APPENDIX

Transcript of Oprah Interview with J. K. Rowling

1. Winfrey: The J. K. Rowling legend begins with a delightful children’s book about an orphan boy wizard named with a lightning-shaped scar – a boy with a magical destiny. A destiny shared by his creator. J. K. Rowling is the first self-made billionaire author in history, selling more than four-hundred million books, captivating readers in sixty-nine languages, and two-hundred countries around the world. Harry’s final chapter – the Deathly Hallows, is the fastest-selling book of all time. No wonder she’s credited with doing more for literacy than anyone else on the planet. Her empire spans movies, merchandise – even an amusement park. The Harry Potter blockbusters are the highest grossing movie franchise in history – raking in more than 5.3 billion dollars and still counting.

2. Winfrey: So, this is the first time we’ve met.

3. Rowling: Yes, it is.

4. Winfrey: And my producers tell me that your real name is Jo. All this time I thought you were ‘J. K.’.

5. Rowling: (laughing) Yeah.

6. Winfrey: J. K. is -

7. Rowling: Is just the nom de – well, it’s because my British publisher, when the first book came out, thought ‘this is a book that will appeal to boys’ but they didn’t want the boys to know a woman had written it. So they said to me ‘could we use your initials’ and I said ‘fine’. I only have one initial. I don’t have a middle name. So I took my favourite grandmother’s name, Kathleen.

8. Winfrey: Kathleen.


10. Winfrey: Jo Kathleen.


12. Winfrey: And fooled the boys for a while.

13. Rowling: Yeah, not for too long.


15. Rowling: Yeah – because I started getting my picture in the press and no one could pretend I was a man anymore.
16. Winfrey: Yes – and I don’t think the boys have minded.

17. Rowling: No – it hasn’t held me back, has it? Clearly not held me back.

18. Winfrey: Not a bit. When we came – just arrived yesterday – it was beautiful. Scotland is beautiful.


20. Winfrey: And the green is greener than anything I’ve ever seen other than Ireland.

21. Winfrey: – That you thought would be particularly stimulating to your creative process. That’s why you wanted to come here? To finish?

22. Rowling: Well, it turned out to be stimulating. As I was finishing *Deathly Hallows* there came a day where the window cleaner came, the kids were at home, the dogs were barking, and I could not work and this light-bulb went on over my head and I thought ‘I can throw money at this problem. I can now solve this problem.’ For years and years and years I just would go to a café and sit in a different kind of noise and work. I thought ‘I can go to a quiet place’. So I came to this hotel because it’s a beautiful hotel, but I didn’t intend to stay here. They were so nice to me here – and I think writers can be a little bit superstitious – so the first day’s writing went well so I kept coming back to this hotel and I ended-up finishing the last of the *Harry Potter* books in this hotel.

23. Winfrey: We have a lot of things in common.


25. Winfrey: First of all you know this is the last year that I’m doing the *Oprah Show*. I will go on and do other things but when I came to the end of *Hallows* – the ‘last trace of steam evaporated in the autumn air’, ‘the train rounded a corner’, ‘Harry’s hand was still raised in farewell’. “‘He’ll be alright,” murmured Ginny. As Harry looked at her he lowered his hand absentmindedly and touched the lightning scar on his forehead. “I know he will”. The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well.” When I came to the end of that I mourned not only for the end of the series but for you. I cannot imagine what that was like.

26. Rowling: It was huge.

27. Winfrey: I can’t imagine.

28. Rowling: I kept – It was a bereavement. It was. It was a bereavement. It was huge. I think one way – although I knew it was coming we all know that the people we love are mortal – we are mortal. We know it’s going to end. You cannot prepare yourself for it. So even though I always knew it would be seven books – that was it. I knew how it was going to end. When it ended I was in a slight state of shock.

29. Winfrey: What did you do when you finished?
30. Rowling: Well, initially I was elated but then there came a point – I cried as I’ve only ever cried once before in my life and that was when my mother died. It was uncontrollable and I’m not a big crier. You know – I cry, but I’m not someone who can sort of keep crying going. You know what I mean? Some people can – do floods for hours. I’ve never – only twice in my life have I done that. For seventeen years I’d had that – through very tumultuous times in my personal life and I – I’d always had that. And if it was an escape for all these children you can imagine what it would have been for me. And it was not just the world. It was the discipline of working and it was the structure it gave to my life and I knew I’d still be writing but I had to mourn Harry.

