



Ros Asquith

Q: What were you like at school?

A: A hard working, prize winning, insufferable teacher's pet until I was twelve, when I grew about seven inches, turning from the smallest to the tallest in my class. Secondary school was very disappointing so I spent most of my time there in a daydream and couldn't wait to leave. However, I did discover that a good way to make friends was to make jokes, which I've been doing ever since. My nickname was Rabbit. Was it my sticky out teeth? Or my big ears? Probably both.

Q: What did you want to be when you were a child?

A: An Apache chief. I wanted to gallop on an Appaloosa stallion (that's a spotted horse, rather like a dalmatian) with a bow and arrow slung over my shoulder and feathers in my hair. I had two naughty older brothers and I wanted to be just like them. I refused to answer to any name but Jim until I was about five. I drew every spare minute and it occurred to me that it would be fun to write or draw for a living, but I never believed I would do it.

Q: Which three words describe you best?

A: Tall, untidy, friendly.

Q: What is your favourite word?

A: Bamboozle

Q: What are you afraid of?

A: People who shout. Nowadays they make me more angry than scared.

Q: When did you last have a really good laugh?

A: Last night, talking to my sons about the election. They make me laugh on a daily basis.

Q: What is your most treasured possession?

A: A pencil. Any old pencil will do.

Q: What do you do as a hobby?

A: Play the piano very badly. Read, swim, walk. Have a nice cup of tea and a chat.

I've been lucky to turn my real hobbies, writing and drawing, into my work.

Q: What strange habits do you have?

A: That's for me to know and you to guess.

Oh, OK then, I like to have a hot water bottle most of the year round.

Not in August. Usually.

Q: What's your favourite food?

A: Roast potatoes and fudge. I've never tried them together, so far.

Q: What do you day dream about?

A: It used to be riding a dolphin alongside Marlon Brando,(who was the Robert Pattinson of his time, only better) but he's died and I've changed... So now it's the rather predictable daydream of Accepting an Oscar for best screen adaptation/animation.

It's unlikely to come true as I've never done either of these and am more likely to have a nice cup of tea and a chat.

Q: What's the most outrageous thing you've done?

A: I poured a nice cup of tea over my boss's head when he refused to pay me and two friends our overdue wages. My friends and I had been making fibreglass sculptures for six weeks in a badly ventilated space and the wicked boss, who looked very like Dennis the Menace, didn't give us proper gloves, so we had headaches and little splinters of fibreglass in our hands and were all very cross.

I waited till the tea was luke warm though...(and given my desire for a nice cup of tea, this was a noble sacrifice).

I also went round the San Fransisco zoo at night, caught an escaped tarantula, shared a cigarette with a chimpanzee, cuddled a wolf and stroked a tiger. Oh, and I once juggled naked standing on the shoulders of two other naked jugglers in a travelling circus.

Generally speaking, I'm not outrageous at all.

Q: What profession other than yours would you like to attempt?

A: I quite fancy myself as a lawyer. Naturally, in my daydreams I would always be defending innocent people and waging war on injustice. I don't think real lawyers get that choice very often.

Q: Do you feel younger or older than your current age?

A: Younger, except first thing in the morning.

Q: If you could meet one person, dead or alive, who would it be?

A: Shakespeare. Sorry to be so obvious. But how did he do it?

Honestly? Using just the same 26 letters we all have?

Multitudinous seas incarnadine! Good heavens.

Q: What quality do you most admire in a person?

A: Kindness.

Q: What is the most interesting place you have ever visited?

A: Cuba. There are good musicians on every street corner and it's refreshing not to see advertisements everywhere. It also feels very safe and is full of wonderful old cars stuck together with sellotape because they can't buy new parts. Apparently there's no illiteracy there either, so everyone can read, which has to be a good thing. But look, I know it's not

perfect at all. Just very, very interesting.

Q: What is the best advice anyone has ever given you?

A: To work from the heart.

