



Geoff Anderson

Q: What were you like at school?

A: My maths teacher summed me up: 'You're one of those silly little boys, aren't you?'

I couldn't deny it. I did a mind reading act and held the record (36min 25sec) for balancing a stick on the end of my finger.

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

A: An actor.

Q: Which three words describe you best?

A: sociable, hermit-like, confusing.

Q: What is your favourite word?

A: legend

Q: What are you afraid of?

A: I'm afraid that people might use against me a fear that I've casually revealed in a questionnaire.

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

A: Today. My third child always makes me laugh deep down in my soul.

Q: What is your most treasured possession?

A: My memory.

Q: What do you do as a hobby?

A: Cryptic Crosswords.

Q: What strange habits do you have?

A: Tucking my trousers into my socks - but only when I'm at home!

Letting my food go cold.

Q: What's your favourite food?

A: Porridge with sliced banana and a drizzle of honey.

Q: What do you day dream about?

A: Writing my next novel - it's so easy in my dreams.

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

A: When I was 16, I pretended to be a reporter from a fictitious London sporting journal. I went to a school in Birmingham (about 20 miles from my home) and interviewed the Headmistress about sport in her school. I didn't have an appointment but it was their Sports Gala next day and she assumed I was from a local rag coming about that. But once I was in, she couldn't very well kick me out, so she gave me fifteen minutes before passing me on to the Games Mistress. They never cottoned on, thankfully, or my academic career might have come to an abrupt end.

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

A: I could never attempt it because I couldn't handle the theoretical maths involved, but I envy particle physicists who delve into the subatomic world.

To be the first to capture a particle of dark matter and have it be called an 'anderson' - that would be something, wouldn't it?

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

A: On the one hand, I feel as if I've lived twice my number of years and yet, on the other hand, I feel I'm only half my age.

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

A: The author of the Book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible.

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

A: Patience.

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

A: The EPCOT Centre in Disney World, Florida, in the days when it reflected its expanded acronym (Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow).

Sadly, Walt Disney died before he could realise his vision. After his death it became what it still is, a theme park.

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

A: In France, drive on the right.

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

A: My verbosity.

Hey, I did it!

Q: What has life taught you?

A: Firstly, make sure the property you rent is earthed before you plug in several electric tools. If you've NOT made sure of that, don't (I repeat, don't) pick up a second tool and start it up before you've put down the first tool, otherwise you risk becoming a link in the property's mains electric circuit, as happened to me.

Secondly, never work in an unearthed property alone. My brother-in-law was working with me, otherwise I wouldn't be writing this today.

Some lessons are definitely worth learning.

Q: How long have you been a writer?

A: Longer than I realised until I read some schoolboy diaries of mine. 'Wrote first three chapters of a story, The Mine, but it was rubbish so I burned it.'

It sounds like I was a sterner self-critic back in those days, for I never deem anything I write nowadays to be worthy of destruction by fire - but then it's hard to burn a Word document on my computer.

Life was more dramatic back then. Now a less-than-inspired piece of writing will lie in the subfolder of a subfolder, never to be read again until a biographer in some future century comes across it and declares it to be a masterpiece.

So the answer is: since I was a schoolboy.

Q: Was there a specific moment in your life when you decide to become a writer?

A: No. I don't see writing as that kind of occupation. I think a writer is someone who:

1. Has developed a love of words.

This can happen through being read to from an early age, as happened to me; also through doing word puzzles - my mother and I did crosswords from when I was about nine; also through reading to others - in my early teens I would read a book and then, if it excited me, read it again aloud to my mother, something I was still doing in the summer before I went to university.

2. then expresses (I'm tempted to say 'tests') this love affair with words by committing some to paper (or computer). Even if the result is deemed by the writer to be worthy only of the fire. That person has become a writer.

What happens to the writing is largely irrelevant. Not everyone's children become rich and famous but we are still their parents and they are still our children.

A piece of writing will always have a readership, even if it's only one - the author. It may have two if it's a text message, dozens if it's a tweet (a million if you're Stephen Fry), hundreds if it's in a blog, or thousands if it's a Comment on somebody else's widely read blog.

Being published in book form doesn't guarantee lots of readers - the average sales of a debut novel written by a non-famous person is said to be 300-400. Nor does it guarantee great wealth. I have a friend whose income from his published book was dwarfed by his income from one article published in the Guardian!

So I always come back to my own definition of a writer as someone who has developed a love of words and has expressed that love by creating something with words.

Our modern obsession with professionalism risks losing sight of the precious essence of writing which is a person's gift of creation.