31. Winfrey: Did you know ‘all is well’ was going to be the last line?

32. Rowling: Yeah, I did.

33. Winfrey: And you always knew that?

34. Rowling: Well, that’s a really good question because for a long time the last word was going to be ‘scar’. It was just worded differently but I – and I had said that to fans. The last word would be ‘scar’ and then I changed my mind. I just wanted the last words to be ‘all is well’.

35. Winfrey: ‘All is well’.

36. Rowling: ‘All is well’, yeah.

37. Winfrey: But you know what happens ‘ever after’.

38. Rowling: Yeah, I do. I couldn’t stop. I don’t think you can when you’ve been that involved with the characters for that long. It’s still all in there. They’re all in my head still. I mean I could write – I could – I could definitely write an eighth, ninth, tenth – I could – easily.

39. Winfrey: Will you?

40. Rowling: I’m not going to say I won’t. I don’t think I will. I loved writing those books. I love writing it. So, I feel I am done but you never know.

41. Winfrey: Tell me: did you ever feel that you had to succumb to the pressure? Because when you first started – the first one – the world didn’t know. And afterwards – once the deals are made and the industry and the entire universe of Harry Potter began I’m sure the pressure was overwhelming at times.

42. Rowling: Yeah. It was. I can say that now because I’m free of it. At the time I felt the need to deny how great the pressure was because that was my way of coping. It happened so fast for me and it shouldn’t have happened. You know? This was a children’s book. A children’s book, moreover, that I’d been told repeatedly that wasn’t very commercial because I’d been turned-down a lot. So – and I went from utter obscurity – it was like being a Beatle – there came a point where it was crazy.
43. Winfrey: That’s such a great analogy.

44. Rowling: But there were – except there were four Beatles – so they could turn to each other and say ‘my God, this is crazy!’ I couldn’t turn to anyone. So the pressure was insane. We turned-up to a book signing my second American tour – my first American tour hand been kind of hit and miss, you know? – We turned-up for my second American tour, thought it was going to be the same thing again. We’re in this car rolling down the street and there’s just this queue block after block after block after block and I’m looking out the window and I turn to the girl from the publisher and I say “Is there a sale on?” And we turn the corner and there was this enormous Barnes & Noble and I thought “Oh, my God”. And the queue snaked up the street, up the Barnes & Noble, up though four floors and they took me in the back entrance. They opened the door and they screamed. And all these light-bulbs went off in my face. And I was – oh, my God – and I signed two thousand books and the queue hadn’t ended. We had to go.

45. Winfrey: We call queues lines.

46. Rowling: Lines.

47. Winfrey: The line went on and on and on.

48. Rowling: The line was on and on and on. Yeah. Okay.

49. Winfrey: And that is when you knew.

50. Rowling: Yeah. That’s a real stand-out moment for me. I mean I knew it was getting big – in that there was press attention and so-on – but at that point – that for me was the real – that was when it felt Beatlesque. That’s when it started to get crazy. So you ask about the pressure? At that point I kept saying to people “Yeah, I’m coping, I’m coping.” The truth was there were times I was barely hanging by a thread.

51. Winfrey: It is the land of bagpipes, whiskey, kilts, and castles. Scotland is also the land home to the queen of the publishing world – billionaire mom – J. K. Rowling. I traveled to Edinburough to meet J. K. in the city where her beloved boy wizard, Harry Potter, leapt from her fantastical imagination into the hearts of millions. Here among the cobblestone streets and quaint cafés J. K., then a struggling single mother, wrote the *Sorcerer’s Stone* – long-hand, while her young daughter slept at her side.

52. Winfrey: But isn’t it interesting that in the first book, when Harry is being dropped-off at his uncle’s, it is predicted – ?

