Lives of the Rich and Famous: Valerie Austin

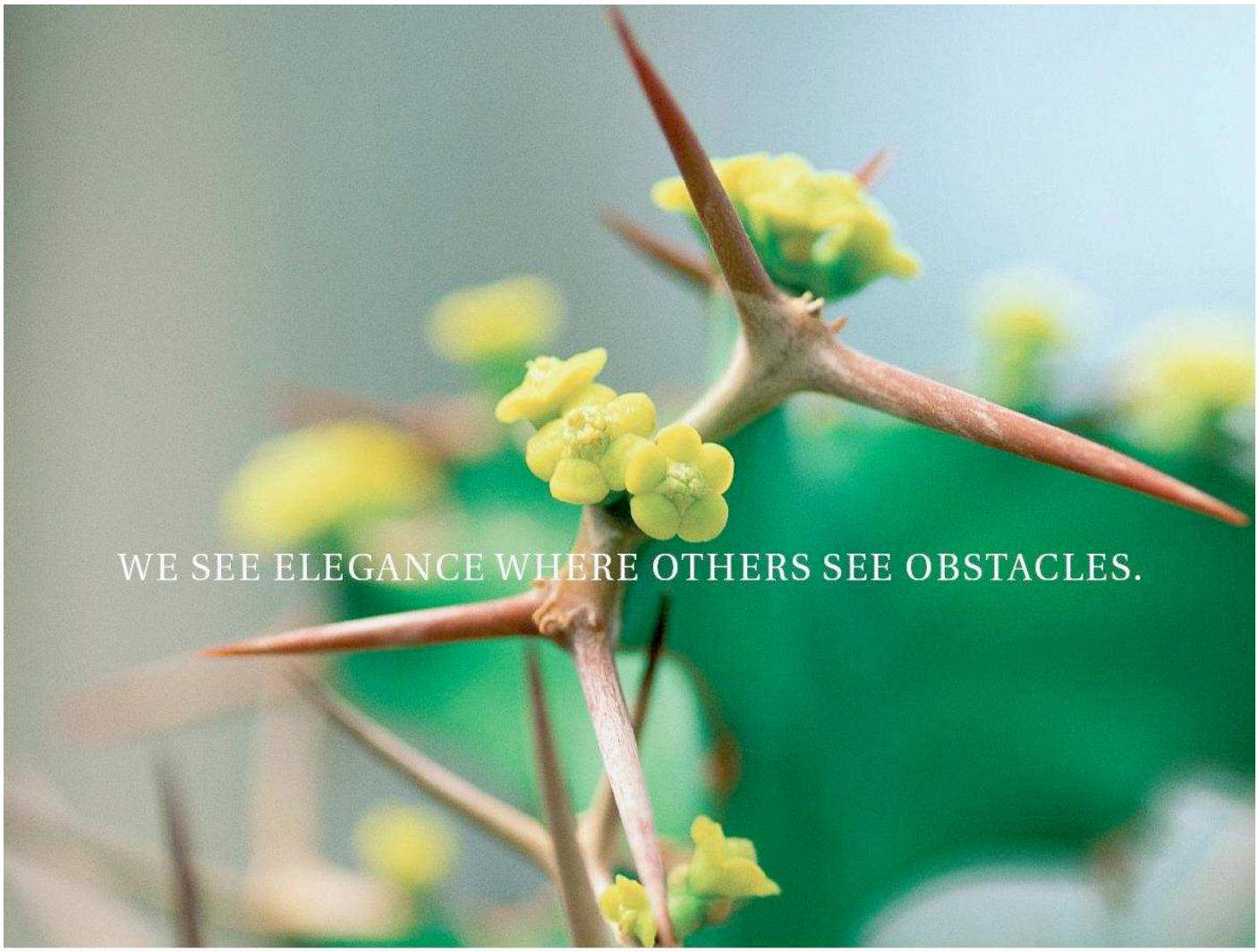


Valerie Austin with Jack Nicholson in Monaco

Valerie Austin, world renowned hypnotherapist; author of best selling books "Self Hypnosis" published by Thorsons; the original "Stop Smoking in One Hour" and inventor of the 'Austin Technique', which is used as an authoritative hypnotherapy method, has had a rollercoaster life, mirroring her British seaside upbringing. She was born in Blackpool, which she describes as similar to Vegas in its day and reveals easily that she is a self confessed "Lancashire lass." Lunching at her swanky yacht club in St Katherines Dock, her Blackpool accent though, is hardly noticeable, which confirms that she has come a long way since then.

