

An aerial photograph of Tokyo, Japan, taken during the "golden hour" of sunset. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, oranges, and blues. The city's dense urban landscape is visible, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings. The Tokyo Tower, a prominent red and white lattice tower, stands out in the center of the frame. A semi-transparent dark grey rectangle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text in white.

Meeting The Mentor: 40 Inspiring Interviews with Writers & Artists

DJ Metcalf

Meeting The Mentor

Introduction

If you're anything like me, and considering you've downloaded an ebook about writers and artists I'll assume you are, you love reading about the wisdom and lessons learned by other creative people.

Within these electronic pages you'll find what it is like to be a novelist, children's writer, cartoonist, blogger, agent and editor. You'll see how to run a crowdfunding campaign, a crowdfunding company, a book festival and a e-zine.

I certainly learnt a heap of great information when I conducted the interviews and I am very proud to be able to bring to you this ebook full of ideas and advice from professional writers and artists.

Enjoy!

DJ Metcalf

Meeting The Mentor

Before you begin...

You obviously love reading about writing, art and other creative endeavours, so I want to give you the opportunity to join my FREE mini-course on how to experiment with writing exercises so you can find out how YOU write best .

This short e-course, cleverly entitled **'Your Story, Your Way'**, is full of inspiring techniques and tips that can help you work out your writing style.
Oh, and did I mention it's FREE?

Make this year the year you write your story!

[Learn more](#)

Meeting The Mentor

Rachel Lyon

Rachel Lyon is the author of *I Wish I'd Been Born a Unicorn*. She kindly spoke to me about the book, the secret to writing and inspiration

Tell me about *I Wish I'd been born a Unicorn*

It's a rhyming story about a scruffy horse named Mucky who has more fleas than friends. He thinks that he would be more popular if he was a Unicorn, so an owl offers to make his wish come true. With the help of other farmyard animals, he is made to look like a Unicorn, but by the end of the story he learns, as the clever owl tried to tell him from the start, that when it comes to true friendship, it's what's inside that counts.

Where did the idea for the book come from?

Because I like to write in rhyme I'm always looking out for rhyming phrases, and the initial phrase I came up with was 'the horse with remorse'. I was then trying to think of things that a horse might regret or feel sad about, and the idea of a horse with low self esteem who wished it was a unicorn began developing from there.

Did you trial it on any audiences before submitting you manuscript?

Meeting The Mentor

I read an early draft to a school group, which helped me to see which bits worked and which didn't. That helped with the editing process a lot. I always show my stories to family and friends as I'm developing them, and I usually get honest opinions back which is helpful.

What is the experience of being published like?

If you're like me, and writing's all you've ever wanted to do - then that moment when a publisher calls and says they're interested is the biggest thrill imaginable. It must be like crossing the line first in the Olympic Games. It can also be nerve-wracking when your book comes out - wondering whether people will like it or not. But that's what keeps you working hard and trying to write the best book you can each time.

Which writers or artists are you most inspired by?

In children's writing, Roald Dahl for his imagination and originality, and Julia Donaldson for her rhymes and storytelling. My main idol is Jane Austen, though. I'd love to write a historical romance.

Meeting The Mentor

What's the secret to writing a good picture book?

I don't know, but if you find out let me in on it! Joking aside, I have learned that children like to laugh, they like to encounter the weird and wonderful, they like repetition and they like suspense. The Gruffalo, for instance, has all of those attributes in spades, which is why it's so wonderful.

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I'm working on a raft of new ideas for the publisher and hopefully they'll like one of them and another picture book will soon be born!

[I Wish I'd Been Born a Unicorn](#) is out now from [Maverick Books](#). You can contact Rachel on twitter [@RachelSLyon](#) , and through her website www.rachellyon.co.uk

Meeting The Mentor

Huw Powell

Huw Powell is the Author of *Spacejackers* and he kindly spoke to me about writing, books and cyber-monks.

Hi Huw! Tell me about *Spacejackers*!

Spacejackers is the first book in an exciting new adventure series published by Bloomsbury and WF Howes. It's about a boy called Jake Cutler, who is raised by cyber-monks on a remote planet, until he is forced to flee when space pirates attack the monastery. Jake embarks on an incredible voyage through space in search of his missing father and a mythical planet called Altus, which has three crystal moons: one diamond, one emerald and one ruby. Literature Works made it their 'book of the month' in August.

What can we expect from book 2?

Meeting The Mentor

The second book is called *Spacejackers: The Lost Sword*. It will be out in July next year. Jake Cutler and his friends return with more exciting adventures and a galaxy full of trouble, as they search for a priceless artefact to prevent a galactic war. We also meet some new characters, including a teenage pirate captain called Kay Jagger and an eight-foot battle 'droid called Vigor-8.

What writers or books inspired you to start writing?

As a child, my favourite books included the *Adventure* series by [Willard Price](#); *The Lord of the Rings* by [J.R.R. Tolkien](#); *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by [C.S. Lewis](#); *The Stainless Steel Rat* by [Harry Harrison](#) and *Mort* by Sir [Terry Pratchett](#). As an adult, I've been inspired by authors such as [JK Rowling](#) and my older brother, [Gareth L Powell](#).

What's the one thing you can't write without?

Meeting The Mentor

Music. I can write anywhere at any time, whether I'm at home, in a café or on a train, but I always have music, because it helps me to concentrate by blocking out the rest of the world.

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I'm in the process of editing the second book, *Spacejackers: The Lost Sword*, while working on the explosive third book, *Spacejackers: The Pirate King*. I'm also reviewing the US and Canadian edition of the first *Spacejackers* book, which will be published in June with a smart blue cover.

Thanks Huw! You can find *Spacejackers* [HERE](#) and Huw can be reached on the interwebs at the links below:

- **Website:** www.spacejackers.com
 - **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/spacejackers
 - **Twitter:** www.twitter.com/spacejackers
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Meeting The Mentor

SiobhanCurham

Hi Siobhan! Tell me about your latest book!

My latest novel for adults, [TRUE LOVE ALWAYS](#), is set during the 1980s Miners' Strike: a time when fashion crimes were committed on a daily basis and it felt as if the whole country was at war. It tells the story of a teenage girl from London who falls in love with a young striking miner from Nottingham and how a tragic twist in their relationship changes her life forever. It's perfect for fans of Billy Elliot and Pride. Excitingly, it recently became a Kindle bestseller, reaching the heady heights of number nine in the Women's Romantic Fiction chart!

Meeting The Mentor

How much research did you do?

It's loosely based on my own experiences as a teenager during the Miners' Strike so that really helped. But I had to do a lot of research when it came to the music of the time, making sure I got the dates exactly right for the songs that were in the charts back then. I love 80s music so that part of the research was a lot of fun. The research into the fashion was extremely embarrassing!

You're also an editorial consultant with [Hothouse Fiction](#). How do you divide the time?

I only work for Hothouse two days a week on a freelance, consultancy basis so it's actually quite easy to divide the time. And I love the contrast between the two sides of my work. I find that my editorial work has really helped me to hone my skills as a writer.

Meeting The Mentor

What books/TV/films inspired you to start writing?

[Jimmy McGovern](#) (Brookside, Cracker, Hillsborough and many other TV dramas) is probably my biggest inspiration as a writer. I met him in Liverpool when I was twenty years old and having a crisis of confidence about whether I'd ever make it as a writer, coming from a poor, council estate background. Meeting him and discovering that he was from a very similar background - and then watching him go from success to success - was a massive inspiration to me. He made me see that not only could people achieve success writing about gritty, working class issues, but that there was a real need for this kind of writing too.

Meeting The Mentor

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

I try to keep to a normal work routine, writing during the day and keeping my evenings free for friends and family and fun. I tend to write my DARE TO DREAM blog in more public places like cafes but when I'm working on my books I have to be in the peace and quiet of my bedroom. I set up camp with my laptop balanced on a cushion on my bed and tap away for hours on end.

Meeting The Mentor

Any nuggets of advice for emerging writers?

Loads! But mainly to write from your heart. If you try to write what you think publishers and agents want to see it won't have nearly as much passion. Publishers are always looking for that fresh new voice - and you've got way more chance of being that if you're writing about things that really matter to you. Things that make you angry, or happy or sad or alive. When I'm going through a submissions pile with my editorial hat on, I'm not looking for the most grammatically correct sample or the most perfectly laid out. It's the ones where you can tell that the writer has really let the words flow through them that stand out a mile. That's the writing that stays in the mind long after reading. And those are the writers who get the job - when I'm commissioning anyway. And I'm sure most other editors would agree with me. When I was disillusioned with the publishing world a few years ago, I decided to write a young adult novel purely for the love of it and self publish it so that I could give away the e-book for free. That book, DEAR DYLAN, went on to win a national award and book deals in the UK, France and Germany. It was such an important lesson to me

Meeting The Mentor

Always, always write for the love of writing first and foremost. Your writing will be so much better for it.

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

Yes, I'm lucky enough to be working on lots of things right now. I've just started writing a middle grade series for Egmont and a new YA series for my French publisher, Flammarion. I also have a non-fiction book being published by Faber & Faber next spring. It's called 'TRUE FACE: Be real. Be Fearless. Be You' and it's all about the pressure on young women to look and be a certain way and encouraging them to forget the fake and keep it real. It's a subject I feel really passionately about and a really good example of how writing from the heart can really bring amazing results. There isn't really a non-fiction genre for young adults so this is a first for Faber too. And Random House, Germany, have just made a pre-emptive offer for the book, which is hugely exciting.

Meeting The Mentor

I love encouraging other writers over on my blog [Dare to Dream](#) and you can find out more about my books here: [Siobhan Curham's writing home: novelist, freelance journalist and writing coach](#)

Twitter: @SiobhanCurham

Thanks Siobhan! Get click with the links and pics above to buy Siobhan's books, and visit her sites to say hello!

Alex English

Alex English is the writer of Yuck! Said the Yak, a new picture book from Maverick Arts Publishing. She spoke to StoryWorld about writing, children and, er... Yaks.

Tell me about Yuck Said the Yak!

Yuck said the Yak is written by me and illustrated by the lovely Emma Levey. A fussy yak comes to stay with Alfie, but says YUCK! to everything he is offered. Can Alfie find something to make the yak say YUM?!

Meeting The Mentor

Why did you write a picture book?

I've always written, but it was only when I took a class in writing for children at CityLit that I got the confidence to have a go at picture books. I love playing around with words and I am very silly, so picture books were a natural thing for me to write. Plus it's nice to have written something my little boys can enjoy.

How did you go about getting it published?

I sent my manuscript in to [Maverick's](#) slushpile. Then I completely forgot about it and was thrilled when, six months later, I heard that they loved it and wanted to publish it.

Meeting The Mentor

What are the challenges of writing for children?

Children are very discerning. Your writing needs to grab them immediately because they won't cut you any slack if it's boring. With a picture book every single word needs to be right. Luckily, I like a challenge.

Which writers are you most inspired by?

I try to read very widely. Recently I've enjoyed [There's a Shark in the Bath](#) by Sarah McIntyre , [The Three Robbers](#) by Tomi Ungerer and [Do Not Enter the Monster Zoo](#) by Amy Sparkes. But I get inspiration from all around. I first saw my yak in the Natural History Museum and thought, 'what would a yak say?'

What has the reception of Yuck said the Yak been like?

It's early days yet, but so far, so good! It's very exciting that the book is out in the world and children are enjoying it.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I am busy writing a novel for 9-12 year-olds, editing the sequel to Yuck said the Yak (which will be out next year) and dreaming up new picture book ideas all the time.

Thanks Alex! Click the links above to buy Yuck! Said the Yak. Find out more about Alex on her website, www.alexenglish.co.uk

Meeting The Mentor

Jane Lovering

Jane is the author of *Hubble Bubble*, *Vampire State of Mind* and *Falling Apart* (amongst others). She spoke to me about her latest book, scheduling, and VAMPIRES!

Hi Jane! Tell me about *Falling Apart*.

Falling Apart is the sequel to *Vampire State of Mind*, it's the second in the Otherworlder's Trilogy, and it's very big on zombies! It revolves around the premise that vampires live among us, and it's set in York. There's a lot of angst, HobNobs, banter and paperwork. Oh, and everyone drinks a lot of tea...

Meeting The Mentor

Have you always liked Vampire stories?

I like some vampire stories, I draw the line at anything that treats vampires as Alpha-Males with Attitude though. Surely, if vampires were once human, they'd keep all their human attributes? So I like all vampire tales that have a bit of human versus vampire drama (I loved the Laurel K Hamilton books until she went down the sexsexsexsex route), but hated Twilight. I like my vampires fallible and capable of real human stupidity at times, and fighting to keep the things that made them human in the first place, so Terry Pratchett's Vampyres are probably my favourites.

Meeting The Mentor

What is your writing schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime and anywhere?

