



# Here I am

Star of the stage, page, and internet age – award-winning actor, author, and YouTuber **Carrie Hope Fletcher** knows better than most what it takes to live life in the spotlight.

From times when her personal life has been put under a microscope, to the collision of her online and offline worlds, here Carrie speaks candidly about rebuilding yourself after a relationship ends, her experiences with depression and anxiety, and the importance of having your own back

Interview | Kathryn Wheeler    Photography | Paul Buller



Blouse | Topshop, Skirt | H&M, Belt | New Look, Shoes | Kurt Geiger

**I**t was the night of the 30th anniversary of the first London production of *Les Misérables*; that, Carrie Hope Fletcher tells me, was the pinnacle of her career so far. At the time, Carrie was playing the role of Éponine, and following the curtain call, the current cast were joined on stage by the original actors for a half-hour concert, concluding with a rousing rendition of ‘One Day More’.

In the shuffle to fit everyone under the spotlight, Carrie found herself standing centre stage next to Colm Wilkinson – the original Jean Valjean. As the song ended, and confetti cannons and applause erupted, Colm took Carrie’s hand and said: “You were excellent.”

Of course, this was far from Carrie’s first rodeo. Her big break was aged five, featuring in a Honey Nut Cheerios advert – and by the time she was 11, she’d already starred in three West End shows. >>>





Blouse | Topshop, Shorts | H&M, Headscarf | New Look

Today, Carrie's fingers are adorned with rings – one for each show she's starred in – and this year she won 'Best Actress in a Musical' for her performance in *Heathers: The Musical* in the WhatsOnStage Awards. But despite all this, Carrie admits she still has 'pinch me' moments, and struggles with imposter syndrome, and feelings of self-doubt.

"It's an insecurity of mine that I always feel I have something to prove because I never went to drama school. I convince myself that I don't deserve to be here," Carrie says. "But then you talk to other people who *have* been to drama school, and they think the same thing. Everyone convinces themselves that they don't deserve to be where they are."

Meeting Carrie – who is calm, attentive, and warm – you may not suspect the current of anxiety that, she explains, is often meandering below the surface.

"I feel like I walk through life with a bubble over my head," Carrie says. "It's just my own thoughts bouncing around, and I come up with every single scenario of what could go wrong, and then a contingency plan for each."

Carrie shares how recently she was due to meet her boyfriend – fellow West End actor Oliver Ormson – and his castmates for drinks after rehearsals. As she approached the bar, Carrie felt her heart begin to beat faster as anxiety, at the thought of walking into a room full of people she didn't know, set in. The evening went absolutely fine, and afterwards Carrie was frustrated that she spent so much time worrying about it.

It's something that many others who experience anxiety will relate to. But putting feelings and experiences that are rarely articulated into words is something of a speciality for Carrie. In 2015, at the age of 22, Carrie published her first book, *All I Know Now*. Written on train journeys between her job at the West End, and home where she would film, edit and upload YouTube videos – and aimed at her then-teenage following – the book sought to address the worries and hurdles that Carrie herself had come up against as a teen. And it did so with huge success, topping the charts as a *Sunday Times* best-seller.

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## “Everyone convinces themselves that they don't deserve to be where they are”

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Fuelled by a cocktail of rapidly-changing hormones, bad haircuts, and general angst, our teenage years are some of the most memorable, but also most challenging. It makes perfect sense that so many people would jump at the chance to read a guide like Carrie's. But, now 26, Carrie looks back at the four years that have passed since the book was published, and sees them as equally formative.

"There are times in your life where even a year or two makes such a difference," she reflects. "I think about myself a year ago and say: 'Oh God, what was I thinking?"

Why did I make that decision? Why didn't I just calm down?"

"Then I look around at the people who are exactly the same age as I am, and one of them has three kids, one of them is single and travelling, one of them has created her own business and she's just bought a mansion.

"There's no one way to do things. There's no: you get a house, you have kids, and you live out the rest of your days with your husband and your children."