Q: Where do you do your writing?

A: On my laptop which is on a table in my den. It is a den, not a study, because it's not a room devoted to literary pursuits. There are about 20 books that have meant a lot to me in my life for various reasons, but there's also an HD TV, a music system, a dining table and a Welsh dresser. A shelving unit contains box files filled with letters and other writings of mine from the days of paper.

Neither is my den exclusively for my use. My wife and I have our evening meal together there, and we watch some television. When the grandchildren visit, it becomes a playroom for them and a hive of crossword activity for their parents and me.

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

A: The best thing about being a writer, for me, is creating something outside of myself. It has come from within me but I'm never sure from where exactly.

From flashing synapses? Subliminal memories? My subconscious? A muse? Another 'me' in a parallel universe? My mother used to be awakened in the night by an inner voice prompting her to get up and write and even, broadly, telling her what to write. When the voice stopped its visitations, she never wrote again.

And of course that's the worst thing about being a writer, when the muse goes on holiday.

But I tend to believe that most muses are lazy sprites; left to themselves they would all opt for early retirement. But I'm venturing into ground covered by a later question about 'writer's block', so I'll end this here.

Q: Where do you get your greatest ideas from?

A: Non-writers regard writers' ideas as gold nuggets locked away in a seam of rock, requiring much work to be dug out. They are in awe of ideas.

But I was taught that ideas are like clay dirt beneath our feet - common, ubiquitous, trodden down by millions of people and swept up and used by thousands more.

The plot is where most people think that the application of ideas is most necessary. But it is often stated that there have only ever been seven cowboy film plots, ever.

It's what happens around the plot that makes it come alive in a hopefully compelling way: the characters who enact the plot; the location in which the plot unfolds; the order of events within the plot, which may be chronological, involve flashbacks or come to a series of deliberate cliff-hangers; then there is the balance struck between dialogue and narrative; and so on. One could regard all these as a writer's way of dressing up an old idea.

But where does all the 'dressing up' material come from, the characters, etc? Usually it all springs from the writer's own experience of people and places, which is then twisted about, exaggerated or downplayed, and modified.

But, to be consistent with my earlier answer, I do allow a touch of magic to be introduced at this point, at the point of remodelling and modifying personal experience. How writers achieve this is often a mystery - an art, one might say, wrapped up in a craft (because half the battle is knowing the basic rules of writing, the techniques involved).

Q: Which of your own characters do you most identify with?

A: Those least like myself, of course! The gift of fiction is to offer a dream, an alternative reality, and in that dream I can be whoever I want to be. So I always identify with the most courageous, witty, and thoroughly spiffing characters.

Q: What do you do to combat "writers' block"?

A: The only way I find to conquer that empty page is to fill it. Who cares if it's gibberish? At

least it's gibberish you've written. Write an account of your week, and go off at tangents whenever possible - just as I have done in these answers!

If you've reached a particular point in a fiction and come to an abrupt stop, write down a series of questions rather than the answers you crave. You can't know the best answers until you've asked the best questions: what would be the LAST thing that Jack would want to do now? Who is the last person on earth who he would want to see walk through that door? Why is Jack where he is and where would he prefer to be? Make all these things happen, and as you do so you'll probably hit upon what SHOULD happen next in your story about this particular Jack.

Q: What was your favourite book as a child?

A: Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome

Q: What book do you wish you had written?

A: Pickwick Papers by Charles Dickens

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring authors?

A: 1.

Write, write, write. I put writing even above reading, though it's unlikely that anyone would develop a love of words (which I think is necessary to be a writer) without having read a lot first.

And I emphasise write ANYthing. Don't have any preconceived ideas about what constitutes writing and what doesn't. String those beloved words together. I once wrote out the subject columns of about a dozen spam emails I'd received in their sequence of arriving. With a bit of twisting round and modifying I ended up with a poem.

2.

Learn the rules, practise the craft of writing clearly. If possible, take a writing course. I did a 2-year correspondence course with an American organisation on writing for children and teenagers, and it was invaluable. But if you can't take a course, then learn how to use a dictionary and a thesaurus (which lists lots of ways of saying the same thing!). Become familiar with websites for aspiring writers - there are lots out there - where help and advice is freely given, problems shared, and, most importantly, where you will find encouragement.

3.

Learn to take criticism, for it's the best way to grow and improve. You don't have to take every detail to heart, but at least let criticism make you take your OWN hard second, third, tenth look at what you've written.

4.

Good luck!

My Books



The Legend of Aranrhod

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