Scheduling writing is something I am very bad at. Well, I'm bad at scheduling anything really, but writing is the worst, because nobody knows whether you are doing it or not. Sitting behind a keyboard making 'mmm' noises is 'writing' as far as most people are concerned, even if you're really looking at pictures of kittens on Twitter. I have a day job which rules out writing in the mornings, and when I get home there's always something to be done, so I try to work between 1.30 and 5pm, and all day at weekends and during school holidays. But, you know, there are a lot of kittens that need looking at...

Meeting The Mentor

What one piece of advice would you give to emerging writers?

I have two bits of writing advice which I usually give. One is – read. Read everything, and read all the time. If you haven't burned at least one meal because you were engrossed in a book, then you aren't reading enough. The second bit of advice is – don't give up. Your first piece of writing won't be perfect (although you will think it is, this is normal writerly behaviour and perfectly understandable) and will probably be rejected. Keep writing. Do Not Give Up. Ever.

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I am always writing. Presently, I am editing *How I Wonder What You Are*, which is out from Choc Lit in December, I have submitted my next book, provisionally entitled *I Don't Want to Talk About It*, and I'm heavily stuck into my Work In Progress. This is called *Crush*, and is about a young man who flies falcons and a girl who works in a Historic House. Well, she works in the teashop, anyway. I'm currently about 25,000 words in, and ploughing my way through the first draft. Kittens permitting, of course.

Meeting The Mentor

Thanks Jane! You can find out more about her at the links below:

www.janelovering.co.uk www.twitter.com/janelovering

www.ChocLitpublishing.co.uk

www.samhainpublishing.com/authors/jane-lovering

Lucy Tapper & Steve Wilson

Lucy Tapper & Steve Wilson are the creators of the beautiful *Hedgehugs*, out now from Maverick Books. They spoke to me about art, inspiration and working together:

Meeting The Mentor

Hi! Tell me about *Hedgehugs*!

Hedgehugs is the story of Horace & Hattie, two hedgehogs who are the very best of friends. They like to do everything together, but there is one thing they can't do, they cannot hug, they're just too spiky! The book follows their journey through the seasons as they try to find a way to cuddle, and ends up solving not only their hugging problem, but also one of life's little mysteries!

Where did the idea for the book come from?

Lucy had designed two gorgeous hedgehog characters in her trusty sketchbook, which Steve loved. She then coloured and textured the images to create the beautiful characters we know and love today, using scans of the fabrics from our kid's baby clothes [we couldn't bear to part with them , and this meant we could make them last forever] and we knew that they had to be the stars of their own storybook.

Meeting The Mentor

The characters looked so cute and cuddly, but of course in real life a hedgehog is a spiky little creature, so a cuddle would actually be a rather prickly affair... which gave us the premise for our story. How could they hug? The answer to their plight and the ending to our book actually came when Lucy was sorting through our washing [we're married!] and said " where do all the socks go?" ...

That was our Eureka! moment. Socks! Horace & Hattie can crawl inside, nibble a hole for their arms and faces, and finally hug!

So now you know that whenever your socks go missing, or you see someone wearing odd socks... a Hedgehug has happened !

Meeting The Mentor

Which writers or artists are you most inspired by?

Steve: I was very very fond as a child of [DrSeuss](#) . Wacky, weird and wonderful. The original 'thinking outside the box' writer. Lucy and I always try to think with no limits or boundaries when not only writing our books, but also designing and marketing our products that we create for our personalised illustrated gift business [FromLucy.com](#). I also love [David Lucas'](#) children's books, which follow a similar theme of being different from the norm, in words and illustration. I presented CBBC for many years, so was always inspired by the storytelling in many of the great shows I used to introduce. It was amazing having our Hedgehugs book read out on Cbeebies Bedtime Stories recently, and felt like 'coming home'!

Meeting The Mentor

Lucy: Growing up I loved Janet and Allan Ahlberg's books like *The Jolly Postman* and *Peepo*, but the [Brambley Hedge](#) books by Jill Barklem really got me started on the path of illustration. The details in her drawings inspired me to draw little worlds of my own from a very young age. I now read them to my own children, as well as many other books illustrated by many great artists like [Emily Gravett](#) whom I admire greatly. I also adore [Rob Ryan](#)'s papercut pieces, and sip tea from a Rob Ryan mug every morning before starting work!

How do you find working together?

We have always been a team. In our marriage, our parenting, our decisions in life, and as partners in our illustrated gift business, so working together on our children's books is a natural extension of that, not to mention an absolute dream come true!

Spending all your time with your best friend is rewarding, fun, exciting and feels right. Just the way Horace & Hattie are !

Meeting The Mentor

What's the secret to writing a good picture book?

There are so many components needed to make a good picture book - but 3 major ones to think about are:

Images! first and foremost and obviously, fantastic eye catching illustrations are key. We take great pride in the way our books look, and believe that the images are most important in making the reader have a 'feeling' about that particular book. Imagine if your favourite children's book from your past looked completely different. How would 'Where The Wild Things Are' have made us feel had it not had those particular dark, atmospheric drawings? The words of course direct the illustrator in a certain direction, but each artist has their own creative spark, hence why the world of books is full of such diverse talent.

Meeting The Mentor

Words are important too! Finding the right style of talking to your reader can take time, but is important to get right, and differs from book to book or series to series [if you're lucky enough to have a series of books!]. With prose, sometimes leaving words out, or letting illustrations do some of the describing, can work wonders. With young picture books, it's crucial to choose words that won't flummox the reader, but at the same time use words in the right places that sound fun to speak out loud. Remember, that type of book will be read out loud more often than in silence. If writing rhyme, the rhymes must scan! Lucy and I often have a bee in our bonnet when rhymes 'fall short' or the rhythm is slightly off due to not enough syllables. Rhymes can make a book such a wonderful experience to read and speak out loud, and we find that songwriters have an in-built talent for doing that right, like author [Giles Paley-Phillips](#) [and our own Steve!]

Meeting The Mentor

Title! A snappy, or funny, or clever, or intriguing title will literally make someone pick up a book. Apart from the cover art, the title is the 'hook' that might make someone pick your book out of a book shop shelf, or out of the library tray. Thinking carefully about how those words are presented helps too - think about colour, font, extra imagery, and anything else that can reel the potential reader in!

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

We have many plans for our working life! As well as opening a branch of our personalised gift business in France next month, we are very very focused on Horace & Hattie's future:

Meeting The Mentor

We have just launched a Hedgehugs 2015 Calender and a 2015 Family Organiser in time for Christmas, plus a brand new Hedgehugs website launching very shortly where readers and fans can get all the newest Horace & Hattie info, games, downloads and competitions, and send their own drawings / photos / messages to us too.

Lucy has designed a new cover for our new size Hedgehugs book, which is out now, slightly bigger than before, and looks beautiful!

We have the second book in the Hedgehugs series due for publication by [Maverick Arts Children's Books](#) next year [2015], with more Hedgehugs books and products to follow! We also have an exciting TV/animation project in progress that we hope to be able to make reality, plus our books will be launched in some big overseas territories next year.

The future's bright, the future's spiky!

Wow! Someone's busy! Thanks for speaking to us.

Hedgehugs is available [online](#) and in bookshops.

Meeting The Mentor

JC Hannigan

JC Hannigan is the author of *Collide*, a romantic suspense described as 'strong and controversial'. She spoke to me about writing, inspiration and distractions.

Tell me about *Collide*...

Collide is a romantic suspense new adult novel about a 17-year-old girl who falls for the "wrong" guy (her English teacher), and finds herself in the middle of a town scandal and dirty cover up when she walks in on the Chief of Police's son sexually assaulting her classmate, Jenna. Harlow has to decide what's more important...helping Jenna get justice for what happened to her, or protecting her own secrets...her steamy relationship with Mr. Bentley.

Meeting The Mentor

You're a committed blogger. Do you think this has helped with your writing?

I do think it's helped my writing skills flourish, putting my ideas out there for others to receive. I told stories there too, only instead of fiction, it's my life. So yes, I definitely think it's helped.

Which writers are you most inspired by?

J.K. Rowling will probably always be on top of that list. Instead of giving up on her dream when things got tough, she kept pushing and pushing. She never gave up, and look at her now!

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

My work schedule is kind of whenever I can get at it. I have two small boys and distractions are plentiful! My best hours of writing are first thing in the morning and at night.

Meeting The Mentor

What's the best/worst bit about writing for you?

The best and worst thing about writing is literally the same thing -- getting inspiration to write. This is good and bad because then I can't stop and I tend to shut everything out!

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

Thanks!

Check out *Collide* on [Kindle](#) or [Kobo](#). You can find out more about JC Hannigan and contact her here: F a c e b o o k : <http://facebook.com/jcahannigan> Twitter:

<http://twitter.com/jcahdavis>

Blog:

<http://thefeveredpen.wordpress.com>

Meeting The Mentor

L.K. Watts

L.K. Watts has built an enviable career writing women's fiction and publishing on the internet. L.K. lives in the U.K with her partner and two adorable dogs. She spoke to me about her new book, publishing and being eclectic.

Meeting The Mentor

Tell me about *Confessions of a Webcam Model!*

I can certainly say it's been the most fun book I've ever written. I came into this writing lark after I spent three years travelling the world. My first book is a memoir about backpacking Australia and due to its success; I thought I'd write a second book about travelling Canada. My third book is chick lit and although I had fun writing that, it wasn't the same fun as I'd had writing my first two books. *Confessions of a Webcam Model* is about a fictitious character but it's based upon real life situations as the result of a years' worth of extensive research. Basically I wanted to write about a character that was financially hard up but didn't give a flying f**k what anyone else thought. I've always been praised for writing candid, witty stories in the past, so I thought I'd play into those strengths again for my fourth book. *Confessions of a Webcam Model* is not for the faint hearted but I can guarantee it will make you guffaw. You have been warned. Do not read it in public places!

Meeting The Mentor

This is your fourth book. What drives your motivation to write?

This is a tough one to answer. While I believe most people can write if they set their mind to it, I also believe that writing has to be in you if you're going to write everyday and be serious about making a career of it. I've always written various things even though I didn't think I could do it for financial gain until a couple of years back. I guess my motivation to write comes from within as a deep need to express myself. It's also great when I receive reviews or fan mail from a reader telling me just how much they enjoyed my book. That always keeps me going too.

Meeting The Mentor

How are you finding the world of self-publishing? Do you see it as a viable future for indie authors?

I definitely do believe people can be successful if they put their minds to it. You might not be able to make a living with it overnight as a lot depends on which genre you write. But I do believe if you write enough books you can make a half decent success of yourself. More books equals more visibility and if you write an electric range like I do I'm sure you'll find some sort of audience. Most writers seem to have better luck if they just stick to one genre though so maybe from now on I'll just write chick lit. This genre is still popular over here in the U.K. so I'll have to see how it goes.

Do you plan your work, or do you just start writing?

I have to say I'm a plotter as I don't think I could set out to write an 80,000 word novel without knowing where I was going. I have a strong feeling I would just end up going round in circles. For my fifth book, I have done an extensive amount of plotting so hopefully it's going to be easier to write.

Meeting The Mentor

I have just started my fifth book. It's another chick lit book that this time is all about a shy girl who has absolutely no self-confidence but wants to find true love. The story is set in Edinburgh which happens to be my birthplace. Things start to change for her when she joins a dating agency and I want it to be a fun adventure for her with a twist at the end.

What is the best piece of writing advice you've been given?

Do not just write one book and then spend all your time promoting it. Write more books as writing is the only thing you have control over. Don't focus so much on sales because unless you hold everyone to knifepoint, you have no control over them. Even if you do advertising or other forms of marketing there's no saying it will bring you more sales. So just write otherwise you'll drive yourself mad.

Thanks Laura! Check out the L.K Watts website at <http://lkwattsconfessions.blogspot.com/>

Meeting The Mentor

Mandy Baggot

Mandy Baggot is an award-winning romantic fiction author, writing hot heroes and emotional reads. She spoke to me about her new book, her process and going with your gut.

Hi Mandy. Tell me about *Made in Nashville*!

I'm obsessed with country music! *Made in Nashville* was my chance to explore the country music scene and make up these wonderful characters in the music business in Tennessee. There's Honor, the former star who's not been back in the limelight since she was attacked on stage, and there's Jed Marshall, the country rocker, inked up, torn jeans and hot property in Nashville. You don't have to be a country music fan to enjoy the drama and romance in this one.

Meeting The Mentor

You've quite a social media empire! How have you achieved this?

If I told you my secrets I would have to kill you! Basically I'm a lovely person – who wouldn't want to follow me on Twitter? I think talking about sausages, wine, mashed potato and hot heroes draws people in.

Which writer were you most inspired by?

I've always been someone who walks her own path so I can't really say I've been inspired by any one writer. But I have the upmost admiration for my buddy Talli Roland. The way she's grown her career is amazing. She's such a lovely person and super cool too! And now she owes me a glass of wine!