In my twenties I tried to get work as a photographer with an amazing man called Simon Guttman, who ran a famous news agency called Report. I took a lot of very dramatic (I thought) political photographs which I was sure would impress him. I also took along some more personal ones of friends and family. He swiftly dealt them into two piles. 'These,' he said, indicating the political pictures, 'are taken out of duty. These others are taken out of love. Continue to work for love.'

I've tried to follow that advice ever since.

Q: What would you most like to change about yourself?

A: Hah! Most things.

If I had to choose one, it would be to influence my ability to concentrate so that I finish tasks as well as I possibly can instead of thinking 'Oh that'll do, time for a nice cup of tea and a chat.'

Q: What has life taught you?

A: Eh? How long is a piece of string?

Q: How long have you been a writer?

A: All my life, but I did lots of other jobs before my first book (I Was a Teenage Worrier) was published in 1992. My first cartoons were pasted up inside The FUN ART bus, which travelled through North London with a piano on the bonnet, poems for tickets, a tiny cinema downstairs and a theatre on the top deck. It stopped at ordinary bus stops and anyone could travel for free. The driver played piano while people got on and off.

Q: Where do you do your writing?

A: I've always written and drawn in my bedroom, but I've recently hired a small studio to experiment in. I've found getting away from home quite inspiring, as the house is always telling me to tidy it up. It's not that I DO tidy up, but I do feel I should, and that is not conducive to creativity.

I usually draw my cartoons at the beautiful Guardian office in Kings Cross.

Q: What are the best and worst things about being an author?

A: Best things are being your own boss, not having to look smart, letting your mind run free. Having a nice cup of tea and a chat whenever you fancy.

Worst things: can you make any money? Can you do your own tax return?

Will you ever get another good idea? Or any idea? (see below)

Q: Where do you get your greatest ideas from?

A: Every word I've ever heard, every sight I've ever seen.

Every day is packed with stories. Trying to make sense of them is the hard bit.

That's why doing cartoons is such fun (and so much easier than writing stories).

You can just get a quick idea, doodle it... aha! Bingo! It's excellent for those of us with a short attention span. Try it yourself.

Go on. Think of six jokes about, say, cats. I bet you can. Now draw them. See? It's fun, isn't it?

But like all writers and artists I am often staring at the paper till my forehead bleeds (thank you, Douglas Adams).

Q: What do you do to combat “writers’ block”?

A: Have a nice cup of tea and a chat.

But I think the term ‘writers block’ is indulgent, really. Writing’s a job, like any other and if you choose to do it, then that is what you do: you sit down and write until it’s done. What the term means, really, is how do you deal with not writing as well as you’d like? Of not being able to translate your magnificent story from inside your head onto the page. That, obviously, is a very painful and complicated matter. No one can write nearly as well as they would wish.

Which is why I’d like to meet Shakespeare, who could.

Q: What was your favourite book as a child?

A: I liked comics best, which is probably why I have become a cartoonist.

I’m excited by the graphic novel revival and hope we can start to see graphic novels as serious art forms, like they do in Europe and the USA. So: Superman and the Beano.

Otherwise Alice in Wonderland (amazing Tenniel drawings), Fairy Tales (with illustrations by Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac), anything by Edward Lear, almost anything with a horse in it. I loved ‘The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe’ too, partly for Pauline Baynes’s pictures and partly because Lucy was brave and got a dagger from Father Christmas. Much better than a tangerine.

Q: What book do you wish you had written?

A: ‘War and Peace’ by Leo Tolstoy. If I was a dictator, I would dictate that all politicians had to read it before declaring war. On the other hand, if I was a dictator, they wouldn’t need to. And then again, by the time they’d finished reading it, the reasons for declaring war might well have resolved themselves into something else: like a good reason to buy an ice cream. Or to have a nice cup of tea and a chat.

I also wish I’d written (and illustrated) ‘The Jolly Postman’ by Janet and Allan Ahlberg.

