

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Name:

Sue Clark

Do you have a pen name?

No

Book titles – What are the titles of the books you have written or are currently writing?

Note to Boy, published (Unbound) July 2020.

The Ochre Pit, provisional title, work in progress.

The title of this interview is 'Every writer has a story'. Tell us a bit about you and your story leading up to becoming an author.

For thirty or so years, I earned my living as a journalist, PR copywriter and editor. Creative and enjoyable though these jobs were, they were not what I wanted to do. What I really wanted to do was write comedy.

So, alongside the 'grown-up' work, I contributed scripts to BBC radio and TV light entertainment shows, putting funny lines in the mouths of performers such as Tracey Ullman, Lenny Henry and David Jason.

But it wasn't until a few years back, when I was able to give up the day job(s), that I was able to fulfil my dream and write a comic novel. It took a while to find an agent and a publisher – not to mention a lifetime of learning the craft of writing – but I got there in the end.

Note to Boy is my debut novel. I'm planning more.

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

Who or what are your main influencers and why?

Both my parents wrote little stories, poems and reminiscences for their own amusement. So I guess it's in the blood.

Getting comedy right is tricky. It's a question of technique and nuance. The wrong word, the wrong emphasis, and the humour is killed stone dead. So I read, watch and listen to a heck of a lot of comedy, in the hope, I suppose, that comic genius is catching like chicken pox.

I read and reread the classics: P G Wodehouse, Richmal Crompton, Tom Sharpe, Sue Townsend, Douglas Adams. I watch the best of the sitcom writers: Andy Hamilton, Graham Linehan, Paul Mayhew Archer. I love sketch shows, particularly on the radio: current favourites are John Finnemore and The Pin.

And I have a special place in my heart for Count Arthur Strong, the creation of Steve Delaney. I see the Count and Eloise Slaughter, a character in my book – both inveterate 'mord wurderers' – as kindred spirits.

What inspired your books?

In the late 60s and early 70s, I was a bright young thing living in Central London around the corner from Carnaby Street. I'll pause here while you say *Surely not. But you look so young!* All around me, London was in full swing. Furthermore, I was working for an American film company and bumping into stars like Sean Connery and David Niven.

How could the excesses of those times not find their way into *Note to Boy*, via the memoirs of the flamboyant, former celebrity, Eloise? Eloise, by the way, is partly modelled on the fashion journalist, now artist, the outrageous Molly Parkin. If you think Eloise is over the top ...

My other main character, in contrast, is Bradley, a withdrawn and damaged teenager. I wanted to show, through him, that you should never underestimate anyone, particularly the young. My inspiration for him was every resentful, half-reckless, half-terrified teenager there ever was, including myself.

When we meet them, both characters have become invisible to the rest of society but together, eventually, they make a formidable, if unconventional – and certainly un-ignorable – team.

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

Tell us about your latest published book:

Note to Boy was published by Unbound in July 2020.

Eloise, once a rich and famous 'shock frock' fashionista, has fallen on hard times. She lives alone – consoled only by her best friend, the gin bottle – in a chaotic Bayswater flat.

Into her life slouches Bradley, a neglected but wily teenager from the wrong side of town. He is looking for an escape from his brutal home life.

Eloise wants her celebrity life back. Bradley just wants a life.

Fate brings them together when Eloise decides she wants to remake her fortune and wreak revenge on her enemies by writing a tell-all autobiography.

Both guard secrets. How did she lose her fame and fortune? What is he scheming, beyond getting his hands on her bank card? And just what's hidden in that mysterious locked room?

It's a story of faded fame and unlikely friendship, with lots of laughter and a few tears.

Tell us about your work in progress:

My current work in progress – tentatively called *The Ochre Pit* – is another comic fiction, this time with thriller-ish overtones.

Trish loses her job, her husband, the respect of her daughters and a tooth, all in a few days. After a chance meeting, Trish pins her hopes on overbearing local author, Amanda Turner, as the one who'll help restore her self-respect and get her life back on track.