53. Rowling: One day every child in the world will know his name.

54. Winfrey: One day every child in the world will know his name.

55. Rowling: Well, the screenwriter –
56. Winfrey: So, didn’t you know?

57. Rowling: No.

58. Winfrey: Wasn’t there part of you –

59. Rowling: Part of me –

60. Winfrey: Subconsciously, that knew? Yes.

61. Rowling: I – I remember once and it was like – it was like – well, like – I’m going to call it clash – a flash of clairvoyance now. Obviously if it hadn’t come true it would just be some crazy thought I had. But I do remember one day, writing *Philosopher’s Stone*, I was walking away from the café where I’d been working on –

62. Winfrey: *Philosopher’s Stone* which became *Sorcerer’s Stone*.

63. Rowling: Which became *Sorcerer’s Stone*, exactly. So that’s the first novel. And I had this moment where I suddenly thought – It was like another voice speaking to me and the voice said “the difficult thing is going to get published. If it gets published it will be huge.”

64. Winfrey: Wow.

65. Rowling: And that is exactly what it was.

66. Winfrey: So there was some hint that – the voice had said to you –

67. Rowling: Well, the thing is you’ve got to believe, haven’t you?

68. Winfrey: Yes.

69. Rowling: You know – I was not the world’s most secure person. I wasn’t someone with an enormous amount of – in fact, I’d say I was someone with not much self-belief at all and yet in this one thing in my life I believed. That was the one thing in my life. I felt ‘I can tell a story’.

70. Winfrey: Is it true that it just – You know I’ve heard the legend is that the story just entered your head while on a train.

71. Rowling: Yeah. That is – that’s true.

72. Winfrey: That is true.

73. Rowling: I had been writing – all I ever wanted to do from – as – from the age at which you understand that books are written – they don’t just spontaneously grow out of the ground.

74. Winfrey: Which for you is about six?
75. Rowling: Yeah. Five or six. That’s all I ever wanted to be.

76. Winfrey: Was a writer.

77. Rowling: Yeah. I wrote compulsively all through my late teens into my twenties, but I’d never really the right thing, you know? And then I was on a train, I was twenty-five, and it came. And what came was ‘boy who doesn’t know he’s a wizard goes to wizarding school’. Bang. Bang. Bang. And then that was it. And that was like touch paper. And I was on this delayed train going from Manchester to London and my head was just flooding with what’s at this wizard’s school. There were four houses, there were ghosts, there were house ghosts. What do they teach? What subjects do they learn? Who are the teachers? And I had no pen. But that was it. That was it. And I don’t think I had ever felt so excited. I thought ‘I’d love to write that’. I’d never thought about writing for children. I’d never thought about aiming anything at that age group and yet it was the thing I was meant to write, you know? Because I’d always been fascinated by folklore. I love a kooky word.

78. Winfrey: I know. Kooky words –

79. Rowling: I do!

80. Winfrey: I think the greatest gift the Harry Potter series has given to the world is the freedom to use our imaginations.

81. Rowling: I really hope so. I’m very frustrated by fear of imagination. That’s – I don’t think that’s healthy.

82. Winfrey: What about all the criticism that you received from a lot of religious people who felt that it was too dark and frightening, and wizardry, and sorcerers, and magic, and all the like?

83. Rowling: Well, I think –

84. Winfrey: I love what you said. I read this some place where you said you were not trying to convert people to Christianity when you wrote the books.

85. Rowling: No. No. I’m not pushing any belief system here, although there is a lot of Christian imagery in the books. That’s undeniable. And certainly in Hallows there’s a very clear – but that’s not. That’s an allusion to a belief system in which I was raised. But to answer the question about how that felt – How did that feel –

86. Winfrey: To be criticized –

87. Rowling: To be criticized in that way. Well, I tried to tease out – okay, what do they – what are they being critical of here? Well, if we’re talking about that dark and scary stuff, I think it’s perfectly legitimate for a parent to say ‘that’s a little old for my child’ or ‘we’re going to need to discuss that together – we’ll read that together’. That’s great. In fact, that’s perfect! Sit down and read that together. That would be amazing. On the ‘you must not discuss witchcraft, you must not have witches or magic depicted in a book’ I find that nonsensical. Nonsensical. In a hundred, two-
hundred, three-hundred years from now there’ll be a new children’s story that has witches, and wizards, and magic. It will always be with us because it’s a belief system that humanity passed-through. It still has huge attractions. There’s a quotation that I almost used in the *Harry Potter* book. I’m paraphrasing, this won’t be exact. In magic, man has to rely on himself. So, in religion, of course, you’re looking for outside support but that’s the appeal of magic. I’m not saying I believe magic is real. I don’t. But that’s the perennial appeal of magic – that we ourselves have power and we can shape our world. I sometimes think its very analogous to having a lot of money that people think – ‘cause that’s kind of like a super power. I’ve often thought this, since all this happened to me. People think ‘well, you can solve anything now’. Really? It doesn’t work like that.