Meeting The Mentor

Do you plan your work, or do you just start writing?

I'm terrible at planning. I often have this vague idea of how things are going to pan out in the story and then I change everything. I find planning too much really saps the creative process for me. I do know a lot of authors who plan meticulously though. I can't do it – tried it, failed, never going back! I quite like having an empty page and not knowing what's going to appear there.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

I am! I've just finished a novel set on the Greek island of Corfu which is now in the hands of my agent and I'm cracking on with my next one. All I can tell you is the hero is a firefighter, at the moment it's set in London (although that might change) and there's going to be all sorts of drama, danger and of course lots of romance!

Meeting The Mentor

What is the best piece of writing advice you've been given?

When I'm given advice I always listen and absorb it but sometimes you have to go with your gut. I was once told to change the profession of one of my characters from a rock star to a reclusive writer. I just couldn't do it, so I didn't. Quinn Blake in *Strings Attached* stayed as a rock star and the book's been one of my best sellers to date.

Thanks Mandy! Make sure to keep up to date with Mandy through her [website](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Goodreads](#).

Anna Wilson

Anna Wilson told us about her new book [Summer's Shadow](#) and her writing life.

Meeting The Mentor

Summer's Shadow is a ghostly mystery story set in Cornwall, near Land's End.

...:Hi Anna! Tell me about Summer's Shadow

When Summer's mum dies, everything she thought she knew about her life is thrown into disarray. Her mother's will states that Summer's legal guardian is her Uncle Tristan: a man she has never met or heard of before. Summer finds herself leaving London and her friends to live in a large rambling house in Cornwall with Tristan and his family, where she feels certain she is not welcome. As she comes to terms with her new life, she experiences many new things, some of them good (mostly in the shape of a boy called Zach); some of them most unsettling . . . After one unnerving occasion too many, Summer comes to believe that the house may be haunted. But is she haunted by real ghosts, or by the shadows of her own family's past?

Meeting The Mentor

What was the inspiration for the story?

The inspiration came initially from a place where my husband's family have lived for years. I first visited it in 1993 and have been going back every year for summer holidays. It is a special place with a magical house and beach, very similar to the ones I describe in the book, and I have always wanted to write a story about it. For years I scribbled in diaries, trying to capture the essence of the place, but what I really needed was a strong character, not to mention a plot! Then my grandmother died in 2008 and I knew I needed to write about that: the grieving, the loss of a mother figure (as that is what she was to me), and the making sense of things that follows from such a loss. Suddenly I was writing from the point of view of a grieving girl. The scene that really kicked things off for me is a passage towards the end of the book, where Kenan challenges Summer to a dangerous swim across the bay. I knew once I had written that scene that I had two good, strong characters and the makings of a plot.

Meeting The Mentor

Why the dip into the waters of YA fiction?

I think there is something in the fact that my own children are now teenagers. I do seem to have “grown up” with them in my writing! I started writing when I was pregnant with my daughter and had two picture books published; when both she and her brother went to school I wrote young series fiction and then progressed to novels for 7+ and 10+. Now my children are 15 and 13, so I suppose I am in tune with what they are reading and how they speak, act and think. Who knows, maybe I’ll manage an adult novel by the time they hit their twenties?

Meeting The Mentor

What are your favourite books, YA or otherwise, that influenced the writing of Summer's Shadow?

Rebecca by Daphne Du Maurier would have to be up there as a huge influence: a young girl, far from everything she knows, falling in love for the first time, alone, confused, fearful . . . Also I Capture the Castle by Dodie Smith has had a big effect on me: again, a girl in an unusual house, trying to make sense of her life. I love a good family mystery or saga, so Maggie O'Farrell's novels have helped me think about the interaction between relatives, siblings and so on. My favourite at the moment is Instructions for a Heatwave, but I also loved The Hand that First Held Mine. I also read Colm Tóibín's Brooklyn when I was writing Summer's Shadow, and found it helped me get into the mind of a young girl, ripped from her normal surroundings and cast adrift in a foreign place.

Meeting The Mentor

What piece of advice would you give to emerging writers?

First: read! Read everything and anything: well-written books, not-so-well-written books, books for children and books for adults, things you like, things you don't like. Above all, do not be afraid to read the sort of books you would like to write yourself. Some people are worried that they will be unduly influenced if they do this; that they will end up copying another writer by mistake, or that they will be so overwhelmed by another writer's brilliant ideas that they will be paralyzed in their own writing. I have found the opposite to be true. I find that other writers help me to see how a good story should be told; help me to understand a strong plot, well-drawn characters and tightly conceived dialogue. You cannot be a writer unless you are a reader first.

Second: write! Write all the time, every day, in journals, tiny notebooks you keep in a pocket or bag, on your laptop – it doesn't matter where, just do it! A diary is an invaluable way of collecting all your thoughts and ideas. Summer's Shadow started out as jottings in a holiday diary and went on from there.

Meeting The Mentor

What's next?

I have made a start on a new story for the same audience. So far I know that it is about family conflict again, but with a very different twist. It will not be set in Cornwall; in fact, it will probably have a setting closer to my own home environment. I live near the Kennet and Avon canal and one of my new characters lives on a houseboat. I am having fun playing with different scenes and points of view at the moment. I hope I will finish the novel this year. I am also writing another young fiction title involving animals (again!) so I am keeping busy. I am crossing all my fingers and toes for *Summer's Shadow*, though. I just hope it does well enough so that I can feel that I really have broken through into a new market, as this is an incredibly enjoyable age for which to write.

**Thanks Anna! Visit Anna at her website [here](#) .
Summer's Shadow is out on July 3rd.**

Meeting The Mentor

Philip Reeve

Philip Reeve is the Carnegie winning author behind the Mortal Engines series, Larklight and Goblins. He spoke to me about his new book and his writing.

Hi Philip! Tell me about Goblin Quest!

Goblin Quest is the third of my books about the Goblins of Clovenstone. They're sort of affectionate parodies of Tolkein and that type of story, in which the goblins get to be the good guys for a change. I don't read fantasy these days, but I loved it as a child, so it's a chance to revisit lots of ideas I enjoyed then and had more or less forgotten. I was only planning one book, but somehow I've ended up with three. This latest one is about a quest to raise the lost kingdom of the elves from beneath the sea - which turns out to be not such a good idea after all.

The Goblins are great creations, but a bit cheeky. Did you know they keep hijacking your blog?

Yes, but that's fine. I can never think of anything to blog about these days, so it's quite useful to have a back-up team, even if they can't spell. Or type.

Meeting The Mentor

(Oi! WeE Hurd tHatT, ReeEve!)

You live on Dartmoor. How do you feel the landscape and history of the place affect your writing?

I've loved Dartmoor since I was a child, which is why I live here. There seem to be two strands to my work; one is science-fiction-ish, and tends to be inspired by cities and urban environments, and the other more fantasy/historical, and that second strand definitely draws on the landscape of Dartmoor in all sorts of ways. I'd like to do a book that's specifically set here one day.

When you write a book, do you plan the story, or fly by the seat of your pants?

Always by the seat of my pants. I like to just start writing and see where it goes, so I always end up with huge rewrites and multiple different versions. It's a bit like doing a drawing; you keep rubbing out a line and laying it in again in a slightly different way until (hopefully) you get it right.

Meeting The Mentor

Do you *like* writing? Seems a silly question, but many writers say they find the process painful...

I like it when it's going well. When it isn't it's horrible, and it never really feels like a real job; I always secretly feel I'm skiving and ought to be out digging a ditch or driving a bus or something. I don't think it's a very healthy life, mentally or physically. Sometimes I think I'm tired of it, and that the book I'm working on will be my last, but so far something has always happened to get me writing again. I was on the brink of giving up a couple of years back, but then I met the illustrator Sarah McIntyre and we decided we should create some stories together, and that has set me off down a whole new path.

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I'm finishing a very sci-fi novel which will be coming out next year, and thinking about the fourth Reeve and McIntyre book.

Meeting The Mentor

You've been quite prolific: winning awards, creating whole new worlds in fiction, Hollywood movies etc. Is there still a story or project you long to do? Maybe in another medium, like screenplays, comics, video games?

Well although I've sold a lot of my books to Hollywood, no actual movies have been made yet, so it would be nice to see that happen with one of them, at least. And I'd love to have done screenplays, or TV, or write for the stage. I sort of imagined that if you published books that would give you a way into these other media, but it doesn't seem to work like that!

What one piece of advice would you give to emerging writers?

Keep writing, I suppose, which sounds obvious, but it's really the only way. Write something every day!

Meeting The Mentor

William King.

[William King](#) is a fantasy author of the acclaimed [Kormak Saga](#) and [Terrarch Chronicles](#)

Tell me about Ocean of Fear!

It's the sixth novel in my sword and sorcery series about Kormak, a wandering monster hunter in a dark medieval fantasy world. Along with a ship full of bounty hunters he's seeking the Kraken, a pirate sorcerer with a claim to a kingdom's throne and a plan to awaken the most powerful demon of the ancient world. Somebody once described the series as being a bit like Jack Reacher Meets Game of Thrones.

Meeting The Mentor

You've been quite a trailblazer in the world of self-publishing. You were already an experienced writer: what made you 'go it alone'?

I laughed when I read the word trailblazer. I've always felt I came to the self-publishing party very late. I'd been reading Joe Konrath's blog for a couple of years, thinking this Kindle thing sounds interesting, before I decided to give it a try. It was Joe's blog and the writings of other indie trailblazers like Dave Gaughran that got me into self-publishing. That and the fact that I was sitting on a pile of manuscripts that had been published in German, Spanish, Czech, Polish and Hungarian but not in English.

How do you find the world of self-publishing? Is it difficult being your own boss?

I find self-publishing enormously liberating compared to conventional publishing. It's no more difficult than being a freelance writer already was, perhaps even a little less so since I get to set my own deadlines.

Meeting The Mentor

You've been brilliantly honest about your career and the self-publishing business on your blog. The big question is: is it rewarding? (in both senses of the word) Can you support yourself, and are you fulfilled creatively as a writer?

I earn more from indie publishing than I do from traditional publishing and I've made my living from trad pub for a couple of decades.

And I am writing the stuff I dreamed about writing when I got into fantasy and SF in the first place. I loved the old Weird Tales style sword and sorcery when I was growing up. Now I get to write it when I want. I've published books outside the genre I am known for. I am writing short stories again. I don't think I have ever been more excited about being a writer than I am now.

Meeting The Mentor

What books/TV/films inspired you to start writing? As you've probably guessed, it was mostly fantasy and SF from the 60s and 70s (Conan, [Lord of the Rings](#), [Michael Moorcock](#)'s [Eric](#) and [Hawkmoon](#) and [Roger Zelazny](#)'s work) along with [Raymond Chandler](#) and [Dashiel Hammett](#).

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, routines, superstitions, etc.?

The main thing is to write every day. It's gotten a bit more difficult since I spend a couple of my former work days each week looking after our hyper-active two year old. I've built my schedule around his nap times. Recently I have been finding [The Pomodoro Method](#) very useful.

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I am currently editing [Born of Darkness](#), book seven in the [Kormak Saga](#), and a couple of short stories also in the series.

Meeting The Mentor

Clare Elsom

Clare Elsom is a freelance illustrator with works behind her such as the **Arthur** books, **Spies in Disguise** and **Maisie Mae** . She spoke about her working day, favourite artists, and tea & cake.

What's the average day of an illustrator look like?

In theory, I do try keep my day either drawing based, where I work on a drawing board and a lightbox, scribbling away with pencil and pens on large sheets of paper, or computer based, where I am working on final artwork, using Photoshop to collage textures and add colour to my scanned drawings. I try and keep my entire day either one or the other, as I tend to zone into these tasks. Other tasks such as image research, emailing and web updating creep into the working day too... as well as those essential tea and cake breaks.

Meeting The Mentor

What's your background? Have you always drawn?

Yes I have, and written stories - but no more than other children I don't think. It was a deep love of children's books, stories, cartoons and characters, and a big, slightly silly imagination that really got me into this! I enjoyed art at school, we had a really inspiring art department, and it just felt natural to pursue that direction of study. I was recently rooting through my parents attic and stumbled across a LOT of old illustrated books I made as a child... so maybe there was always an indication of my career path there!

Quentin Blake, definitely, always. I liked quite traditional illustrators, such Shirley Hughes, Helen Oxenbury, Lynley Dodd... I just really admired their drawing. However when I began to look at more contemporary artists that used combined drawn/digital methods - Lauren Child being a particularly famous example - something really clicked for me. These big bold characters, collages, textures, drawn line sitting against digital colour... it definitely influenced the way I work.

Meeting The Mentor

Is there any writer you'd love to provide illustrations for?

