

**Life as a diploma holder. Also known simply as Life.**

**To be candid, I'm not at all sure that whatever I have to say about my own experience will be of the slightest use to anyone. Nietzsche said it: you have your way. I have my way. As for the right way, the correct way and the only way, it does not exist. Let Nietzsche teach ya.**

**What would you want to know? What can I tell you?**

**Well. It was over 20 years ago and my memory isn't what it used to be, but if I try and think back to passing my dip, the first thing I remember is the whole day lost to crying flat out and face down on the bed in the middle of the exam week when I should have been looking at the synastry and the second thing I remember is my utter disbelief when the results arrived that I had actually managed to scrape through the flipping thing.**

**I've forgotten what number Diploma holder I became. It's in that lovely book somewhere. 348 sticks in my head but that's probably made up. Anyway, the other day Carole assured me that we still haven't gone past 400 Diploma holders worldwide since 1948. Which is something.**

**So, if you're still studying then you're on your way to being part of a rare group. And if you've passed, look at you! Amazing work. Anyone else who's been there knows exactly what an achievement it is. Just don't expect the other 7.4 billion people in the world to understand or care much any time soon. It'll be our secret.**

**I was really lucky. I wouldn't be an astrologer at all without a series of chance encounters culminating in sitting next to Sue Tompkins in a writing course one Autumn night at the end of the 80s. Thanks to her I started teaching early on, cut my teeth in occasional adult ed classes before I was fully qualified.**

**And then was ridiculously fortunate in being offered to teach a daytime certificate class when the previous tutor Jan decided to pack it in. Thursday mornings in the library of Baden Powell House on Queensgate. Scouts honour.**

And that merciful thing of having no real clue about just how much you don't know. Talking of which, I had started consultation work straight off the bat, maybe a week after turning up at my very first beginners' class with Sue. Didn't charge a bean for years, obviously, but was lucky enough to meet plenty of folk who were happy to chat about their charts and therefore help teach me for free.

Hardest thing in the beginning, when you really don't know and are insecure and yet simultaneously blissfully unaware of the true depth of your own ignorance, is to say I don't know. The longer you consult or teach the easier it becomes. So I would definitely recommend practising saying I don't know as much as you can from the get go.

As an apprentice, when I did start charging to read people's charts I went in at a whole £5. I would spend maybe 7 hours preparing, generate 4 inches of stacked notes and then spend about 3 hours with them. Terrible time boundaries. It was all just too interesting. People. I can still ask a person about their life in the most forensic detail. Merc Scorpio, sextile and mutual reception Pluto and cnj Mars Scorpio. Maybe throw in a bit of Sag on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and a tight Moon Jupiter connection. Chart and Sun ruler cnj Pluto helps.

I think my apprenticeship was invaluable. After passing my Dip things felt a lot more loaded, somehow, a lot more freighted with expectation and responsibility. I still spent too long with people, I still over-prepared. I still undercharged. Some things don't change that much. But right after qualifying I was doing it with a newfound and sometimes troubling sense of gravity. Often I would long for clients not to turn up. And I don't just mean all the Hoovering and getting dressed that had to be done before they arrived.

It takes time to become good at what you do. Countless hours that run into weeks, months, years so if you don't get on and just do it, you'll never give yourself the chance. There was a dip student in the classes I attended who was theoretically brilliant and got outstanding exam marks but she'd never talked to a single person even informally about their chart and having avoided any face to face astrology over several years she'd become paralysed at the very thought. I'd say start before you're ready. This is good advice for lots of stuff.

**My working practises suit me but they may be no use at all to anyone else. I don't advertise and I don't have a separate place where I work and I don't have a leaflet or a website or a twitter account or a sun sign column or any of it. Never have.**

**In the beginning I used to work on Saturdays and evenings because I had a full time job elsewhere, now I don't see clients except during daytime on weekdays, though believe you me, there is no steady stream of people at my door. I would never do more than one reading a day and anyway, nobody's asking me to! But even if they were stacked up 3 deep at the bar, one a day would be more than plenty.**

**If I had an ideal, I'd say that would be maybe 2 and a half clients a week. So if you know any half people, do refer them. There are professionals who might see 4 clients in one morning and good for them if that's what they want. These days I allot 2 hours to prep time, which now factors in the tidying up and getting dressed and 2 max to the reading. So we're already talking 4 hours scheduled for each client.**

**I might well have printed stuff out previously or looked into the chart before the actual day they come, but usually I like to do all my prep in the immediate run up to their arrival. I like the sense of immersion and the dedicated time given over to thinking about them followed immediately by meeting them.**

**And of course I love teaching my teaching. The special excitement of beginners classes. Though it's great to work alongside people much further down the road too. I still have other jobs apart from astrology and wouldn't survive otherwise, even with the teaching.**

**Don't make much of a living but I make a hell of a life.**

**And in many ways, life since I passed the diploma has not changed massively from life before the diploma. But I've become more used to telling people I'm an astrologer without pulling a massive face.**

**I love client work. I love hearing about people's lives and being trusted to hold their stuff. I love being able to reflect how brilliant they are and encourage them to be even more so. I love imagining all the possibilities and**

the enthusiasm about how much might expand and change. I love the way astrology provides a creative and flexible framework within which we can locate ourselves and into which we can stretch and grow.

I don't see it as a job. For me it's soul work. At the obvious risk of an outbreak of eyerolling, it's an art, a calling, a vocation. Sometimes the call is louder, sometimes quieter. It's a living thing and living things will always falter and fail sometimes. But that's OK. My periods of doubt are less frequent and less painful these days. I have become more able to trust things, to relax and know that astrology will hold me.

I care a little bit less what other people think of me and am more comfortable with my own way of doing things. I still sometimes get that 'everyone else does it properly and I'm some kind of fraud' feeling that I think almost all of us have about stuff now and then, but it doesn't last.

So it doesn't matter what anyone else says, really. Just be the kind of astrologer you are, or want to be.

Be your own astrological self. Because, as we know, everyone else is already taken.