88. Winfrey: [J. K. Rowling] granted us a rare interview in Edinburgh, Scotland – the city she calls home. We sat down at the historic Balmoral Hotel. This is where she completed the final chapters of Harry Potter’s wondrous journey. After selling more than four-hundred million copies of this series it’s hard to believe that twelve publishers rejected the *Sorcerer’s Stone*. Thirteen turned-out to be a lucky number. A publisher bewitched by the spectacular tale finally agreed to print it. J. K. signed the deal with a warning from her agent. “You’ll never make money writing children’s books”.

89. Winfrey: Isn’t it interesting how when you first get to understand what having money can do – like – you have to realize – I don’t have to be in this situation where –

90. Rowling: Did you feel that?

91. Winfrey: Yeah.

92. Rowling: Did it take you a while to understand?

93. Winfrey: And it still is. And it still does.

94. Rowling: Me, too! It think it’s that moment when you’re trying to choose between two things.

95. Winfrey: That’s happened to me!

96. Rowling: And you think – I could –

97. Winfrey: I could get both!

98. Rowling: But you don’t – you’ve not lived like that for so long.

99. Winfrey: Yes, and you know why? Because you understand what twenty-five pounds is.


101. Winfrey: Yes. Or a hundred dollars.
102. Rowling: This felt so extravagant!

103. Winfrey: In the United States you’re known as the first billionaire author.

104. Rowling: Yeah.

105. Winfrey: So how has being the first billionaire author affected your perception of yourself?

106. Rowling: I dress better. But that’s not just about money, ’cause you meet lots of rich people who dress atrociously. It’s more that you can afford to – well, you can definitely afford better clothes. I think the single biggest thing that money gave me – and obviously I came from a place where I was a single mother and it really was hand to mouth at one point. It was literally as poor as you can get in Britain without being homeless at one point. If you’ve ever been there you will never, ever take for granted that you don’t need to worry. Never.

107. Winfrey: Are you in a place now where you can accept that you will always be rich?

108. Rowling: No. Are you?


111. Winfrey: Unless I’m a complete fool.

112. Rowling: But that’s it! Unless I’m a fool! And you know what? I’ve never been a fool with money so why worry? But I do. I think ‘God, if I blew this, how could I look everyone in the face?’

113. Winfrey: But, you know psychologically it’s a difficult thing to come to terms with because it’s like saying – not allowing room for never say never.


115. Winfrey: You know?

116. Rowling: Exactly. And you feel – I feel – I don’t want to get complacent.

117. Winfrey: Right.

118. Rowling: I don’t want to take things for granted.

119. Winfrey: Correct.

120. Rowling: I just – I just – and after all. Well, you do know what, I’m talking absolutely rubbish, aren’t I? I’m talking rubbish. I mean really would have to be very stupid but, yeah, I do still worry.
121. Winfrey: Really?

122. Rowling: Yeah. Not all the time. I mean mostly I feel great.

123. Winfrey: What do you actually think money has done for you? What does it do?

124. Rowling: It frees you. That’s what it does. It frees you. That’s why it’s like a super power. You don’t – it frees you. I mean we don’t have to – the luxury of literally being able to sit down and say “where should we go for a holiday?” and not be, in any way, limited.

125. Winfrey: I hear you don’t drive.


127. Winfrey: So do you have a driver?

128. Rowling: I – of – lately I have had a driver. Very lately.

129. Winfrey: Is it true that you still take the bus? I read that you still take the bus.

130. Rowling: Occasionally. Within the last year I have taken the bus. Definitely, yeah.

131. Winfrey: Did you ever imagine your life being the way it is now?

132. Rowling: No. Never. And I really, really mean never. It overshot the mark so ridiculously that I – I was so unprepared for it. This is a thing I think I’ve never really spoken about. I was a writer. I had no one near me professionally or personally who could in any way help me when I had questions like “what do you do when the press is searching your bins?” You know?