I always think it would be fun to tackle a classic text – something like Peter Pan, fantastical and character based. I would also LOVE to illustrate Enid Blyton's Faraway Tree series. I loved those books as a kid.

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

Ohhh.... if only I could tell you! Well, I suppose I can tell you YES, a few big projects – a colourful, young series for a US publisher, a 'magical' new series a bit closer to home, and another project involving some characters from my own sketchbooks... but other than that I have to unfortunately keep quiet for now! I also continue to work on Kate Scott's Spies in Disguise series, the Set4Sport franchise, and cross my fingers for some more adventures with Maisie Mae...

You can find out more about Clare on her website: www.elsomillustration.co.uk

Meeting The Mentor

Sarah Taylor, Literary Agent.

Sarah Taylor spoke to me about her career

Hi Sarah! First of all: Who are you and what do you do

My name is Sarah Taylor and I work as a Literary Agent at the Kate Nash Literary Agency. I was previously Literary Assistant.

. How did you come to work in the industry?

I started as Literary Assistant at the Kate Nash Literary Agency in 2012. Before that I studied History and Italian at the University of Reading.

Read a lot and then write, write, write. Make sure your submission is as perfect as you think it can be (and is finished) before submitting to an agent.

Try to develop an author platform – be on twitter and social media. Join creative writing forums and groups. Publishers expect a lot of self publicising, so it is good to be creating a platform for yourself early on.

Meeting The Mentor

What's the best bit about your job?

I love finding new authors and seeing a book that you have worked on being published is a great feeling. I also enjoy getting out to events and festivals and meeting writers.

Laura Purcell

Laura Purcell is a writer, history fan and guinea pig lover living in Colchester. She is writing a series of novels about the women who loved (and hated!) the Hanoverian monarchs. . She spoke about research, inspiration and lots more research!

Hi Laura! Tell me about *Queen of Bedlam*:

Queen of Bedlam is about the family of King George III of England, who famously went "mad". It focuses on his wife, Queen Charlotte, and the emotional impact his illness had upon her. You also see life through the eyes of the royal children, who had to make great sacrifices to keep their father well.

How much research do you do for the historical elements of your writing?

Quite simply, loads. First there is the period to get to grips with, including dress, everyday life and speech. Then there are the people themselves. My husband jokes that I have every book every published on George III. I've been researching his family since 2009 and still I keep learning new things.

I'm always working on something! I'm currently writing about two inspirational women from the court of George II: Henrietta Howard and Queen Caroline. Both orphans with difficult husbands, they rose to become prominent figures in English politics. The only problem was, they were both sleeping with the same man...

Thanks Laura! Sounds great! You can buy [Queen of Bedlam](#) online and in the usual outlets. Catch up with Laura at her website: <http://laurapurcell.com/>

Meeting The Mentor

Giles Paley Phillips

Giles Paley Phillips is a picture book writer from East Sussex. His debut book 'THE FEARSOME BEASTIE' won The People's Book Prize, Bizziebaby Gold Award and Highly Commended in The Forward National Literature Award and was Shortlisted for The Rotherham Children's Awards and The Heart of Hawick Children's Book Award. He spoke about his new book, life in a band, and the magic of picture books.

Hi Giles! Tell me about *Princess Stay Awake*:

Princess Stay Awake is a book all about a little girl called Layla, who won't go to sleep at bedtime, I think it's a subject a lot of parents can resonate with.

You began as a musician. How did the change to picture book writer come about?

I've played in bands for many years, but when I found out my wife was expecting our first son, I decided I really wanted to do something creative for him.

Meeting The Mentor

What is special about picture books? Why do kids (& adults) love them?

I think because picture books are one of a child's first experiences of literature, also it's a special time when you can sit together and share the experience of reading.

Which writer/artist are you most inspired by?

There are several writers that have always been a big influence, but primarily Shel Silverstein and Edward Gorey are ones that I always feel inspired by.

What's the best writing advice you've ever heard?

Start early, what I mean is, if you have any kind of interest in writing, then pursue it, don't put it off till tomorrow.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you working on anything at the moment? I've not written anything for some time, I decided to have a break and do something else creative. I recorded a single with my band Burnthouse, so I've been enjoying getting back into music. <http://burnthouse.bandcamp.com/track/the-sun-makers>

Peter Jay Black

Peter Jay Black is the author of debut series [Urban Outlaws](#) which was published by Bloomsbury in 2014. He spoke about publishing, writing, and inspiration.

Meeting The Mentor

Tell me about UrbanOutlaws

The Urban Outlaws are five kids who live in a secret bunker hidden deep beneath London. They each have their own skills and use gadgets and hacking to outsmart London's crime gangs and hand out their dirty money through Random Acts of Kindness (R.A.K.s).

Their latest mission leads them to a Top Secret computer that can hack any secure system in the world and destroy governments.

The Urban Outlaws have to stop it and avert world domination!

What has the experience of being published been like?

I taught myself creative writing because I failed English GCSE at school. So, I had to work very hard at it. It took eight years to get my writing up to a readable standard!

Meeting The Mentor

I guess I have my feet on the ground about being published now. After all, it's a job and I want to do the best I can. I think the hardest point was the beginning – it was very overwhelming and a lot more hard work follows! Now, I'm so busy I haven't had time to stop and reflect. I'm sure it will hit me hard one day!

What writers or books inspired you to start writing?

All of them. Seriously. But, a few have helped me on the way: I like Clive Cussler's Fargo adventures for action, Harry Potter for fantasy and pure imagination, Classic sci-fi with Arthur C Clarke and Isaac Asimov, and I've read a lot of non fiction about physics.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you a plotter when it comes to writing?

I would say a combination of several things help me when writing. I think primarily in images. I get a strong visual of a character in a dangerous/exciting situation and I then watch how they try and get out of it. Main characters come first. I then think of an overall plot and plan it out – this helps me to know where the book is going and try to avoid writer's block. Once the rough draft is done, it's write, edit, write, edit. . .

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

Urban Outlaws is book one of five in the series. The second, Urban Outlaws: Blackout, will be published in September this year. So, they're my main focus at the moment, but I have plenty of ideas for the future.

Thanks Peter! You can find out more about Peter and the Urban Outlaws on the Website:

<http://www.urbanoutlawsbunker.com/>

Meeting The Mentor

Marcus Gipps

I thought it would be interesting to find out how a successful crowdfunding campaign works. Marcus Gipps ran a successful Kickstarter Campaign to get the UNCLE books by JP Martin and Quentin Blake back in print. He spoke to me about the project.

Tell me about your project.

I fell in love with the UNCLE books by JP Martin and Quentin Blake when I was a kid, but sadly my copies went to a charity shop. When I was reminded of them and wanted to read them again, I discovered that they were largely out of print – and second-hand copies were shockingly expensive. After a long period of occasionally nagging the publishers to reprint (I was a bookseller, and knew who to nag), I decided that no-one else was going to do it, so I better had! By that time I had been an editor at Gollancz for two years – although this project was in no way affiliated with them – so I believed I knew enough about publishing to make it work.

Meeting The Mentor

The campaign went well. How did you get the word out there?

Two main things – I found an old and largely defunct yahoo group dedicated to UNCLE, which only had around 160 users – many of whom, I suspect, had closed their associated email addresses. But a message on that was enough to get me a handful of hugely supportive and very vocal supporters, who were poised ready and waiting when the campaign launched. I was also lucky enough to have new material from people such as Neil Gaiman and Garth Nix (among others), who were fans of the book, and their online presence and supportive tweeting etc was hugely useful. It sort of snowballed from there!

Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

As a personal project, I knew that I couldn't afford to produce a book which would do the contents justice on my own money. I basically saw kickstarter as a way of judging interest, and also getting pre-orders – so I could use that money to produce the book!

Meeting The Mentor

Did you come across any problems in the campaign, or the execution of the project?

I underestimated how long everything would take, of course, as everyone seems to – although I had done quite a lot of work on my own before the project started, I couldn't afford to pay the professionals I needed until the funds cleared. I also didn't factor in enough time for complications – introductions being delayed, CDs being lost in the post, that sort of thing.

What one tip would you give to anyone considering using kickstarter to fund their book?

Try and have it almost ready to be published before you launch – I know that means doing a lot of work with the possibility of not succeeding in your campaign, but the pressure of running a campaign at the same time as working on the project is immense, and I'd have been much happier if I knew that I'd done most of the work beforehand. It also reduces the chance of nasty surprises!

Thanks Marcus. Check out the Kickstarter page [here](#).

Meeting The Mentor

Dan Berry

Dan Berry is an artist and lecturer, based somewhere around the middle of the UK. He spoke about his comics, art, and the creative process.

Hi Dan! Tell me about Carry Me:

Carry Me started as a really small idea. I went for a walk with my daughter who was about 9 months old at the time along an overgrown path on a really hot 'end of summer' day. The path was more overgrown than I was expecting and I ended up having to hold her high above my head so she wouldn't get hurt by the thorny branches. The idea for a story about life and death grew from there. I made notes once I got home and the following day I started drawing it straight into my sketchbook. I gave myself some rules to follow - no planning or pencilling beyond those first notes, no corrections, just drawing. It's a very stressful way to work, I don't recommend it!

Meeting The Mentor

You produce a lot of autobiographical comics. How much is true?

I've never really thought of the strips I draw that feature me as a character as being autobiographical. The Dan that I draw is an exaggeration of a version of me. I think I draw myself into these strips for a few reasons. I'm pretty easy to draw. That's a big factor. Drawing myself also gives me a bit more freedom to exaggerate small details from everyday life. As for how much is true, they all start with the seed of a small observation, usually about how I personally react to something in real life that I'll exaggerate into a fiction. This is probably why I've never thought of them as autobiographical before.

Meeting The Mentor

Why do you draw?

I'll be honest and say that I really don't know. I can't stop. It is a compulsion for me. I find now that my general base level of stress is linked to how little I draw. I try to draw every day, even if it is a brief doodle or something. I've got stories to tell and things to say coupled with a compulsion to draw which comes out as comics.

Which artist are you most inspired by?

In terms of style or subject, that changes every day. I really like Kerascoët at the moment. One of the big influences on my work ethic and underlying thinking about creativity was reading Brian Eno's *A Year With Swollen Appendices*. I was really inspired by what seemed to be a relentlessly enquiring approach to life. I go back to that book quite a lot. It is like being refuelled when I'm feeling lazy.

Meeting The Mentor

Do you script your books before embarking on them?

Yes, for the most part, the exception being Carry Me which aside from being wordless was only roughly plotted before I started drawing. My process usually starts with me making notes in my phone, then adapting those notes into a program called Scrivener for mac. That helps me organise my ideas and keep all my research in one place. Then I print it out and make edits with pencil. It sometimes changes slightly as I draw it, but for the most part I'll work to the pencil-edited version fairly strictly.

Meeting The Mentor

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

My schedule is pretty full-on. I teach comics and illustration full time in North Wales, and have two kids so all of my work is squeezed around the edges of that. A normal day is being awoken by my son at about 6am, getting up and answering emails til 7am, driving to work at about 7:30, teaching all day til about 5, driving home, getting dinner together and putting the kids to bed, doing chores and then I've got a two or three hour window to get some drawing done. I can 'sort of' work anywhere. The first four pages of Carry Me were drawn on a train to London, but for larger projects I'm ideally placed at my desk with all my equipment to hand.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

Yes, I'm working on a short book that'll be out in a month or two. It's tonally different from anything I've done previously and I'm very much enjoying it!

Meeting The Mentor

Where can we buy your stuff? You can buy things from me in person if you see me at a comics show, it is always nice to chat to people face to face. The next best place is from my website - <http://thingsbydan.bigcartel.com> or from the publishers I've been working with, Blank Slate Books - <http://blankslatebooks.bigcartel.com> and Great Beast Comics - <http://greatbeastcomics.bigcartel.com>

Thanks Dan! If you want to hear more of Dan's thoughts on writing, drawing and comics, check out his podcast Make it Then Tell Everybody.

Meeting The Mentor

Lisa Sofianos

Lisa Sofianos spoke to me about the non-fiction book *The Truth of Revolution, Brother*

Tell me about your project!

We are three friends who lived through the punk movement and were inspired by the energy, ideas and creativity and the irresistible call to action that it contained. We decided to connect to the people who shaped those ideas and see how they have lived them in the intervening decades. We wanted to know what they had learned and what this would tell us about how to live now in a time of global economic crisis, war and neo-liberal capitalism. We weren't interested in yet another retrospective, but rather, we wanted to put the punk legacy into the context of the present. We wanted to know what did it all mean?

Meeting The Mentor

We have spent the last year interviewing the architects of punk thinking at length in a series of conversations and we have found that the ideas of challenging authority, of disrupting ideology and of taking charge of your own situation are just as incendiary and relevant as they were decades ago, but they have been refined and developed over the years. Some of the people we have spoken to have been on incredible philosophical journeys that can't fail to inspire new ideas about one's own life. Our travels have taken us as to places like Iceland where the Capital, Reykjavik, is governed by a party of anarchist situationists who enjoy the highest approval rates of an Icelandic political party in years.