But as time goes on, it begins to dawn on Trish that it is Amanda, not her, who needs help.

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

Which part of the writing process do you enjoy, and which parts do you dread?

Novel writing is a joy. And a torture.

Drafting a novel is fun, liberating and self-indulgent. Shaping that draft into an actual book is tough but rewarding. Working with an editor to polish it is joyful. Probably for the first time, you have an experienced professional on your side, who gets what you want to say and wants to help you say it in the best way possible.

Marketing it after publication has proved to be pure torture! The key to humour is timing, right? So what do you say about an author whose comic novel is launched in the teeth of a global pandemic? Apart from, 'Oops!'. With no live events possible and no bookshops open, marketing my book is, to say the least, demanding, even with my background in PR.

But I'm gritting my teeth and getting on with it. And my reward is, I've had enough positive responses to *Note to Boy* from readers, writers and bloggers to encourage me to go through the process all over again with another book. Did I really just write that?

What is your greatest strength/weakness when it comes to writing?

My sense of humour is both my strength and my weakness! Let me explain.

I wanted *Note to Boy* to be funny. I wanted to make the reader laugh. And what makes people laugh? Why jokes of course! So, in early drafts every now and then I'd feel obliged to write in a little gag or quip to keep the laughs coming. Big mistake!

I found the jokes were getting in the way of the story. Worse, they weren't always in keeping with the characters or the tone of a scene. I had to learn to rein myself in, be sparing with the funny stuff, and use it only if it moved the narrative along or illuminated a character.

Oh, and I'm messy. My desk is messy. My first drafts are very messy. I think the neurotransmitters in my brain must be messy. But that's all right. I can always tidy up later. Except my brain. I'm stuck with that.

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

Do you have a favourite author, and do you write the same genre?

I have quite a few! If I had to choose one today – and my choice will probably be different tomorrow – I'd go for Nine Stibbe. Her *Reasons to be Cheerful* is, hands down, the funniest book I've ever read about DIY dentistry in 1980s Leicester!

I like her work because, without being too brown-nosey, we write similar first-person, deluded and unreliable narrator comedy. You cringe for the characters but you love them all the same. And she does make me laugh!

I'm also a sucker for anything by David Nicholls and Lissa Evans, who both write the sort of funny/serious fiction that I love and aspire to. And if I feel a lust for gore, it's Val McDermid every time.

How do you measure your success as an author?

Gosh! That's a big question. Just being published counts as success to me.

Beyond that, I guess I measure it by the laughs. I don't think I'll ever get over the thrill of hearing that people have actually laughed – occasionally even LOL-ed – at *Note to Boy*. Oh, the power!

I'd be lying if I didn't say I'd love for it to be a best-seller but the market is so competitive and crowded at the moment – 600 books were released *in one day* in September 2020!

If you're not an off-the-telly author or already have a huge following, it's difficult to make your voice heard above the clamour. So I'll be realistic and settle for just making some people laugh.

Writing is very time consuming; how do you fit it into your daily routine?

What can I say? My children are grown up and independent. I no longer need to have a full-time job. My husband and I don't mind a scruffy house and a ready meal now and then. We don't even have a dog. I have no excuse not to write!

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

What advice would you give to someone thinking of writing a novel?

Believe in yourself and stick at it.

Don't give up because you can't see where your story is going. Don't give up because you've lost confidence. Don't give up because it's so much harder than you ever imagined it would be. Just keep going and finish the bally thing. Then put right everything that's wrong.

Published authors come in many shapes and sizes but one thing they all have in common: they didn't give up.

Finally: Your chance to advertise your work.

List your links below.

@SueClarkAuthor

<https://sueclarkauthor.com>

<https://uk.bookshop.org/books/note-to-boy/9781789650938>

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Note-Boy-Sue-Clark/dp/1789650933>

<https://www.amazon.com/Note-to-Boy/dp/1789650933/>

<https://www.facebook.com/sueclarkauthor/>

EVERY AUTHOR HAS A STORY

Add your photograph to let the readers put a face to the name.