133. Winfrey: Mhmm.

134. Rowling: Really crazy stuff that happens. The stuff that makes you feel –

135. Winfrey: But that doesn’t happen to most writers, you know?


137. Winfrey: It’s not like if you’re an actress you could have expected that.

138. Rowling: Of course! Of course. You know that if I’m wildly successful that stuff will happen. I’m not going to like it but that will happen. But as a writer there’s no way of thinking “if I’m wildly successful they will want long-lens photographs of me on the beach in my bikini. Never occurred to me in a million years.

139. Winfrey: So you weren’t prepared for it.

140. Rowling: Totally unprepared. And really running scared for a while.
141. Winfrey: Tell me – we were talking about this earlier – about people’s criticism of you. Have you made peace with your relationship with God? And do you call it God?


143. Winfrey: But when you read the *Potter* books, watch the *Potter* movies the theme that is consistent and that obviously in the end rules is love.

144. Rowling: Definitely.

145. Winfrey: Love wins.

146. Rowling: Yes, which is a concept which runs through all the major religions – without exception. And I think that, this is probably true of all writers, but sometimes I know what I believe because of what I have written. Oddly, if you’d asked me before I wrote it ‘what did I believe’ I maybe couldn’t have told you. But it does come through strongly in the *Potter* books. You’re right. It does and that –

147. Winfrey: That in the end love wins.

148. Rowling: Love wins. It does win. We know it wins. When a person dies, love isn’t turned-off like a – I was going to say tap, but it’s faucet. ‘Cause you had to translate ‘queue’ to ‘line’.

149. Winfrey: Yes.

150. Rowling: It isn’t turned-off. Yeah. It is an amazingly resilient part of us, isn’t it?

151. Winfrey: So you believe in a higher power?

152. Rowling: Yeah, I would say I do. Yes. And would I call it God, yes. For want of a better word sometimes, but yes. Yeah.

153. Winfrey: Before J. K. Rowling became one of the world’s richest women she led a modest life as a secretary in London. She was twenty-five years old when her mother died from Multiple Sclerosis sending Jo into an emotional tailspin. Desperate to escape the pain, she moved to Portugal, married and gave birth to her first daughter, Jessica. But, the marriage was, in Jo’s words, ‘short and catastrophic’. She packed-up her daughter and moved to Scotland, where she hit a knew low. Jo was clinically depressed and struggling to survive on welfare.

154. Winfrey: What did your first marriage teach you about yourself? You know, we’ve heard very little about it and you haven’t spoken very much about it – only that it was short-lived. I think thirteen months and a day?

155. Rowling: Yeah, it was, yeah. You’re good.
156. Winfrey: Thirteen months and a day. What did you learn about yourself to never be repeated?

157. Rowling: Well, I’d think the first and most important thing to say about that marriage is I would do it all again, step for step to have Jessica, who is incredible and the world’s a better place for having her in it. So, you know, don’t regret a thing.

158. Winfrey: Okay.

159. Rowling: I think I repeated patterns from my first family as we often do in my selection of my first husband.

160. Winfrey: Which is what we do.

161. Rowling: Yeah, you’d think. You say “what did I learn”? I think that it taught me – I’m proud that it taught me how – that I had a strong survival instinct. Because when I knew that it was time to go, I left.

162. Winfrey: Did it help you to know more of who you are? Did it bring you into a –

163. Rowling: Eventually. But I can’t say I walked straight out of that marriage and that experience saying, you know, I feel enlightened in any way – I felt quite shell-shocked. I had a very, very tiny baby. And then I went straight into poverty and depression. So, but – in a strange way all of that, yes, was enormously illuminated. But I did a lot of thinking after that – after that marriage ended. Primarily about me. Why things had been as they had been. And it was seven years before I met the right man. But I think it needed to be seven years. You know? They –

164. Winfrey: And you were ready?

165. Rowling: Yeah, I was really ready.


167. Rowling: The strange thing is a week before I met Neil – literally a week – and I hope this gives hope to all single women out there – I remember speaking to a very good friend and she said “well, what would you like in a man?” And I said “I would need to be with someone intelligent, ’cause I just value that. I said I would really like him to have his own career. These were really basic things, okay? Integrity was very important and kindness and a very strong sense of who he was. These were things I would really like. And then she looked and me and she said, “well, that’s not going to happen.” Like I’d asked for, you know, the earth. And I-

168. Winfrey: Like you’d asked for Jesus.

169. Rowling: Yes, exactly! And I thought “okay, yeah, maybe that’s not going to happen.”
170. Winfrey: Were you okay with it?