Her parents, who were comfortably off, ran a prosperous hotel called the Beaula Hotel which was visited by the formidable, recently assassinated Benazir Bhutto, known as "Pinky," and her family. Bhutto's relatives later bought the hotel when Valerie's parents decided to sell up, to use as a safe house during tumultuous political times in Pakistan in the seventies. "Back then, Blackpool used to attract lots of interesting and glamorous people, like Bhutto." Remembers Valerie. "It had it's own crowd of 'beautiful people." I ask if she was one of them when she confesses to having had an hour glass figure, which is still evident. "It included pop stars." Continues Valerie, smiling unabashed in answer. "Like the Beatles with screaming fans following them everywhere. It was a great time and I loved the party scene."

At eighteen she left college, mar-



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Valerie is married to James Pool, author



Valerie with Charles Kennedy at The Albert Hall

ried and had a baby soon afterward, but life didn't turn into the fairytale she expected. Her husband developed an addiction to alcohol and gambling which eventually led to the breakdown of their marriage and divorce at twenty five. To support herself and her son, Valerie fell into a job selling advertising space on a commission only basis and surprised herself by quickly becoming top sales person; breaking all their records during her seven years there. As a further bonus, sometime later, she was able to leverage the sales experience and now uses hypnosis with corporate sales teams and senior management for improved productivity and stress management. Valerie explains. "One company commissioned me to get their telephone sales people on the phone more. They identified that the more calls sales people made, the more sales they got, so I used hypnosis to change attitudes and increase their desire to make calls." Her client, who one assumes was pleased, said: "Calls went through the roof."

Whilst in the midst of her sales success, a strange twist of fate intervened. Driving on the motorway, late at night, a man ran in front of her car and she swerved to avoid him. Her car left the road and hit three trees as she plunged thirty feet into a ravine. Although she

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Valerie has had a rollercoaster life, mirroring her British seaside upbringing in Blackpool

walked away with bad bruising, a month later, strange memory-loss symptoms started to surface. "My friends noticed that I couldn't remember things." Says Valerie. "I was left with a twenty four hour memory." I mention the film Groundhog day for a moment and she enthusiastically agrees. "Yes, just like that."


Valerie with Margaret Thatcher.

She suffered, what must have been, a frustrating eighteen months with this condition, until her local newspaper ran a story, appealing for readers to help. An American hypnotherapist replied and said he had a cure; if she could attend a course he was running in the US. But before she could book her trip, fate intervened again. She met the international editor of a prestigious US publication called the Hollywood Reporter, John Austin, who fell head over heels in love and proposed. "He was second generation Hollywood." Says Valerie. "I loved him immediately and was swept off my feet." Despite other offers which included Valerie being chosen as a 'new face' on British TV and being offered a part in Coronation Street, she turned down all these opportunities and departed for the US to get married; take the hypnosis course which did recover her mem-



Valerie lives half in the UK and half in the US


The Flamant Rose

ory and started her new life, with John, in California.

A dazzling, celebrity life followed with VIP everything enveloping her, until John found himself in a dispute with the owner of the magazine, when scandal erupted. The end result of the row was John leaving his Hollywood throne and launching his own film-trade publication. Although the change was unexpected, it allowed Valerie the opportunity to get first hand experience as a journalist and a new career as a writer launched.

Then one day about a year later, Valerie woke up and didn't know where she was. She headed for the airport, jumped on a 'plane and returned to England with her former memory loss resurfaced. John Austin spent considerable effort trying to get her to return but she resisted, feeling that the marriage and stay in LA, after such a serious accident had been too impulsive and a result of shock. The distressed calls from John continued for many months but just as Valerie was about to change her mind and head to LA for a visit, John phoned to say. "Don't worry, I've just met someone else whilst jogging." Valerie giggles loudly, saying. "That is sooo LA for you." Although she hasn't seen John again since, he changed the course of her professional life.

At thirty two and with experience of celebrity style magazines now firmly embedded in her career history and a black book full of friends who were powerful editors, Valerie, who says she inherited her independent spirit from her mother,

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Valerie became a hypnotherapist at forty and hasn't looked back: her natural talent emerged.

swung jobs to gather more journalism experience and got friends to recommended for her NUJ membership (union journalist card). She soon had the idea of launching some free magazines in London, in partnership with her son. "We did very well with the magazines just distributing in London." She says. "Time marched on though and we wanted to expand." They attracted an investor; put world domination plans in place; started investing in the new, bigger operation then waited for the cheque: which didn't surface. The investor finally confessed that he'd got cold feet and pulled out, leaving them facing a future of debt and difficulty. The experience took the wind out of their sails and rather than fight on with meager resources, Valerie and her son bravely admitted defeat and closed the operation down.


