

Kate expectations

From big knickers to facelifts, *Good Morning Britain* presenter Kate Garraway is facing up to midlife Bridget Jones style. She talks to Tom Atkinson about her new book

We are still in the early months of 2017 but last year's seismic changes still seem to be on the menu. And when I sit down for a chat with Kate Garraway, only a short time has passed since Donald Trump's surprising inauguration yet the bizarre updates from The White House are coming thick and fast.

Kate certainly hasn't suffered from the winds of change, although the *Good Morning Britain* presenter created something of a social media storm when she reported live from Washington DC on inauguration day. She was struggling with her false eyelashes with lipstick marks showing on her coat's faux-fur collar.

Not that she is ruffled by the experience and when I ask her about the tabloid response to her appearance, she quickly laughs off an issue that would have had many other celebrities hiding under their duvets for weeks.

"So my lipstick on my collar got more headlines than Donald Trump?" she hoots. "That is quite an achievement. But, being honest, the way you look is part of being on television really isn't it? I can't blame it on getting older, though. I've always been a bit ridiculous."

Age is immediately on the agenda because Kate is here to discuss her new book, *The Joy Of Big Knickers (Or Learning To Love The Rest Of Your Life)*.

It is something she was inspired to write as she faces up to turning 50 this May and had all kinds of questions about what came next. That included diet, exercise, relationships, sex, money and pretty much any of the things that keep people awake at night as another birthday looms.

In short, it is all about what Kate calls midlife and, hopefully, is a guide to avoiding the word that usually follows – crisis.

"Midlife is a little bit like another puberty," she says. "It's another time of explosive change for women. It's very similar to puberty because there is a huge hormonal change. That can make us go a little bit bonkers and make us run off and have affairs or climb Kilimanjaro or whatever."

"But also it is necessary to reposition yourself because you have now got older relatives. You're either dealing with their loss or caring for them. Your children are no longer cute toddlers bouncing on your knee, they're challenging you and you're trying to manage your work. I think

you need to throw it all off and think, 'Where am I? What do I believe in? How did I get to this point in my life?' And go back and review."

On top of all that, Kate's book takes a good hard look at a subject she admits she couldn't even name until recently – death.

"Last year I realised I never used the word death – and 2016 was not a good year to be a TV presenter who couldn't say death," she admits. "Virtually every day I came in, some kind of idol from my youth had passed away. I think that because you don't want to admit that it ever happens it is just something awful. I don't think having a fear of death is unreasonable. I didn't know what it was truthfully. I just found myself waking up in a sweat. You can push it away at 21 because it's never going to happen."

Ever the journalist, Kate decided to meet her fears head-on and talk to people who work with the dying and those from cultures where death is simply seen as a part of life.

She also spoke to her parents and discovered that many of her fears began to fade.

"I unpicked through it all and found that a lot of my worries were to do with the fact that my grandmother's life had been devastated by the loss of my grandfather," she says. "I feel like she stopped the day he died and that she didn't really allow herself to enjoy life beyond that. That affected my mother, who then did a lot of caring for her, so it almost stopped her life."

"I'm not sure you ever don't have a fear of death, but you put a lot of things in place. I've had a lot of big conversations with my parents about what they want to do when they get older and what things they would choose to do."

"You don't have those conversations at 20 because no one wants to think about it, but it enabled us to have really open conversations and work it all through. So that is good."

The book is not all heart-poundingly serious

though, and there are plenty of laugh-out-loud anecdotes, not least one involving herself, her ITV colleague and friend Richard Arnold and an ill-fitting – if expensive – frock.

"We'd been invited to host an awards ceremony and it was really exciting because Debenhams sponsored it and said, 'We'd like to lend Kate and Richard a dress and a suit for the occasion,'" she recalls. "Richard was done in two seconds with his purple suit and I put on this dress, got it stuck and couldn't get it off over my boobs. Richard ended up having to crawl underneath me and hold my boobs down."

I said can we cut it off but they said no we can't cut it off it's a really expensive dress. Poor Richard. I'm not sure he has ever entirely recovered."

It is such incidents that have led to comparisons with Kate's fictional contemporary, Bridget Jones. Kate recalls meeting Renée Zellweger, the actress who plays Bridget on the big screen. "On the very first *Bridget Jones* film, she and the producers asked for tapes of GMTV over the summer that I happened to be presenting," Kate says. "And then

when I interviewed her, Renée said, 'Oh my God, you're the real Bridget Jones.' I hadn't seen the movie at this point."

And while it may seem that Bridget Jones' taste in underwear was the inspiration for the book's title, too, Kate insists *The Joy Of Big Knickers* simply ties into her plans to have a good look at your life and enjoy where you are.

"As a woman you wear different pants at different points in your life," she says. "You've got the little skimpy thongs when you're trying to be saucy, you've got your Calvin Klein cotton ones, but before my exciting adventure into really big knickers I'd wear bland-looking, seam-free ones."

"Then you come to a point where you think these look hideous to anyone else but me. I don't really care about that because they make me feel warm, they make me feel sexy and you

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Above: Kate and co-presenter Ben Shephard
Below: With her children Darcey and Billy



can wear slinky dresses without thinking if your lumps and bumps are covered. It's like making peace with where you are in your life and choosing to wear things that make you comfortable and happy."

Of course it's easy to say that we need to be happy in our own skin (or knickers), but as someone whose appearance on screen is constantly analysed, Kate confesses to being fascinated by facelifts.

She looked into the idea in depth for the book and discovered her son, Billy, seven, was less than impressed by the idea. (Kate is married to psychotherapist Derek Draper and they also have a daughter, Darcey, 11.)

"Billy was really horrified by the idea of me having a facelift," she laughs. "I think he thought it would be like *Doctor Who* and you'd take your face off and put somebody else's back on. He was like, 'But who would you look like? You're mum, you're so comfy, I don't want you to look any different.' That's lovely but I don't want to look comfy. That might be great as a mum, but not as an employee or as a wild lover."

So the facelift is on hold and it seems writing the book has brought Kate contentment with where she is now and excitement about the future. "I still haven't ruled out a facelift," she admits. "I genuinely don't think there is anything wrong with wanting to look the best you can. I think it is about personal choice, really. I want one less now that I have written the book than I did at the start, though."



"Trying to recapture the freshness, energy and the excitement that comes with youth is a much more rewarding way of spending your time than trying to get skin you had aged 18.

"The fun of that period was that you never looked at your skin. You were meeting new people, going to new places, about to go off and learn something new or fall in love with somebody new. That energy is what you want in your belly, not the skin of that time. That's where

I am right now. But you never know, I may still have one.

"Don't come back and call me a liar if I do." 

The Joy Of Big Knickers
(£14.99, Blink Publishing),
by Kate Garraway, is out now.
See Express Bookshop on
page 81.