171. Rowling: I certainly wasn’t crying my eyes out every night. I could have done it, but I’m glad not to have had to do it.

172. Winfrey: During the process of all of this – I understand are you still estranged from your father?

173. Rowling: I am, yeah.

174. Winfrey: You are?

175. Rowling: Yeah, yeah. That’s never an easy thing to do in the public eye, but there you are.

176. Winfrey: Do you think you’ll ever make peace?

177. Rowling: No, I don’t. I don’t. I think that it’s such a huge thing to be estranged from a parent that obviously you would – it would have to be very big reasons for that.

178. Winfrey: Do you have your reasons?

179. Rowling: I have my reasons.

180. Winfrey: Any you want to share?

181. Rowling: It wasn’t a good relationship from my point of view for a very long time but I had a need to please and I kept that going for a long time and then there – there just came a point at which I had to pull-up and say I can’t do this anymore. And, yeah…

182. Winfrey: Do you regret that he can’t be a part of this success?

183. Rowling: Well, the estrangement happened post-success so he was – he was there for a while. If I’m totally honest with you I regret much more that my mother never saw any of it. That – that’s a bit of a killer. I mean she would have just –

184. Winfrey: Would she have loved reading it?

185. Rowling: I can honestly say I know a hundred percent she would have adored it. Yeah. Yeah.

186. Winfrey: But you started writing before she passed?

187. Rowling: Yeah, but I never told her about it.

188. Winfrey: You never told her?
189. Rowling: And I would have done. You know? I would have told her about it and I know she would have really liked it. I think she was – I think it was six months before she died I started writing. Yeah, and I never shared it with her.

190. Winfrey: Do you regret that?

191. Rowling: Yeah, hugely. Hugely. But the odd thing is that that’s just life, isn’t it? The books wouldn’t be what they are if she hadn’t died. I mean her death is on virtually every other page of the Harry Potter books, you know? At least half of Harry’s journey is a journey to deal with death in its many forms, what it does to the living, what it means to die, what survives death – it’s there in every single volume of the books.

192. Winfrey: What the love of your parents – the love of you parents. How that abides with you still. Yes.

193. Rowling: Exactly, exactly. Exactly. So, if she hadn’t died I don’t think it’s too strong to say there wouldn’t be Harry Potter. There wouldn’t – you know? The books are what they are because she died. Because I loved her and she died. That’s why they are what they are.

194. Winfrey: Would it also be fair to say that your life – everything in your life, because I know you went through a period of depression and I had read that the Dementors came from that depression.


196. Winfrey: In Harry Potter’s world, the Dementors are dark creatures who feed-off human happiness causing depression and despair to those in their path. Dementors are capable of consuming a person’s soul.

197. Winfrey: Would it be fair to say that you’ve used, in the seventeen year process, writing the Potter series, that you’ve used the good, the bad and the ugly of your life?


199. Winfrey: And expressed it through your writing through the Potter stories?

200. Rowling: Yeah. For sure. Depression is – Clinical depression is a – is a – is a terrible place to be. Terrible place to be.

201. Winfrey: So you became depressed after your mother died?

202. Rowling: Yes, but I think it was a kind of delayed – I think I had tendencies toward depression from quite young. It became really acute when I was sort of twenty-five to twenty-eight was a dark time. It’s that absence of feeling – and it’s even the absence of hope that you can feel better. And it’s so difficult to describe to someone who’s never been there because it’s not sadness. Sadness is – I know sadness – sadness is not a bad thing. You know? To cry and to feel. But it’s that cold
absence of feeling – that really hollowed-out feeling. That’s what the Dementors are. And it was because of my daughter that I went and got help.

203. Rowling: – Means a stripping-away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me. I was set free because my greatest feeling had been realized and I was still alive and I still had a daughter whom I adored and I had an old typewriter and a big idea and so rock-bottom became the solid foundation on which I re-built by life. It is impossible to live without failing at something unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all.