Valerie with HSH Prince Albert II Monaco

After that she spent some time freelancing in Fleet Street, until, following a complimentary hypnotherapy lesson, she saw a flyer for a course. "I was in burn out mode, with the drinking culture in newspapers at the time and wanted a change." So she took the course and found some natural talent emerged. At forty years of age, she launched her hypnotherapy career



"We were the L.A. Law of the mind."


The Flamant Rose

and found her journalistic background had equipped her with the skills to promote her business. Each time she sent a press release out, she thought up a catchy headline and received unprecedented publicity. "I think I ended up raising the whole profile of the hypnotherapy industry." She says laughing. Within a year she'd made £100,000 and was working a three day week, working with fifteen clients at £150 a time, to stop them smoking in an hour. "It was quite a lot of money back in the late eighties." She explains. "Others charged less, but I felt financial commitment was necessary, because the reality of stopping smoking so quickly, is very complex. It required a lot of precision with my suggestions so I needed participants to be focused."

By the second year she'd moved into teaching hypnotherapy in the corporate environment and her son joined her to promote their concept of 'productivity for sales forces.' "We invited other hypnotherapists to join us to build a perfect course but after review, found my techniques were most effective." This led to expansion of the Austin business with City offices and a burgeoning corporate business followed. "At our most successful we had 15,000 square feet." Says Valerie. "We made and spent a lot of money in the eighties. We said we were the 'LA Law of the mind', had soft top cars and twenty full time staff."

The 1991 crash coupled with some internal Machiavellian skulldugery, meant Valerie and her son,

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"We didn't have a rule book to work from and ended up hanging on by the seat of our pants."



found themselves up against lacklustre market conditions and a competing hypnosis company, who were duplicating courses and poaching staff. "It was at the same time that the tide turned against Thatcher." She reflects. "We didn't have a rule book to work from and ended up hanging on by the seat of our pants." Eventually they shut down the company and Valerie, exhausted, washed her hands temporarily of big business ventures. "I realized that we were good at generating money for other people but not experienced enough to be in business on this scale." Despite this and maybe because of the hard learning experience, her son later went on to launch a company that floated on the stock exchange.

Valerie then set up as a sole practitioner receiving work from psychiatrists but was to hit another problem: an insurance rule change in the UK that no longer allowed psychiatrists to treat people with drinking problems – an area that had generated a substantial amount of new clients. So in her



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Valerie helps business people and stars


Valerie and James

forties with "Europe in recession" according to John Major, she upped sticks and went to Kuala Lumpur where she hit the ground running. An editor took a shine to her and she was once again launched into business by front page stories about the powers of hypnotherapy which catapulted her into the offices of the rich and famous and corporate communities of KL. It even got her invited to breakfast with the Prime Minister.

Despite some difficulties operating in the region, "I had all payments made through a hotel I was working with to have a solid, financial, paper trail, to avoid any government investigations." Which she says. "Were a worrying part of operating in the region at the time." Her hypnosis and training business was successful and she says of this re-success: "it was always on the cards. I frequently visualize myself at the top of the world and ask myself 'what do I need to do to get here'."

After seven years doing well and a long time as a single woman, she met James Pool, who is an American, history, author at a conference and Valerie says. "We just both knew we were right for each other." They married and now live and work on their numerous sailing boats and yachts in the UK and US. Both have written multiple best selling books, teach hypnosis and psychology and spend half the year in the UK and the other half in the US. The Flamant Rose, their sailing yacht in the UK, is a noteworthy and historic vessel for music lovers. Owned by Edith Piaf when she was

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The Flamant Rose, their sailing yacht in the UK is a noteworthy vessel: once owned by Edith Piaf

alive, the boat has been kept in its original state with all of Edith Piaf's possessions basking within the spacious, two floor interior. Inside you will find brass fittings a plenty; white leather and a marble and gold bath sit sumptuously in the bedroom which oozes 1950's glamour with golden drapes and cream bed linen. It transports you to a time of pin curls, fluttering eye lashes, pencil skirts and of course, no regrets.

At sixty now, but looking ten years younger and with a life that is Monaco rather than pleasure beach, I ask if Valerie is thinking of retirement anytime soon. "No." She says very quickly, perhaps still revealing a part of her Lancashire spirit. "My auntie was head of Max Factor cosmetics and she always said: 'don't take time off; people will jump into your place." Which sounds a bit like some early reinforcement programming was at work.

Valerie now works with many celebrities and stars and offers corporate courses on hypnotherapy. She lectures and holds workshops for companies on stress and increasing productivity in business. She has also put together an exclusive DIY pack, in time for your new years resolutions, to stop smoking. It can be downloaded from the internet. It includes and instructional video hypnosis MP3 and thirty four page handbook for £5.

www.stopsmokinghandbook.

www.valerieaustin.com

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