Carrie's right. While there may have once been a check-list for a good life, now things are increasingly less directed. We have much more freedom to choose our own paths, but that doesn't mean things are easier.

The conundrum of modern life is something Carrie explores in a recent heart-on-her-sleeve blog post, 'Trips with Exes'. Following a visit to Disneyland Paris in July, Carrie reflected on how she had also been there with previous boyfriends – in 2012 and 2015. She notes how, as a society in 2019, we're in a strange situation where we no longer expect to have just one partner for our entire lives, but we haven't yet learned how to deal with the legacy of past relationships.

"Especially when they're archived on the internet," adds Carrie.

"Someone asked me why I hadn't deleted all the photos with my ex-boyfriend, and I'm like, because it happened! I'm not going to erase every trace of my ex. I was with him, I spent two and a half years with him. I'm not going to pretend it didn't happen."

While Carrie finds being open about such topics cathartic, having

been active online for eight years now, she's had to learn where to draw the line when it comes to letting people into her life.

"You know where your line is, and you know that your line is *here*. But other people think your line is much closer to you than it actually is – and they don't realise that when you put a 10-minute video up, that's 10 minutes of a week."

That said, Carrie looks back on a time when YouTube, and sharing her life, was her whole world. Her journey into the online world began in 2011, when she first began uploading videos to the site. A mix of singing covers and chatty vlogs, Carrie quickly amassed a following that today sits at more than half a million.

"When I started I was 19, which is fetal now I think about it," she says. "That's a weird time to be sharing yourself with strangers, because you still don't know who that self is."

"And then I got into *Les Mis*, and I had to move my focus somewhere else. I was still making videos, but I wasn't so much a part of the YouTube community, and I realised how much I enjoyed that. When you're submerged in one thing it's all you ever think about, it's all you ever do, and the people you're speaking about only ever have one perspective – which is being a YouTuber."

That 'YouTube community' was the focus of much attention in the early years of this decade. A level playing field, mainly driven by young people like Carrie, where everyone was welcome to join the movement – YouTube was revolutionising the media landscape at a drastic rate. >>>





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And while much of the same can still be said today, 2014 remains a difficult time in the platform's history.

"A lot of things happened; there were a lot of scandals," says Carrie. "People didn't want to associate themselves with others too heavily, just in case something went wrong. I think everyone's still a bit scared of that now."

From early 2014, sexual abuse scandals shocked the YouTube community, with numerous allegations made against several UK creators. At the centre of this was Carrie's ex-boyfriend – a prominent creator who was accused of abuse and inappropriate behaviour in 14 separate allegations.

"It was such a horrendous time for everybody," Carrie says. "When I started dating him, people told me: 'He's cheated in the past, so just be careful.' But I was that girl who thought: 'I'll change him, it'll be different with me.' He was very charming, and he was quite aloof, so when he was giving me attention I felt special. And I was 19 – I was so young.

"There will be people who will read this interview and say: 'I'm 19 or 20, and I know better.' I promise you, you don't. I thought I knew better, I thought I knew it all. But I was so oblivious to what was going on. I was surprised when I found out he cheated on me with one person, and then I found out it was seven. But you couldn't have told me, there was no way."

Carrie describes the incident, and the allegations, as driving a wedge through her life. Looking back, she sees her life in two acts: 'before it happened' and 'after it happened'.



"Of course there are things that are different now, like how I conduct my relationships – when emotional things like that happen, you're left with a few soul scars. But I've surrounded myself with an amazing group of friends, an amazing boyfriend, and my incredible family, so I never need to worry because I've always got people to fall back on."

Five years on, Carrie's willingness to be candid about her experience, as well as her mental health, is one part of what makes her such a real and refreshing person for all those who follow her.

"I think it's the actor in me," Carrie says, as she ponders what's behind her emotional veracity. "I'm very happy to be like: 'Here I am, take it all!'"