204. Winfrey: I love the Harvard Speech. Were you a little nervous going to speak to Harvard? Even you?

205. Rowling: A little. That was – That was easily the most frightening thing I’ve done in my life. Easily. It felt very exposing because this wasn’t me reading-out words that had already been approved. Do you know what I mean? I used to be borderline phobic about public speaking.

206. Winfrey: Wow, really?

207. Rowling: Yeah. Really. Like shaking so badly I couldn’t – I didn’t know what sentence I was on. So I’ve come a long way. I’m still not – public speaking I’ve got better at but there are things like having to give a speech on T.V. still scares me so much I can’t deal with that very easily. This feels very easy.

208. Winfrey: I was going to say, you’re doing so well!

209. Rowling: But this is different. This is different!


211. Rowling: Well, exactly, but you’re quite good at this, you know?

212. Winfrey: Well thank you.

213. Rowling: They say.

214. Winfrey: So the most important thing about that speech I think first of all you talked about how rock-bottom became the foundation from which you rebuilt your life. But the most important thing was about how to use failure.

215. Rowling: Failure. Failure is so impor – it doesn’t get spoken about enough. We speak about success all the time, but, you know, I do not know any – I haven’t met – and I’ve been so fortunate and met extraordinary people through Harry Potter, and not one of them didn’t have their failure – more than one failure. And it’s the ability to resist failure, in many ways, or use failure that often leads to the greatest success, isn’t it? So, yeah. Failure. I’ve often met people who – who are terrified, you know, in a straight jacket of their own making because they’d rather do anything that fail. They don’t want to try for fear of failing. Well that’s the rock-bottom thing. Rock-
bottom wasn’t fun – at all. I’m not going to romanticize rock-bottom, but it was liberating. What did I have to lose?

216. Winfrey: Were you reluctant to increase the empire?


218. Winfrey: Meaning the theme parks, the doll figures, I mean there is an entire Potter universe.

219. Rowling: There is.

220. Winfrey: I mean anything you imagine in the world – it’s been Potterized.

221. Rowling: I can only say to you: it could be so much worse.

222. Winfrey: It could be?

223. Rowling: Michael Jackson wanted to do the musical.

224. Winfrey: Really?

225. Rowling: Mhmm.

226. Winfrey: That’s big, that you didn’t want Michael Jackson to do –

227. Rowling: I said no to a lot of things, we’ve –

228. Winfrey: Do you control all of it?

229. Rowling: No. I mean – no. I have a say. For me it’s – I love the films, I love the books, and there are elements that are really fun around it. Now with the theme park – when they came to us, they came to us with a really extraordinary proposal. Which is that this will be state-of-the-art and be like nothing anyone has ever seen and they could back that up. They showed us their ideas and I thought yeah, this could be amazing but I only wanted to do it if it was going to be incredible. And it truly is. I mean, if I had been a reader of the books, I would have wanted to go there.

230. Winfrey: In my magazine I do a column at the magazine called ‘what do you know for sure’? and every month when I write it I’m like “I don’t know a thing!”

231. Rowling: I’m really glad you said that because I thought wouldn’t if you ask me what do I know for sure, this is going to be tricky. Okay, okay.

232. Winfrey: Yeah, I’m prefacing it by saying it’s difficult to know what you know for sure.

233. Rowling: Yeah, it is.

234. Winfrey: But what do you?
Rowling: Well, I definitely know that – that love is the most powerful thing of all and I remember thinking that – God, I’m about to make myself cry but, I remember thinking that when 9/11 happened because those last phone calls were about – the last thing knowingly, that I’m going to say on this earth is “I love you”. What’s more powerful than that? What’s more proof than that? Beyond fear, beyond death.

Winfrey: It’s so interesting that you mention 9/11 because I think about them all the time.

Rowling: It’s such a huge – it is a defining moment in our lives. I remember thinking “they can’t have come down”.

Winfrey: Could they have come down? Yes.

Rowling: Yeah. When I turned-on the T.V. and then yeah – I saw it. Yeah. And I panicked because I have good friends in New York and I emailed my two best friends in New York. One of them is my editor Arthur Levine and bizarrely, he was able to email me back virtually immediately and his last line in his email was “and they say we shouldn’t teach children about evil”. ‘Cause we had had many a discussion about that.