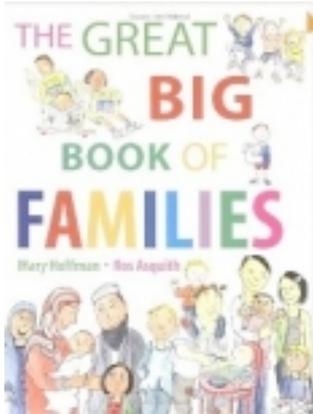
I am uncertain which of these two books would be the harder to accomplish, but certain both are outside my reach.

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring authors?

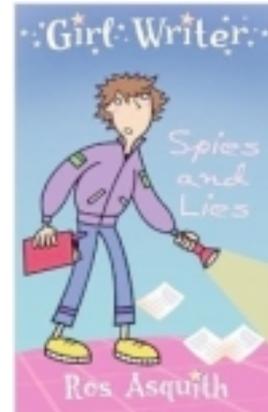
A: Everyone says ‘read’ to this. I agree. But it’s more important to write.

A lot. Every day. I don’t do this myself, but I draw a lot. And that, perhaps, is why I am better at drawing than writing.

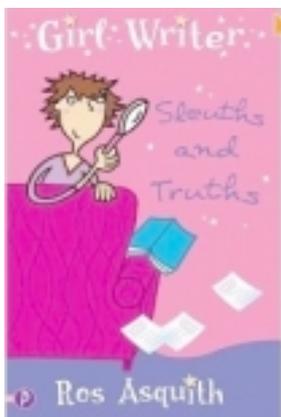
My Books



THE GREAT BIG BOOK OF FAMILIES



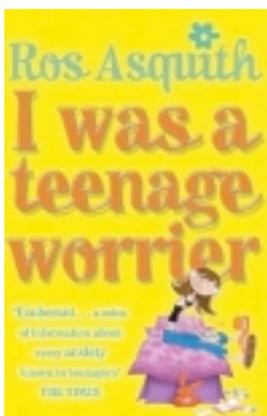
Spies and Lies



**Sleuths and Truths
Yap Star**



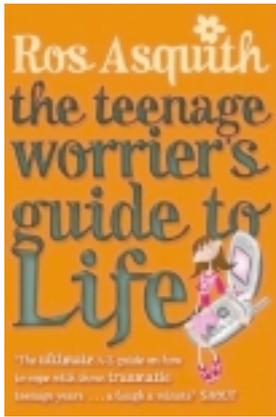
**Trixie and the Amazing Doggy
Yap Star**



**I WAS A TEENAGE WORRIER
Doom**



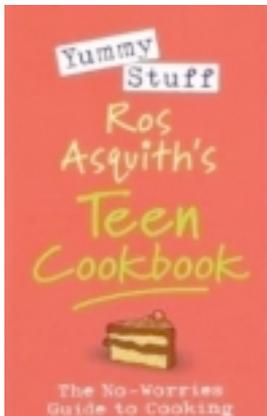
**Trixie and the Dream Pony of
Doom**



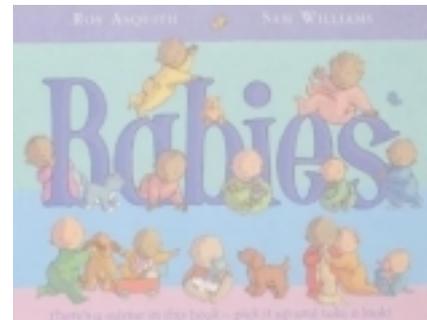
The Teenage Worrier's Guide to LIFE TOAST



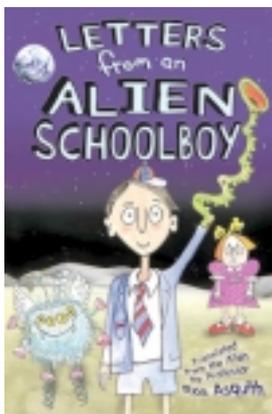
FIBBY LIBBY: A GHOST ATE MY TOAST



YUMMY STUFF



BABIES



Letters from an Alien Schoolboy