We are turning these conversations into a book that will also seek to challenge and disrupt the ideas of the reader. We have been very lucky to have gained so much access to the contributors in their homes and workplaces and, as far as we know, ours is a unique project.

Robin and I are published authors and Charlie has won graphic design awards so we thought that we were in a good position to do justice to the work.

Meeting The Mentor

The first thing I do now on waking up in the morning is to check our Kickstarter site. We achieved nearly 50% of funding within the first two weeks and with 4 weeks to go we are optimistic about reaching our final goal. I particularly like the fact that you can build a community around the project and we are finding that many backers have become our advocates. The way that Kickstarter works is that backers pledge funds in return for "rewards". These are usually items produced by the project, in our case first or limited editions of the book, exclusive photographs, original art etc. The backers are committed to the success of the project because they want to receive their reward, but they also want to play their part in the creative process. It feels as though we are all working together. We keep the backers informed of the progress of the project and in return we have had offers of help to produce or contribute to the book, messages of support and help in getting the word out. We are also creating more interest and finding new interviewees for the project as we go along like Keith Levene (first Clash guitarist/Public Image Ltd) who joined us yesterday.

Meeting The Mentor

It has been hard work to keep generating interest in the project and connecting with websites, the press, bloggers and our own social media platforms. I would strongly advise that you have a good strategy for creating a buzz around a project before you consider using crowd funding and be as inventive as possible.

Meeting The Mentor

Robin and I have published books through more conventional routes in the past and it has worked very well. But we all knew that we wanted this book to be a one-off, sitting across the genres of music, culture, philosophy and art. We have very definite ideas about the look of the book, that it should include unique artwork from the contributors, that it should challenge ideas of form and embody the idea of disruption, and that should also be a thing of beauty to do justice to the subject matter. We know that traditional publishers are very focussed on how they will market a book and can be risk averse and we didn't want to be faced with making a lot of compromises, so we decided to self-publish. We were also mindful of the do-it-yourself punk ethos and saw an alignment. After the decision to self-publish we then had to find the funds to cover the up-front production costs that would normally be born by the publisher. We settled on crowdfunding because of the success that similar projects seemed to enjoy and because it is a brilliant synthesis of finance, marketing and sales

Meeting The Mentor

Kickstarter gives us the ability to engage with supporters from around the world who then become a valued resource and the reward system gives us an international sales channel. It's such an elegant idea.

What is your target and deadline?

We are looking for £15,000 to produce and print the book. We have nearly finished the interviews and the finances for the writing and design are all covered. Kickstarter is an "all or nothing" funding model so if we don't make our target amount by 11 May 2014 then we don't get anything and neither do our backers. We're putting everything into it to make sure we do! If you're out there reading this, take a look and what we're doing, back us and join the project.

Where can people find you?

The Kickstarter project is here [https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/200002823/the-truth-of-revolution-](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/200002823/the-truth-of-revolution-brother-punk-philosophy-bo)

[brother-punk-philosophy-bo](#) The Truth of

Revolution, Brother website

is www.thetruthofrevolution.com Twitter

[@robinrydenow](#) [@thisaintrock](#)

Meeting The Mentor

UPDATE! THIS PROJECT HAS NOW BEEN FUNDED! Lisa & Co have reached their £15000 goal with now four days to go. This means the project will definitely go ahead and any orders you place (and you should) will be fulfilled. Click above to find out what great products and incentives they have still available.

Meeting The Mentor

Amanda Barbara, Vice President of Pubslush

Amanda Barbara set up crowdfunding site Pubslush in 2011. She spoke to about the challenges and motivations.

Tell me about Pubslush

The mission at Pubslush is to provide a literary-centric crowdfunding platform focused on user education and engagement. We believe by providing exceptional personalized customer service to our users, we will continue to forge ourselves as a reputable and trusted member of not only the publishing industry, but the larger literary world. In a short time, we have become a top player in the crowdfunding arena, with specific emphasis on reward-based crowdfunding. By offering authors, publishers, and other literary trendsetters the educational tools and one-on-one assistance needed to be successful on Pubslush and beyond, we are establishing ourselves as one of the elite resources in a rapidly evolving industry.

Meeting The Mentor

What made you start up the site?

Pubslush is a direct tribute to J.K. Rowling. We were shocked to learn that 12 publishers rejected her first Harry Potter book. This seemed to indicate that there was a problem within the publishing industry. Upon further investigation, we learned many bestselling books were first in the slush pile and rejected time and time again, which means there are countless bestsellers out there that would never reach the shelves under the current publishing system. As with all creative projects, writers can't share their work without monetary backing. That's where Pubslush comes in.

Of course, Pubslush is also a tribute to the TOMS Shoes movement. By implementing a one-for-one model, we are able to create a sustainable nonprofit brand that's able to combat illiteracy.

Meeting The Mentor

What's the reception been to it?

Crowdfunding is still a very new term and a developing industry. The publishing community was a bit hesitant at first to welcome what we were trying to do for authors. Pubslush offers more than just a platform to raise funds. We are a community that is helping authors build a brand and market their book before publication. Our authors need a way to understand their readers, which we are able to provide through our market analytics.

Were there a lot of challenges involved in setting it up?

When we first launched Pubslush in September 2011, our platform was a bit different — we served as the publisher, and if an author reached 1,000 preorders in 30 days, we would publish his or her book full-service. As great an idea as this was, we felt it closed us off from working with many great people in the industry.

Meeting The Mentor

After realizing that the platform wasn't formatted as strongly as it could have been, we went back and reworked our idea to develop a more effective and beneficial Pubslush process for all. There was more need for authors to be able to crowdfund and choose any path they wanted after they had those funds. It eliminated the author being locked into a contract with us, and it still allowed people to self-publish if they wanted to take that track.

Now that we have a very defined goal and mission and understand the needs of the industry, we are able to forge forward and grow as a company. This platform has proven to be much more accepted and successful within the industry.

What one piece of advice would you give to a writer wanting to launch a Pubslush campaign?

Pre-campaign outreach and organization is the most important advice we give to a writer. If a campaigner comes into it with an organized list of outreach and social media efforts, they'll have more time to focus on the campaigning itself and will be more successful!

Meeting The Mentor

Where can people find you?:

<http://pubslush.com> www.twitter.com/pubslush
www.facebook.com/pubslush <http://blog.pubslush.com>
Email us at hello@pubslush.com

Thanks Amanda! Head on over to Pubslush to see what they have to offer.

Doug Tocco

Doug Tocco spoke about his great creative project, Wibble, Dibble and Splattt!

Tell me about your project!

All of us have passion and creativity inside of our hearts but at some point in our lives we leave childhood behind and forget how to fly. Through the adventures of Wibble, Dibble & Splattt we can all take flight with our children and soar once more beyond the stars and back before bedtime!

Meeting The Mentor

I'm proud to welcome Wibble, Dibble & Splattt to our world. Their first adventure is an Augmented Reality board-book called "Where is One? An Earthling's Book of Numbers." It marks the start of their exploration on planet Earth. This fun filled book is about counting, outer space and much more, for Earth children ages 2 and up. Each page is a new and exciting augmented reality experience that both kids and parents will love! Wibble, Dibble & Splattt come to life using your smart device and our simple and easy to use Augmented Reality APP. Children will enjoy this quality board-book as is, but the AR opens up a new level of fun and interaction. Search for "Wibble, Dibble and Splattt on the Apple App Store and Google Play for a demonstration of the Augmented Reality.

Years ago, I created three lovable aliens on a quest to find creativity in the Universe. After 10 years of telling stories to my kids about the adventures of Wibble, Dibble & Splattt, my family told me it's time to get these characters out of my head and bring them down to Earth.

Meeting The Mentor

It has always been a dream of mine to bring these characters to life and share them with the world. Working as a freelance designer and creator, with insanely tight deadlines and long 120 hour work weeks, didn't leave much time to pursue this dream. But I realized that I wasn't setting the right example for my children. I want them to know that it is important to pursue your dreams. So I am leading by example and finally chasing mine. I also want to spend more time with my children before they're grown, and I'm hopeful that this will allow me to do that. It will be a fun and fulfilling way to provide for my family. I want to create a positive message that will inspire children to reach higher. Now with the support of my wonderful wife and three kids, I'm finally ready to take a chance.

How's the campaign going?

Our pledge levels are moving in the right direction, but we need to get the word out to reach our goal. I'm confident that when people see the quality of the illustrations and the added innovation of the augmented reality, we will reach our goals.

Meeting The Mentor

What is your target and deadline?

We are hoping to raise \$29,000 by May 16th so that we can complete the illustrations, finish the Augmented Reality APP and put the book into production.

Robert Llewellyn

Robert Llewellyn is a comedian, actor, writer and TV presenter known worldwide for shows such as Red Dwarf, Carpool and Scrapheap Challenge. His latest book, *News from the Clouds*, is being funded on Unbound.

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Robert! Tell me about your project.

In 2009 I started writing a book set 200 years in the future in a society that had finally moved beyond fire. The overarching idea was to imagine a technologically advanced but sustainable society and economy where they don't burn anything to do anything else. This was inspired by many things but the two main ones were; Re-reading William Morris' 'News from Nowhere' published in 1890 and set in 1980, and the developments I was seeing in renewable energy generation, storage and use. I drive an electric car that is part powered by solar panels and this fact alone inspired me to imagine how far this technology could take us.

Meeting The Mentor

'News from the Squares' continues the story in an alternate dimension 200 years in the future in a complex and economically thriving world governed entirely by women. The thinking behind this was simple; men have dominated society for the past 3-4,000 years and we have achieved some truly remarkable advances in that time. We've also made a right mess in the process. Trying to imagine what would happen if women slowly took over and ran things was at once challenging and liberating and the feedback from both men and women about this book has been very rewarding.

The final book in the trilogy, 'News from the Clouds' creates a world where current generations take no heed of the increasingly dire warnings we are hearing from 98% of the scientific community. It describes a world where extreme weather has become the norm, but instead, as in all the books, of being a dystopian nightmare of horror and carnage, it depicts a place where human beings are finding ways of surviving and prospering under very extreme conditions.

Meeting The Mentor

How's the campaign going?

The first two books, 'News from Gardenia' and 'News from the Squares' were both funded very quickly, in under a month. The final book, 'News from the Clouds' is taking a lot longer but I'm happy to say it's getting there.

You've used Unbound before. Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

I originally wanted to publish 'News from Gardenia' myself but realised fairly quickly that I'd need quite a lot of help to do that. Meeting the folks from Unbound made that possibility a lot less stressful. It's not self publishing and certainly not vanity publishing, my books are distributed by MacMillan which is a very old school publisher, however I've found the direct contact with readers very fulfilling. I've met loads of people who've supported and indeed read the books and the feedback is fantastic.

Meeting The Mentor

Before working with Unbound I had published numerous books with traditional publishers. I loved the creative experience, the editing etc. but often felt cast adrift once the book was out. The experience with Unbound is far more hands on. I know how many we've printed, how many we've sold and I'm very committed to publicising and pushing the books.

What is your target and deadline?

The idea is to raise enough to do the editing, first print run, e-book and audiobook versions so that when the book hits the shelves it's not running at a massive loss as is the case with traditional publishing. The writer shares any profits on a 50-50 basis with Unbound which is unheard of with any other publisher. As for a time deadline, I've nearly finished the first draft of 'News from the Clouds' but there's still a lot of work to do on it. I know I will re-write again and again. The deadline is more of a dead mist, it's all got to be finished... soon...ish

Meeting The Mentor

Where can people find you?: News from the Clouds on Unbound: <http://unbound.co.uk/books/news-from-the-clouds> News from Gardenia on Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1hUI8vu> News from the Squares on Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1gAycrP> [@bobbyllew](#) on Twitter <https://plus.google.com/u/0/+RobertLlewellyn/posts> on G+ <http://llewblog.squarespace.com> is my blog
Thanks Robert! Click on the links above to make News from the Clouds a success.

Meeting The Mentor

Teresa Funke

Teresa Funke runs the Read A Hero Literacy Program in the USA and is using Pubslush.com to help fund a special project.

Tell me about your project!

The Read A Hero Program was developed to fit within the Boys & Girls Clubs' established education programs, using resources available at each club. It was also created to be flexible and easy to use, whether the program is run by the club's education director or a volunteer.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of America run over 4,000 clubs in the U.S. serving more than 4 million low-income children. It's Teresa's goal to help the Boys & Girls Clubs in their mission to raise literacy rates in their kids and increase book ownership. Studies have shown that nearly half of all low-income children in America do not own a single book. Studies also show that kids reading at grade level in elementary school are four times more likely to graduate high school.