Winfrey: What is your dream of happiness?

Rowling: Well, in the – in the first Harry Potter book, Dumbledore says to Harry that the happiest man alive would look in the mirror and see himself exactly as he is. So I would have to say that I’m pretty close.

Winfrey: And will you be writing more?

Rowling: Definitely. Oh, God, definitely. I can’t, yeah, I literally can’t stop. Well, I mean, you could tie my hands to my sides, I suppose, but I have to write. For my own mental health, I need to write. Yeah.

Winfrey: They tell you now, you’re a writer.

Rowling: Yeah, well, exactly. I love it. I need to do it. I mean do you – you’re coming to the end of this. How does that feel?

Winfrey: It feels like the time is right for the end of this.

Rowling: Of this, exactly.

Winfrey: And would I be able to completely withdraw from the public and never sit and talk to – or never have the curiosity to sit and talk to talk about another person’s life or hear their stories? No. That’s why I’m creating my own network. But I read something recently. It was the story of Michael Jackson in the making of Thriller and in that story the writer said Michael Jackson never realized that Thriller was a phenomenon that, it being the number-one selling album of all times is a phenomenon. That what happened when that album came out and people all over the
world doing that dance and listening to every song and that he spent his life chasing the phenomenon and therefore was never satisfied.

249. Rowling: I read it and that really resonated with me.

250. Winfrey: And it really resonated with me, too and I thought “I don’t want to be that.”


252. Winfrey: I don’t want to be chasing the phenomenon that I know –

253. Rowling: I have to do it again. I have to do it again.

254. Winfrey: I have to do it again.

255. Rowling: I know. I did it, I’m really proud that I did it and I’m sure you feel the same way.

256. Winfrey: Yes. That’s exactly how I feel.

257. Rowling: But this is a new phase.

258. Winfrey: That I will bring this to a close just as you have brought that to a close and then I will go one to whatever the next chapter is and let that be whatever that is going to be.

259. Rowling: I feel exactly the same. It would be more interesting if I disagreed for interview purposes, but I do feel – I read that interview and that part is the part that stayed with me.

260. Winfrey: That was life-changing for me in that moment. Click! Switched. I thought “oh, that’s why I was so afraid of moving forward with this idea of the network” ‘cause I’m thinking “how am I going to top this, how am I going to make it? How am I going to do that?” You have to – it’s a completely separate thing and it will be paralyzing – it’s paralyzing.

261. Rowling: Totally. If you’re going to spend your whole life chasing that.

262. Winfrey: But, like, trying to create that. Because the fact that that was –

263. Rowling: You never meant to be that huge.

264. Winfrey: That’s right! I never – I didn’t create that in the first place. That was ..Universal, divine order, Jesus, all of it. So yes, that brings me to the final question for you. Is there, or was there, has there been a part of you that feels “I’ve got to top Harry”.

265. Rowling: No and I really mean that. And I get asked that – it’s not even – people don’t ask me that, interestingly, people tell me that. People say to me “well,
you must just think *how on earth am I going to top that?*” And I think “No. I really, truly don’t think that.” It was amazing. It was also insane, at times.

266. Winfrey: Yes, yes.

267. Rowling: And there are parts of that insanity I’ll be quite glad to leave behind.

268. Winfrey: You became a Beatle!

269. Rowling: I’m so – yeah. It was fun for a while, but it – you know – I’m so grateful I had it, honestly. On so many different levels. I love the people who read the books, I dedicated the last book to the people dearest to my heart and the seventh part of that dedication was a reader who’d stuck with Harry right the way through, I love them.

270. Winfrey: Which is exactly how I feel about all the people who stuck with me. When I was saying – when I was making the announcement for leaving the show, the only time I teared-up *and*, in the future, even sitting in meetings, the only time – the only thing that makes me cry is thinking about the viewers. The people who made it all possible.

271. Rowling: Yeah. I feel totally the same way. There was a girl who came-up to me the other day in the street, sort of ballooned out of the pavement in front of me like she’d Apparated. She must have been early twenties and she said to me “You are my childhood”. How can you – I know! About the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me.

272. Winfrey: That is pretty good.


274. Winfrey: That was so much fun, Jo. That was really fun.

275. Rowling: Thank you.

276. Winfrey: Thank you so much.