She explains how the depression she experienced for years was a side-effect of the birth control she was on – something women have been reporting anecdotally for years, but was only confirmed in 2018 by a study from the University of Copenhagen.

"I've finally found a pill that works for me, and the >>>





depression side of things is something that I don't really have to deal with now. But the anxiety side of things..." Carrie puts her face in her hands, and laughs in exasperation.

"Ever since I was a kid I've been a nervous person. But when you're in an industry where you won't get a role because you're an inch too tall, or too short, your eyes are brown or blue, or even because you're too fat to play that role – you're constantly very self-aware. That's just within the industry – then when you have fans, and there's a whole other side."

The stage door is the place where Carrie's online and offline worlds collide. Fans wait for Carrie to come out after a show, and while she has had incredible experiences, the attention has been overwhelming, and even scary at times.

Carrie's open, nurturing nature has meant that people often come to her for advice. What began as messages online, soon translated into real-life encounters; Carrie recalls a time when someone approached her after a show, to tell her they were planning to take their own life the next day.

"What do you do?" Carrie asks with dismay. "It's happened on more than one occasion, and it's hard because I want to help, but I don't know how. I'm not a counsellor, I'm an actress. I'm not equipped to deal with people's emotional trauma."

It's an unimaginable load, and something that Carrie – and others in similar influential positions – have to bear, never quite knowing what the outcome will be.

Another, albeit milder, challenge of Carrie's multifaceted career is the way that she's perceived by others.

While some artists have been able to break free of the YouTuber bubble, into the mainstream, capturing a three-dimensional career on platforms that demand you to stay 'on-brand' isn't easy.

"It's funny, I get this weird sense of pride when someone says: 'Oh, you're the author!' It's not because I value being an author over everything else, it's because it takes me off-guard. If someone comes to my show, they will always think of me as an actor first – and if they find my videos, they'll always think of me as a Youtuber."

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## **"It's not my business what other people think of me – that's my mantra"**

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"But it's not my business what other people think of me – that's my mantra," says Carrie, though she admits it's a journey, rather than a destination. "I don't think there will ever be a point where I'm happy just to forget how I'm perceived by other people. But me now, compared to me three years ago – we're completely different people. It's a miracle."

As we're finishing up our interview, we get chatting about tattoos. Carrie has several on her feet ("But if I wasn't an actor, I'd be covered!"), and one on her side that features the line, 'An inexplicable sense of happiness' from her 2016 novel *On the Other Side*. In the story, a couple called Vincent and Evie write love notes to each other on the wings of a dove. As the dove

flies by, he's so covered in love that he leaves the people he passes with an inexplicable sense of happiness.

"That's what I kind of wish for myself," says Carrie. "That's the goal; that's how I want to live my life. I want to spend time with people, and then leave, and have those people feel better than they did before."

While Carrie disappears into the changing room to try on the first look of the photoshoot – singing along to Cliff Edwards' 'When You Wish Upon a Star', as it plays over the studio speakers – I'm struck by the self-sufficiency there is in living by your own words.

But more than that, from her passion and creativity, to the seriousness with which she takes supporting the strangers who turn to her in their time of need, Carrie Hope Fletcher is a woman who went through personal challenges – both in and out of the spotlight – and came out stronger, wiser, and full of hope.

As for whether Carrie leaves people feeling better for having spent time with her? I know that I speak for the whole team on the shoot that day when I say, she's a natural.

*Carrie is starring in 'Les Misérables: The All-Star Staged Concert' which opens at the Gielgud Theatre on 10 August 2019 for 16 weeks. Find out more at [lesmis.com/london](http://lesmis.com/london)*

*Follow Carrie on Instagram [@Carriehopefletcher](https://www.instagram.com/Carriehopefletcher), and search for [ItsWayPastMyBedTime](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) on YouTube.*

*Styling | Krishan Parmar  
Hair & Makeup | Alice Theobald at Joy Goodman using Burt's Bees, L'Anza, Dollbaby, Lord & Berry, and Mavala* 