Meeting The Mentor

The Program provides:

- A five-unit curriculum incorporating standard literacy models. Each unit includes reading time, writing prompts, discussion questions, vocabulary games, and more. Each unit also includes at least one math, physical education, art, teamwork, history, or character-building activity.
- A training session for each club.
- A Skype visit with Teresa.
- Posters and gifts for the kids.
- And, of course, 25 FREE copies of Teresa's popular Home-Front Heroes children's books based on true stories from WWII for the kids to keep!

Teresa Funke is a successful author, speaker, and writer's coach. She is the author of six award-winning books, including the Home-Front Heroes series for middle-grade readers. She runs several programs to benefit schools, libraries, and at-risk and low-income children and families.

Meeting The Mentor

How's the campaign going?

We have 10 days left and are 13% funded, so it's a nail biter, but we are very hopeful. This program could do so much good for low-income kids in America and we have had success with it in our area, so we are hoping people will step up to donate before the campaign ends at midnight on May 14th.

Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

I was never really intending to do a crowdfunding effort, but then I was approached by Pubslush, a crowdfunding site for all things literary, to partner with them. They were getting ready to launch an initiative to allow people to crowdfund any literacy related project on the site. I immediately thought of all the teacher, librarians, non-profit leaders, and community minded publishers that I know and realized if Pubslush was successful in launching this effort, it would be of huge benefit to anyone hoping to increase literacy in our country. Pubslush was eager to lead off the effort with my literacy campaign, so if the campaign is successful, I hope it will inspire others to think of projects that would encourage reading and writing in our kids.

Meeting The Mentor

Where can people find you?:

www.teresafunkeliteracycampaign.com pubslush.com
www.teresafunke.com <https://www.facebook.com/teresafunkeandcompany?ref=hl>
<http://www.pinterest.com/teresafunke/>
<https://twitter.com/teresafunke>
https://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=63711832&trk=spm_pic <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP3qGOs8-GMt32xxX2Ubbtw>

Thanks Teresa! Wow, what a great project. Click the links above for more information and to help the Read A Hero Literacy Program.

Meeting The Mentor

Steam Tour: An American Steampunk in London Ezine

Alison Weaverdyck spoke about her plans for a super steampunk project.

Tell me about your project!

I am an American who is going to be living in Eastern Europe for most of the next year, but I will get a chance to visit London in August/September when I am between destinations. My idea is to use that time to visit museums, historical sites and Steampunk and Victorian-themed pubs and tea houses in order to find out the best places in London to find Steampunk inspiration and resources. I am promising articles about H.G. Wells, Sherlock Holmes, Jack the Ripper, Charles Darwin, Around the World in 80 Days, Egypt and Victorian England and Victorian Ghost Stories, but I also want to hear from my backers about where they want me to go and what they want to know more about. I have a tentative itinerary but I want to keep it flexible until I hear from my backers.

Meeting The Mentor

In addition, there is an amazing Steampunk convention called The Weekend at the Asylum that will take place in September and I would go and report back for people who can't get there themselves. I also have some interviews with Steampunk authors lined up and I hope to meet more interesting people to talk to and promote along the way. All of this, plus an exclusive Steampunk London map, would add up to an ezine called Steam Tour: An American Steampunk in London.

Meeting The Mentor

Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

I really love the philosophy of crowdfunding. If an idea is good enough and there are enough people out there to make it happen they get a chance to do it together. I don't just want to write about the things that interest me, I want to hear from other people about the information and experiences I can bring back to them because not everyone gets the opportunity to travel the way I do. And I can't help but find new and interesting things along the way, but I can't know what I am missing until I ask! I would also be lying if I didn't say that I hope the campaign will bring attention to my blog and hopefully help me on my way to becoming a full time writer, but mostly I wanted to embrace the collaborative spirit that Steampunk seems to simply ooze with.

Meeting The Mentor

What is your target and deadline?

\$1750 by May 11, 2014. And just so it is clear, I am not asking people to pay my transportation costs to and from London from the US. I am going to go there anyway, the campaign is just for the zine. I have someone illustrating the cover and doing professional layout and photo editing, plus I am offering an awesome bumper sticker as a thank you to backers which need to be printed and shipped, so there is a lot going on here.

Fran Sivers

Fran is a graphic designer in the UK with a passion for picture books.

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Fran. Tell me about your project!

Pelican Bill is an alternative bedtime story for kids (AND adults), it follows the adventures of a vomiting pirate, it's quite gruesome really I suppose. I started this project last year with illustrator Leilani Coughlan, she has done some amazing illustrations for this project. A couple of our reward tiers also get our backers personalised drawings of themselves as pirates, its a pretty cool thing for Leilani to do, I'm really excited how that'll turn out.

How's the campaign going?

We don't have a lot of backers at the moment, but everyone that I've talked to has been really excited by the story. And Leilani had a really good response from people at the Dubai comic con last weekend, so I am confident the backers will come in as the project continues.

Meeting The Mentor

Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

To get something like this printed is really expensive and you have to do produce a lot at once to make it worth it. Crowdfunding really seemed the only way.

What is your target and deadline?

We need to reach our goal of £4000 by 4th May, but if we do it, things should move quite quickly for our backers after that. Both me and Leilani are graphic designers in our day-jobs and have a lot of experience in getting projects like this to print.

EbbaBrooks,

Ebba Brooks is the organiser of Prestwich Book Festival. We spoke about fundraising and backing a terrific project.

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Ebba! Tell me about your project!

We want to raise £1,000 for a mini childrens' book festival as part of a community event in Prestwich, north Manchester. It's part of the activities of the Prestwich Book Festival, which I founded and run and is now in its third year.

How's the campaign going?

Really well! Five days in and we've raised £780 already - that's 78% of our target. I've been overwhelmed by people's generosity.

Why did you choose to use crowdfunding?

I needed something quick and easy to do. Last year I got a £6,000 Arts Council grant (first time I'd ever applied for something like that) and I'd been planning to apply for lots more grants this year. But because of a family bereavement (my dad died) I didn't have time to submit them, and so the festival had no money at all. I scaled down the plans, and took a punt that people would want to contribute directly.

Meeting The Mentor

Where can people find you? Crowdfunding site: <http://igg.me/at/pbf14/x/6766474> Festival website: <http://www.prestwichbookfestival.net>

Sophia Bennett

Hi Sophia! Tell me about *You Don't Know Me*.

It's the story of a girl who gets a fabulous opportunity to be famous, makes a huge mistake and lives to regret it. She unthinkingly betrays her best friend and becomes the subject of a cyber-bullying campaign. In the course of surviving everything that's thrown at her, she realises the value of friendship, and being creative through music. I wanted to write about cyber-bullying because so many people are suffering it at the moment. I hope there are clues in the book about how to make it stop and how to survive it while it lasts.

Meeting The Mentor

I've always wanted to write for young teenagers because I used to lose myself in books at that age. Reading was very necessary to me. I escaped my ordinary life, learned a lot and formed most of the beliefs and opinions I hold to this day. Teens are passionate readers, and passionate people. When you make a connection with your readers, it's a special thing. You've managed to infuse your love of fashion into your writing. Are there any other obsessions you'd weave into your stories? There are still stories to be written about my love of art, and dance. But my next book, due out in the summer, is about family and politics, which are two other passions of mine. Oh yes, and Italy. I have quite a few obsessions. What's your favourite writing tip? Just write! You'll never get the practise you need to be a great writer if you don't sit down and do it. Two others that I often quote are John Green's 'I give myself permission to suck' on the first draft. You can always make it better later. And Neil Gaiman's 'finish things'. Are you working on anything at the moment? Yes - a book about love. It's what my readers have said they want to read about

Meeting The Mentor

It's fraught love, obviously, but I still think I'm going to have a good time with this one.

Allan Boroughs

Allan Boroughs is a writer of children's adventures. His debut novel is out now from Macmillan. He spoke about his writing, inspirations, and travelling in the name of research.

Meeting The Mentor

Tell me about Ironheart!

Ironheart is, first and foremost, an adventure story – it is set 150 years in the future when the Great Rains have consumed the world's cities. It tells the story of a young girl who travels to Siberia in search of her missing father in the company of a seven foot military android who becomes her friend. Along the way she meets pirates, outlaws a 200 year old shaman and encounters a dark secret under the ice that could bring about the end of the world. The story was inspired by my own journeys in Siberia and by the mystery surrounding the 'Tunguska Event' – the largest meteorite to strike the earth in human history which landed in Siberia in 1908.

Meeting The Mentor

You did research in Antarctica? How?

Primarily by going there to have a look! I have a strong preference to visit all the places I write about so I can get a sense of what it is like to see it for the first time and can instil this sense in my characters when I write the story. It took me about four days to get to Antarctica via Santiago, Tierra del Fuego and a bleak Chilean air force base in the South Atlantic. After that I took a boat down the Antarctic peninsula to a point below the Antarctic circle. It was an astonishing journey and one I feel very privileged to have made.

What writers or books inspired you to start writing?

[CS Lewis](#) – who made me fall in love with reading at age 7 [Tolkien](#) for the best quest stories ever. David Almond for [Skellig](#) – the only book that ever made me cry Philip Pullman for [Northern Lights](#) - the book with the best ever female protagonist. And AA Milne – for [Winnie the Pooh](#) – the funniest book in the universe.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I'm currently finishing up edits on the second instalment of *Ironheart* in which India travels to Antarctica. Also plotting for book three which, if I have my way, will require more research, this time in Venezuela.

Thanks Allan! You can find Allan online at his website www.allanboroughs.co.uk and Twitter: www.twitter.com/allanboroughs Ironheart is available in bookshops and [online](#)

Kate Sermon

Kate Sermon is a journalist and author living in Devon. She spoke about her debut crossover novel [Dark Sleepers](#).

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Kate! Tell me about *Dark Sleepers*.

It's a redemptive story, of friendship, and what it means to suddenly grow up. Kezia is fourteen years old when she watches her dad die in a car crash, her grief propels her into the astral realms in search of him. And as it turns out in search of a way to survive. Her friendship with Ben, an equally lonely boy becomes the centre of her story. It's set on Dartmoor. But is also a magical realism book as most of the story takes place in the astral realms.

How did you come up with the idea?

My husband and I took our two boys to Canada, in 2004, in a bid to emigrate and start a new life. While there we ran an Art Gallery and craft shop, it was while I was sat behind the counter, bubbling over with homesickness that Dartmoor floated in, and Kezia appeared full formed in it. I wrote the first chapter behind that desk.

Meeting The Mentor

I've always been interested in astral projection and the idea of spirit worlds. I suppose as I too, had my dad die when I was a teenager I could relate to Kezia's painful grief as well.

What's your writing schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc?

When I'm writing a first draft, I write every morning without fail. Usually words are already clammering to be written when I wake up so I don't wait. Most of Dark Sleepers and Dark Minds has been written on a laptop in my bed! If I find I am searching for inspiration I write a haiku or a longer poem to 'loosen the ghosts'.

Editing is different, I hate it - so I tend to procrastinate until my publisher screams at me.

I also use Facebook as a quick concentration break now and again, and to slow my writing down.

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I'm editing the Dark Sleepers sequel, Dark Minds (working title) at the moment. So I'm in procrastination and self-doubt phase! I prefer the freedom of the first draft more, it reflects my wild spirit a tad more I feel.

Meeting The Mentor

Find Kate on [Facebook](#), on [Twitter](#), on [Goodreads](#), and on [Pinterest](#). *Dark Sleepers* is available [online](#).

Jeff Norton

Jeff Norton is a Canadian-born writer and producer living in London. He's the author of *Metawars* and the founder of [Awesome Media & Entertainment](#). He spoke to me about his writing and schedules:

Hi Jeff! Tell me about *Metawars* .

[MetaWars](#) is a high-tech thriller, set in a post-peak-oil future where we all interface online, in a type of global virtual world (imagine Minecraft meets Grand Theft Auto!) and two teenagers, Jonah and Sam, get swept up in the battle for control over the internet.

It's fast-paced, challenging, and addictive. I wrote it to read like a video game. One young reader called it "Alex Rider meets The Matrix" which is a pretty accurate description.

Meeting The Mentor

You're also a producer. How do you divide the time?

I write in the mornings and go until about three in the afternoon and then switch into producing mode. It's doable because I'm currently executive producing a big TV series out of Canada, and they are five hours behind the UK. So I get a head start and get my writing done before Canada gets going. The show is called Trucktown and I'm making it with my friend Jon Scieszka, a super talented author of tons of books for younger readers, and we're doing the show at Nelvana – Canada's leading animation company.

Meeting The Mentor

What books/TV/films inspired you to start writing?

