like that. Well, I told you I was a huge bitch and I had the desire and the intention to wake up to the truth.

JM: Were you in bed? Were you looking out the window?

RH: Jay, immediately you go to bed. Okay, I'll answer. It happened late at night. Before I went to sleep I was looking at a book by Ramana Maharshi, and I had a realization that Rama is not dead. That he is right there. That the

body isn't real. And it wasn't a realization like a concept, it was an actual physical sensation. I started having a déjà vu as I was looking at the pictures in the book. I'd been having these experiences of déjà vu a lot for about three months. They would last a long time, literally an hour sometimes. Incidentally, now is kind of like living in a 24-hour déjà vu.

JM: Have we already done this interview? Because I want to go home and see my dog.

RH: You're so very clever Jay. That's why they pay you the big bucks. Wait, I'm not done. And then I fell asleep. In my dream was a friend of mine and she was mooning me. I could see her reflection in the mirror, and I could see me, and I realized I could see all sides of everything. I woke up from the dream in misery, in complete misery. And I prayed: Ramana, please help me wake up from this dream -- and then I had a realization that I was already awake. For weeks after I couldn't even leave my house. Sometimes I still have a hard time functioning.

JM: But intuitively one would think that after this event you would have been able to go anywhere and do anything. Why were you suddenly afraid to go out the door after receiving enlightenment?

RH: Why would you think that it's fear? It was not that I was afraid to go out of the house. It was more the silence of the truth the beingness was so loud, it took me a little while to adjust. I don't know exactly how to communicate it. It was more like driving a car was challenging. People were perceiving me as being all here. That was a kind of an odd experience, kind of being the only one awake in a dream. It was a very odd adjustment phase where you don't fit in anymore.

JM: So that lasted...

RH: ...six months.

JM: But how long was it before you could go out of the house?

RH: I could go out in spurts.

JM: Of course, all I'm thinking about is were you hungry? Did you eat? Did you order take out? Can you work the phone okay?

RH: The interesting thing about being awake is, you get everything you need all the time. Yes I was hungry, and if I needed food, food happened. Not like abracadabra food happened, but I had friends.

JM: Did you give away all your possessions or had you already sold most of them?

RH: To pay for the enlightenment, yes I had. This is really like in the movies, but in order to get to that silent retreat...I had one possession, this rare statue of Baba Muktananda that I was so emotionally attached to. And in order to get to that retreat with Gangaji, I sold it. I sold Baba to get there, and my enlightenment happened on his birthday. But it was hard emotionally to let go. You have to be really willing to let go of everything, willing to lose everything to wake up to where you are.

JM: You said the other day that you really liked being back in New York. I would think that New York would be a very strange place to be. In your heightened state of awareness, I would think that the stimuli overload of the city would be kind of unbearable. It's hard enough if you're just having a normal day and you're sober, let alone if you're in some heightened state of awareness.

RH: Before, I was so sensitive to negative energy, ultra sensitive, like I would go to a movie theater and have to change seats four times because I would feel everybody's stuff. And it was just so uncomfortable and unbearable; I could never be in New York if I wasn't on drugs. And now everything is one love-energy to me. Being in New York is the greatest experience. The background noise is just background noise. I'm aware of it but it doesn't affect my state. It doesn't affect who I am. It doesn't affect the love. Before the shift happened, I would want to be in the chauffeured car, sheltered, away from everyone. Now I love the subway. New York is so awesome.

JM: But it's the ultimate incarnation of materialism and worldly ambition. I'm not putting it down for that reason. I love this city more than any place in the world, and every time I try to leave I come back. But at the same time I consider it to be a place that's almost antithetical to spiritual pursuits because it's so devoted to success.

RH: That's the nature of the times that we live in.

JM: But I'm saying it's more extreme. I'm just curious why...

RH: ...I'm in New York?

JM: I suppose our reasons could overlap. Let me give you an example. Here in New York, a premium is placed on what I do. It's one of the few places in the country where being a writer is respected and admired.

RH: Oh so you're here for the love -- for the recognition and the love?

JM: It's not why I'm here. I'm playing devil's advocate. But I like being here more than in LA, partly because in LA what I do is not terribly highly valued. So you tell me what you're doing, and I would think it's not particularly valued here in New York.

RH: What you were just saying is very human. We're naturally going to be drawn to places where we're loved.

JM: There's a community here that respects what I do. But for what you are entering in to, for where you are right now, I would think that this place would be almost hostile terrain.

RH: It doesn't feel like hostile terrain to me. I'm free and I feel as if now my job is to help others become free. And I want to do that for no charge. I very much want to be of service and do things a little differently.

JM: That's what makes people very skeptical of so many allegedly spiritual organizations -- whether they're fundamentalist Christian or based on precepts of Buddhism -- this sort of pay-as-you-go nature of so many of these organizations. The gurus that ask you to turn over all your possessions, the Christian preachers that fleece widows of their last saving bonds with the promise of relief from arthritis.

RH: Spirituality is a big business. And money is extremely seductive. It enables you to move around with great freedom. If you have money, you can make things happen.

JM: So do you have to spend a fortune to be a spiritual seeker?

RH: It's a rare being that wakes up on his own, without going to spiritual retreats and hanging with people of higher consciousness, and it costs a lot of money to do that. But I want to help people for free. I'm about helping people wake up in their lives, instead of having to leave their lives, or go to retreats.

JM: Could someone still be a novelist if they're enlightened?

RH: You can be anything, Jay.

JM: Would you still want to be one?

RH: Well, the weird thing about enlightenment is that desires arise but there's not a lot of attachment to whether or not they get fulfilled. Like I have a strong desire to help people wake up -- how about for free? How I will survive, I do not know. Enlightenment is living in the not knowing. If you think the sage knows all the answers, that's not true. The sage knows everything it needs to know for the moment. It lives in the state of not knowing.

JM: Why did you use "it" for the sage, instead of he or she?

RH: I don't know. We are "it." I was in a cab the other day, telling the driver how much I love New York -- of course, I love everywhere I am -- but how much I love New York. And he said, "New York, if you can't find it here, you

don't need it." [laughing] I love it.

JM: You found one of the last of the old New York cabbies ♦ quotable.

RH: It needs to be here. It needs to be here, and here I am. [laughs]

JM: Hey, well welcome back.

RH: Amen.

JM: I think it's the greatest place in the world, but I don't know if it's ready for you.

RH: Well, obviously it is or I wouldn't be here.