I was a very reluctant reader as a boy and couldn't find anything in book form that was as interesting to me or as compelling as films, tv, and video games. Luckily, I had a librarian who stuck with me and gave me a book called *After The Bomb* – about a post-nuclear Los Angeles – and it was the first time I wanted to stay awake late to find out what happened in the story. I remember my Dad yelling at me for staying up so late. Once he switched off the light, I had a flashlight to keep reading. That's the feeling that inspired me to write a thriller: to get kids in trouble with their parents for wanting to keep reading. When you care about characters, you don't want to leave them. That's the inspiration.

Meeting The Mentor

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

I'm pretty disciplined and I start each day at 7:30, with a coffee, at my local coffee shop. I squat (rent free...well, price of a latte) there for exactly three hours when I either decamp for the Swiss Cottage library or back to the office at my house. I generally don't stop for lunch, simply warm up soup in a mug and power through, and stop by about three in the afternoon. Later, after I help get the kids to bed, I'm on conference calls for the show, which is a blast. Talking about animation is so much fun.

When I travel, I do get a lot of writing done on airplanes, but less on trains because I gaze out the window and the countryside – the UK is beautiful to look at from the train.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you working on new anything at the moment?

I'm really excited! My next book is called *Memoirs Of A Neurotic Zombie* and it's the story of a twelve year old boy with OCD called Adam Meltzer who rises to the grave to solve his own murder – teaming up with a vegan vampire and an untidy chupacabra! It's very funny, awkward, a bit gross...just like middle school itself!

Thanks, Jeff!

You can follow Jeff at his website:

www.jeffnorton.com

or on Twitter: www.twitter.com/thejeffnorton

His books are available in all bookshops or [online](#).

Meeting The Mentor

Samantha Tonge

Samantha Tonge is the Author of *Doubting Abbey* and a regular contributor to *People's Friend*. She spoke about her writing, insomnia and never giving up.

Tell me about *Doubting Abbey*!

Doubting Abbey is the story of pizza waitress, Gemma, who must pass herself off as aristocratic Abbey for two weeks, in order to win reality show *Million Dollar Mansion* and save rundown Applebridge Hall – without blowing her cover or falling for gorgeous but uptight Lord Edward!

How did you come up with the idea?

It was inspired by the TV series *Downton Abbey*. It fascinated me how this historical series could become so hugely popular, on a global scale, and made me wonder how a modern gal would survive in such a stuffy, emotionally restrained atmosphere

Meeting The Mentor

You are a prolific writer of short stories. Have you found that your writing process differs when writing novels?

Not really – writing short stories has really helped me with novels (I started writing novels first) and I think of each chapter as a short story – its beginning and end are particularly important and what's in between must be well structured, with every word counting. I don't approach a novel as one whole opus, I take it chapter by chapter. Insomnia helps as well – I think up shorts during the night and with the novel, the next scene!

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I am about half way through the sequel to Doubting Abbey and having SO MUCH fun as Gemma is a bit of a bonkers character! I, um, just hope my editor likes it as much as I do!

Meeting The Mentor

What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever been given?

Never give up – hard advice to take when the umpteenth rejection has come in, but in my opinion, the only difference between a published and unpublished writer (if it is publication they are seeking) is sticking power.

You can visit Samantha on her website at samanthatonge.co.uk or at her blog: <http://doubtingabbey.blogspot.co.uk/> . Doubting Abbey is available [online](#).

Sarah Fader

Sarah Fader is the mother of two behind OldSchoolNewSchoolMom, a blog about parenting, and she also writes for the Huffington Post. She took time to answer my questions about blog writing.

Meeting The Mentor

My blog was created in April 2009. Initially I started writing a blog because I wanted a way to document my life with my son who was (at the time) 11 months old. I've been a writer since I was six-years-old and my mother taught me to use her electric typewriter. My best friend Mint and I spent an hour on the phone trying to come up with a name for the blog. I'm a child of the 80s and have a penchant for all things nostalgic, hence the concept of "old school." However, I'm not stuck in the past, and I welcome the advantages of technology. I love my iPhone (although I did recently proclaim on Facebook that we were getting a divorce, but that was due to the battery life) and my children are obsessed with the iPad. I believe it's important to read to your kids, but they're also not going to be permanently damaged from watching television. As a child growing up in the 1980's, I watched so much TV, and I turned out pretty good. Anyway, back to my blog. It started out as an anecdotal journey, and then it developed into an online community for me

Meeting The Mentor

I started sharing real life stories about my struggles with panic disorder and depression and readers came out of the woodwork to support me. I have many blogging friends from all over the world. What you'll find on OS/NS Mom is a variety of content. One day I could be sharing a story about panic, another day I'm making you laugh with a hilarious kid anecdote, and yet another day I'm doing a product review for something I really love and want you to love too!

When and why did you start blogging?

I started blogging as a way to keep an online journal. It was my first time becoming a parent, and I wanted a way to release my feelings of euphoria and frustration. It was different than a real tangible journal, because I had in mind that fact that I was writing for an audience. When you are aware that others are reading your work, even if it's just your friends in the beginning, you tend to take the work more seriously.

At first just my friends and family read my blog and gradually over the years, other people began to follow :)

Meeting The Mentor

How did you come to work with HuffPost? I wrote a piece for OS/NS mom called "My Son is Brony." It was about my son Ari, who is five-years-old, loves My Little Pony. In the article I discussed the idea of labels and gender norms. The post went viral in three days. It was overwhelming and awesome. I'd submitted it to HuffPost for publication and hadn't heard back. So I followed up with the team over there and they advised me that they had published my piece! I was so excited. It was a wonderful day for me.

They then created me with a Blogger User Name so that I could continue to submit posts for review. I love blogging for HuffPost. They are a joy to write for.

Meeting The Mentor

What blogs/type of blogs do you read?

I read a variety of parenting blogs. I prefer real raw and honest stories. Here are two of my favorites:

The Fevered Pen and Trauma Dad:

<http://thefeveredpen.wordpress.com>

<http://traumadad.blogspot.com>

Meeting The Mentor

A recent piece you wrote (3 year olds are *holes) went viral! What does that feel like?**

Surreal. It is overwhelming and surreal and awesome. The weirdest part about that whole experience is that I was one step away from rescinding the piece. Before this article went viral, I'd written a piece for HuffPost called Stop Calling Assertive Women Bitches. That got 10K likes on Facebook and a variety of Internet commentary arose. I became hesitant to publish 3-Year-Olds are Assholes because I was worried about what people would think. Would they hate me? Well, I'm glad I didn't remove the post. The reaction from parents has been overwhelmingly positive. I've only had a handful of dissenters and they seem to have missed the point of the piece. I'll stick with the folks that get it.

Do you think it is necessary to write a 'controversial' piece to get people talking?

Meeting The Mentor

I don't think it's necessary, however I tend to write this way. I write my feelings. Sometimes my feelings are raw. I push myself to be honest when it's hard to express myself. I'll get a nagging feeling that something needs to be said and that something usually is somewhat provocative.

What one piece of advice would you give to new bloggers trying to get noticed on the net? Keep writing. Don't give up. Do what you love. Remember that you're going to feel moody about blogging. One day you'll love the feedback you're getting and another day, no one will comment on your post and you'll feel discouraged. But do not give up. Make friends online. Read other people's blogs and comment on them. Reach out to other bloggers via email or Twitter and ask what they thought about your post. Compliment great writing online when you see it. Most importantly, be yourself. The Internet can sense someone who isn't genuine and it will call your ass out. Find your voice and use it!

Meeting The Mentor

**Thanks Sarah! Sarah's blog is
www.oldschoolnewschoolmom.com and check
her out on www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-
fader/**

Meeting The Mentor

Kate Maryon

Kate Maryon writes books for children, and is the author of

Shine, Glitter, A Million Angels, A Sea of Stars,
and her latest, *Invisible Girl*

. She spoke about writers, writing, and inspiration.

Tell me about *Invisible Girl*!

Invisible Girl is about 12 year-old Gabriella Midwinter who finds herself abandoned and living on the streets in Manchester. It's been endorsed by [The Big Issue Foundation](#) and the [Railway Children](#) charity and we're working together to raise awareness of the realities faced by child who runs away (one child every five minutes runs, which equals 100,000 children a year). [Mumsnet](#) recommend it as a book to use as a resource for parents to use to open up the runaway conversation with their kids.

Meeting The Mentor

Which writer were you most inspired by?

Mmmm, as a child I loved books and read thousands of them - I'm not so sure for me at that age that I was concerned with the author - I more related to the story. Now I am inspired by David Almond and Meg Rosoff but I've been likened to Jacqueline Wilson so I guess she's in the inspiration pot too!

Do you plan your work, or do you just start writing?

I just start writing - I get very close to the character and let them tell me their story. Any planning comes retrospectively.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

I've been concentrating on picture book text for the past few months and have some coming out next year. I've played around with a few ideas for novels but they've not caught my attention enough to continue, until this week, that is, and I've discovered a lovely character - I'm about to begin writing her this afternoon!

Meeting The Mentor

What is the best piece of writing advice you've been given?

Write what you know, write what you love, write, write write.

Thanks Kate! You can find out more about Kate at her website. Invisible Girl is available online and from all good bookshops.

Katie Green

Katie Green is the writer and illustrator of *Lighter Than My Shadow*, a brilliantly honest graphic memoir which took over five years to complete. She spoke about her work and inspirations.

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Katie. Tell me about *Lighter Than My Shadow*.

Lighter Than My Shadow started out as the vague idea to write the book about recovery from anorexia that hadn't been there for me. It evolved as my recovery took in some unexpected and unpleasant twists and turns and became a hope to be unflinchingly honest about what it's like to live with eating disorders, to experience sexual abuse, and what it takes to rebuild your life afterwards.

I knew it had to be in visual form after reading my first graphic novel (*Maus* by Art Spiegelman). I'd always had trouble expressing my feelings in words - this was part of why I developed an eating disorder - so I hoped that exploring the issues in metaphorical language might be more immediate and more affecting, or at least express things differently than a verbal account.

Meeting The Mentor

You produce the Green Bean. What do you write about in there and how did you get into making Zines?

The Green Bean is best described as a blog in paper form. It contains snippets of my everyday life, just things I love to draw, so includes everything from book reviews, short comics, recipes to craft projects and sewing patterns. I often document trips I've taken, or current obsessions. Recent issues have included 30 of my favourite memories in honour of my 30th birthday, a 100 mile walk in Yorkshire, and I'm working on one about my obsessions with knitting and Lego!

Which artist are you most inspired by?

I never fail to be blown away by the work of [Shaun Tan](#).

Meeting The Mentor

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

Meticulous. I try to maintain routine, showing up at my desk in my home studio by 9 every morning. Without that I flail around uselessly and never get anything done. This is not something I find difficult. It's harder for me to remember to leave the desk at the end of the day or at the weekend.

Are you working on anything at the moment?

I recently finished illustrating a collection of children's stories, *The Crystal Mirror*, written by Tim Malnick and published by Vala. It was wonderful to play with so much colour after years working in the greys of *Lighter Than My Shadow*. I've also been illustrating a chapter of *The Courage To Be Me*, a story of hope for survivors of sexual abuse by Nina Burrowes.

Thanks Katie!

Meeting The Mentor

Katie's website is www.katiegreen.co.uk You can order The Green Bean as well as signed copies of Katie's books from www.katiegreen.etsy.com And you can link up with her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

Sarah Hawkins

Sarah Hawkins is a Senior Editor at Hothouse Fiction [EDIT: Sarah has now moved on to work in other publishing companies] and has worked on hit books such as Secret Kingdom, Robot Races, and the new Maisie Mae books. She spoke about her job, editing, and space pirates.

Meeting The Mentor

Hi Sarah! Can you explain what a book packager does, and what your role is at Hothouse?

Packagers like Hothouse create series fiction and sell it to mainstream publishers. We come up with commercial concepts, plot out each book, and commission ghost writers to write them before giving them a good edit and sending them out to publishers. It's a great way for established writers to earn money by writing when they're in-between books, and great experience for new writers, who often go on to write books of their own.

My job is Senior Editor, so I'm in charge of a lot of series.

Meeting The Mentor

What does your average day entail?

It completely varies depending which books I'm working on and what stage they're at. So it can be anything from coming up with a detailed plotline for a new book, to checking layouts before a book goes off to print. We have brainstorming sessions about characters and concepts, so it's not unusual to have a meeting about dinosaurs, or a chat with colleagues to work out what would happen if a Space Pirate bowled a bowling ball around the rings of a planet (answer: it would roll all the way around the planet and get a strike, obviously!).

When we're looking for an author for one of our series we send it out to a selection of writers that have signed up on our website (www.hothousefiction.com). Then the editor narrows it down to three writers, and we all meet to ~~argue~~ discuss which we think is the best. All the samples are judged anonymously, so it's all about whether the voice is right for the concept.

Meeting The Mentor

We work closely with all the major publishers, so I'm often emailing them about a series we're working on.

What qualifications or experience do you need for your job?

Publishing is degree-entry, and then the only way to do it is to get work experience and work your way up, learning your editorial skills as you go. Being able to project-manage is a good skill to have, as are strong spelling and grammatical skills and a keen eye for spotting mistakes, but a passion for reading is essential.

Of all the books you've worked on, do you have any 'favourites'?

I'm very attached to all my books. You get to a stage where you know the characters so well that you would know what they'd eat for breakfast. The best thing about my job is the range of books I get to work on, and the brilliant writers I work with. I love it when a writer takes my concept and brings it to life in an exciting and surprising way.

Meeting The Mentor

What's the most common note or piece of advice you give to the writers you edit?

A standard publishing phrase is 'show, don't tell'. Make sure you show the reader what's happening by taking them through the action, rather than just telling them something happened.

Thank you so much for your time!

Check out the Hothouse Fiction website to see if writing for a book packager might be for you, and take a look at all their fab series of books. All their series are available to buy online or in your favourite bookshops.

Meeting The Mentor

Terri Nixon

Terri Nixon is the Plymouth-based author of *Maid of Oaklands Manor*. She spoke about her writing, myth, and the authors that inspire her.

Tell me about *Maid of Oaklands Manor*!

This book won the historical category of the Piatkus Entice Romantic Fiction awards in 2012, although, as you can see from the reviews, readers have suggested that category is perhaps misleading. It is deeply romantic, in places, but there's intrigue and mystery in there, and a strong element of the espionage thriller. We join Lizzy as she begins work in 1912 as a scullery maid in a large country house, and follow her as she reaches the lowest point in her life, and the most dangerous, and (hopefully!) cheer her on as she pushes through it all with a new realisation of her own strengths. People really seem to like and relate to Lizzy; my favourite review quote is from [Saskia Sarginson](#) (*The Twins*) who said: "Ms Nixon has created a heroine to fall in love with." I love that!

Meeting The Mentor

And tell us about Lynher Mill!

Lynher Mill is the name I've created for the setting of my Mythic Fiction series: The Lynher Mill Chronicles. It's based on the village of Minions, on Bodmin Moor, where I grew up, and it takes ancient Cornish folklore characters and twists it all together with modern life. There's a lot of mischievous, and some downright evil, playing with the weather, and three warring factions of elemental spirits – the Moorlanders, Coastals and Foresters. And then there are the mortals who get in their way, but who they reluctantly need.

This series is my 'baby,' if you like! It's been a lot of years in the writing, and no matter what else I've been doing, I always came back to it, and I believe in it SO strongly that I have self-published the first book, The Dust of Ancients, and the second, The Lightning and the Blade, is due out this June (2014.)

Meeting The Mentor

How do you write? Do you have a plan, a place, a time to write?

I work full-time, so any writing time is a luxury and I have to balance it with time spent promoting. It's bloomin' difficult! I just sit on my sofa with my laptop on a card table in front of me, and push the table away against the wall when I run out of time. Usually when I can't actually keep my eyes open any longer ... or it's time for Coronation Street!

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I'm working on book three of The Lynher Mill Chronicles, The Western War, and also the third book in the trilogy that started with Maid of Oaklands Manor. (The second, Lady of No Man's Land is currently out on submission with my agent, Kate Nash.) I also have a traditional Edwardian ghost story set in Helston, called Penhaligon's Attic, bubbling away on the back-burner.

Meeting The Mentor

Who/what are your writing influences?

I don't remember who made me first want to write, but when I read a [Stephen King](#) book, or a [Diana Gabaldon](#), or a [George Eliot](#), it definitely makes me want to write *better*. So I read them often. I hope it works!

You can find out more about Terri and her writing on her [website](#), and find her on [twitter](#) and [facebook](#). Her books are available [online](#)

Anna Wilson

Anna Wilson is a children's author from Bradford-on-Avon in the UK, where she lives with her husband, two children, two cats, some chickens and a dog. Her books include [I'm a Chicken, Get Me Out of Here!](#), [The Poodle Problem](#) and [Pup Idol](#). Her latest book, [Monkey Madness](#), is out now from Macmillan. She spoke all about monkeys, writing and kittens...

Meeting The Mentor

Tell me about *Monkey Madness!*

Felix has always wanted to see wild animals, such as lions and elephants, in their natural habitat, so when his dad has to go on a business trip to Africa, the family decide to make the most of it and go on a safari. Felix is over the moon! But his best friend, Flo, is not so over the moon when she finds out she is not coming with them. In fact, she is so cross, she sets Felix an impossible task as a punishment for leaving her behind - he must bring her back a real, live, baby monkey! When Felix protests, Flo simply says, 'If there is no monkey, Felix, then there will be No More Us.' Poor Felix spends the whole holiday trying to work out how he can carry out Flo's impossible request so that they will still be friends on his return.

Meeting The Mentor

How did you come up with the idea?

Monkey Madness is the sequel to *Monkey Business* which I wrote three years ago. Both books were inspired by my son's love of wild animals. When he was seven he was convinced he could have his own zoo in the back garden and he was going to get the animals from Longleat Safari Park, 'because they have too many there already'. That was the basis for Felix and Flo's adventures in *Monkey Business*! In *Monkey Madness* Felix, gets to go on a safari to Botswana. The idea for his came from our own family holiday to Botswana. I wrote a diary while I was there and could not help thinking that Felix would have loved to go on a safari too. So I started making notes on the idea for the second book.

Meeting The Mentor

What's it like when you get to meet your fans?

It is wonderful! I love to hear which bits of my stories the readers like the most - and which bits they do not like so much! One girl was very concerned about one of my characters in my book *I'm A Chicken, Get Me Out of Here!* The character is called Meena and she is, well, pretty mean. The reader asked me, 'Does Meena get what's coming to her in the end?' I was able to reassure her that Meena does not get away with being horrible, so thankfully the reader was happy to go on and finish the book and told me she had enjoyed it.

What's your writing process?

Writing is my job, and so I treat it like a job - I have a strict routine. I get up, take my son to school, feed the animals (we have a lot of pets!), take the dog for a run, and then crack on with writing. I sit at my desk on the landing in my house which has a lovely view of a huge old beech tree. I find the view is never the same as the sky changes with the weather and the tree changes with the seasons. I can get distracted watching the squirrels fight, but most of the time it's a good place to write.

Meeting The Mentor

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I certainly am - I have a crazy deadline for a new book for Macmillan which will be out in the summer. All I can say at the moment is that it features a girl and a kitten and an awful lot of baking . . . Look out for more details on my website later in the year!

**Find out more about Anna at www.annawilson.co.uk
Monkey Madness is available in all good bookshops and **online**:**

Tim Bowler

Tim Bowler is the Carnegie Medal winning author of *River Boy*, *Starseeker*, *Apocalypse* and the sublime *Blade* series, to name but a few. He was kind enough to answer some questions about his work, his writing process, and his new book, *Sea of Whispers*.

Meeting The Mentor

Tell me about *Sea of Whispers*.

Sea of Whispers began long before I put down any words. I started writing the novel in 2010 but the images of sea glass that haunt the dreams of fifteen-year-old Hetty came many years before that when I was on holiday on the island of Bryher in the Scillies and my wife said that she wanted to go down to the beach to see if there was any sea glass worth collecting.

There weren't any decent pieces – just a few nondescript shards from a broken bottle which we left on the sand – but as we walked about the beach searching, a picture slipped into the story-making part of my mind: of beautiful sea glass washed up on the shore; and then I forgot about it and went away and for several years wrote other stories. By the time 2010 had come along and Hetty's story was whispering inside my head and demanding to be written, I found that the pictures of sea glass had returned, together with echoes from my life that I knew would affect the way I approached the book.

Meeting The Mentor

You were a teacher before becoming a full-time writer. Did this help your writing, in knowing what your audience liked?

I'm not sure. Maybe it helped but I like teenagers and find them fascinating anyway and I'd have liked them and found them fascinating without being a teacher. I think my interest in the teenage mind is more deeply connected to powerful memories from my own teenage years: that, probably, rather than having been a teacher, though I very much enjoyed working with young people during my teaching days.

When you write a book, do you plan the story?

Meeting The Mentor

I don't find plotting helpful. In fact, I find it blocks me and freezes my imagination. The physical act of writing is often so fruitful in itself that the plot changes by the sentence and I like to stay loose and be able to react to that. Some people see this as chaos but I just see it as the subconscious sharing its richness and fecundity and offering different ways in which the story can go. At some point in this process, I get a sense of the true north of the story, i.e. the way it wants to go. This is often very different from the way my clever little ego-driven conscious mind might have wanted it to go, especially if it has been working to a pre-arranged plot. Having said all that, it's important to remember that this is just my approach. Many top writers plot in detail and swear by it, so it clearly works for them. I advise people interested in writing to experiment and see what works best for them. If plotting helps, that's great. Go ahead and plot, then write your story. If plotting doesn't help and you prefer to dive in and swim around and find your way more intuitively through the story, then that's fine too. All that matters is that the story works in the end. How you achieve that is immaterial.

Meeting The Mentor

The novel took a long time to write, there were many different drafts, and the mystical, elegiac nature of the story made it an emotional tale to tell. Hetty is a strong-minded yet highly sensitive girl and I found myself anxious to do her justice as she struggles to come to terms with her ancient grief, conquer her doubts and stand up to those who mock her. *Sea of Whispers* is about many things – fear, prejudice, love, loss, hope and more – but ultimately it is the story of a young girl's courage and her quest to understand the deepest mystery of all.

Are you writing anything at the moment?

I'm working on three main projects at the moment. I'm finishing the edit of a novel that is due out next year, I'm half-way through the first draft of another novel, and I'm putting together material for some fiction for younger readers. I've also got a new book out this August called *Night Runner*. So I'm keeping busy.

Meeting The Mentor

What one piece of advice would you give to emerging writers?

Keep writing, keep learning your craft, and keep doing that all through your life. Even when you don't believe in yourself, keep writing. You learn about writing by writing. Good writing, bad writing – both have something to teach us if we are receptive. Writing nothing teaches us nothing. So write, write, write, and refuse to quit when it goes badly. Often your best pieces are the ones you had to fight hardest for.

Thanks Tim! You can find out more about Tim at his [website](#). *Sea of Whispers* is out now from OUP and is available [online](#) and in all good bookshops

Shoo Rayner

Shoo Rayner is an author, illustrator and helluva nice guy whose titles include *Olympia*, *Cat and Dog*, *Viking Vik* and *Just so stories*. He was kind enough to talk to me about his career and process.

Meeting The Mentor

Which do you enjoy most, writing or drawing?

Drawing comes more naturally, I don't think twice about picking up a pencil. I failed English language and literature "O"levels three times. Now I know I display all sorts of dyslexic weirdness, but over the years I've developed my own strategies for getting what is in my head into legible text.

The dyslexic kids in the classes I visit get my method of planning right away, the writers in the class tend not to. I start writing by drawing pictures of the characters. I wonder if I'd been taught these strategies when I was young, whether I'd have had a more sensible career.

I don't fear writing. When I get an idea, I'm pretty confident that I will get it finished on time.

Which writer or artist were you most inspired by?

Colin McNaughton taught me at art college and introduced me to children's books, but it was Maurice Sendak's, *Where the Wild Things Are* that really knocked me out. I'd never seen it before I found it in the college library. I think I'm over it now and have stopped trying to write my own version.

Meeting The Mentor

I really learned to write when illustrating books for Rose Impey and Michael Morpurgo. Dissecting their texts to decide where the pictures would go, I worked out how they constructed their stories. Sometimes I can hear their voice in my earlier books.

What's your work schedule like? Do you have regular times, places, etc, or can you work anytime, anywhere?

I visit lots of schools and I have my twice weekly drawing video production schedule for [YouTube](#) too, so I have to be very disciplined. I'm always reallocating time and schedules in my head and on my wall planner. I get upset if I'm late or I run over. After a three day school trip somewhere I will be pretty pooped when I get back. There's all the email and web stuff to do. Life was so much better in the old days with two postal deliveries a day and a photocopier in the town library!

Meeting The Mentor

Are you working on anything at the moment?

I've just finished the final artwork, this afternoon, for a book called Dragon Gold, that I've written for Firefly Press, the soon to be brand new and first children's publisher in Wales. I'm really excited about this because it's the longest book I've ever written, at 20,000 words, and I'm thrilled and honoured to have been asked to be one of Firefly's very first authors. It should be out in May

Then I will be embarking on my new six book series for Orchard, called Roman Brit. Set in the fag end of the Roman Empire, they will be fun stories with lots of animals and incidental roman history hidden in there somewhere.

In the meantime, I'm working on a learn to draw book which I will be publishing myself.

Thanks, Shoo!

Shoo has a website at www.shoorayner.com and an amazing amount of 'how to draw' videos on his YouTube channel:

<http://www.youtube.com/shooraynerdrawing>

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