



Sample Q & A for adults

Could you introduce yourself please?

My full name is Julia Edwards. I'm a children's author, or if I'm being very specific, an independent children's author.

Tell us a little about yourself and your family life

I grew up in the New Forest in Hampshire, read Modern Languages at Cambridge, and then worked as an Orchestral Touring Manager in London.

When I was in my twenties, my husband and I moved to Cardiff, and I started to write, though I was still working from home for my old company. I was a finalist in a writing competition run by the BBC called 'End of Story', and then spent the next few years working on my first novel for adults, called *Time Was Away*, which is now on Amazon.

I had my first son in 2008, and my second in 2011, after we had moved to Salisbury. Friends of mine with older children commented that they would like to find more books they could read to their sons and daughters together. When I returned to work after maternity leave (still working in orchestral touring), I began to think about writing a children's series to meet this need. I've always loved the thought of time-travel, and the idea for *The Scar Gatherer* series came to me, almost fully formed, very quickly.

In January 2013, I gave up my job and wrote the first book in the series, *The Leopard in the Golden Cage*, which came out two weeks before my third son was born, in March 2014.

Can you briefly sum up what *The Scar Gatherer* series is about?

When Joe Hopkins slips through time by mistake, and finds himself in Roman Britain, it's the start of a sequence of adventures that see him riding with Vikings, hunting with Tudors, and hoping to save London from the Great Fire. In book five, he faced some of the most powerful men of 18th century England, the slave traders, and in the sixth book, he encountered the Victorians' peculiar death rituals. In the final book, *The Ring from the Ruins*, he is thrown into the teeth of the Blitz. The question is: will he survive?

Do you write full time?

I combine writing (and all the associated tasks of the independent author) with looking after my sons. I would love to be able to spend more time writing, but I'm aware that my children are growing up fast, so now is the time for them.

How did you come to this place in your life? How did you become a writer?

I started to write as a hobby, and found that I really enjoyed it. To begin with, it was little bits of improvisation, where you just write freely. Then I wrote some short stories. That's much harder than people realise. They think because it's short, it must be easy. But actually, you have to communicate a huge amount in very few words.

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Early on, I did the NaNoWriMo challenge (which stands for National Novel Writing Month), where you write a 50,000 word novel during November. I don't know where that novel is - buried in the attic somewhere, maybe - but it helped me to learn the discipline of writing. I think the first thing you have to learn is how to keep writing even when you don't want to, and when what you produce feels like it's rubbish; and the second thing is to finish what you're working on. I know lots of people who've started a novel. But if you don't finish something, nothing can come of it.

The next big step in becoming a writer is sharing what you've written with someone else. After NaNoWriMo, I started work on a proper novel. When I'd finished the second or third draft, a good friend read it for me, and sent me his comments. There were a lot of things he criticised, but he was careful to be constructive, and his objectivity was really helpful. I realised that I could actually write, and I could improve what I'd written if I listened to him. At the same time, I joined a short story writing circle online. There were 8 of us, plus a writing tutor, and we each wrote a story every month, and critiqued each others' stories. That was great practice in how to deal with criticism, and I got a lot better at it, as well as learning lots about how to write better.

It was still a huge leap to deciding to give up my job and write. Everyone will tell you, don't give up the day job, and they're right! Whether you go down the traditional publishing route, or take the indie route, it will be a few years before you start earning money from it, and it may never be enough to be a living! You're better off writing in the evenings and at weekends, whenever you can. But I'd been doing that for ten years, so I decided to take the plunge. My husband agreed to support me, and it took no time at all for me to recognise that I was so much happier working as a writer.

What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

As an independent author, my work is fantastically varied. I have [a website for my work](#), which I update regularly. I also do my own marketing and promotion, finance, distribution management, and book production. I didn't design the covers for *The Scar Gatherer* books - they were produced by Peter O'Connor at [bespokebookcovers.com](#) - but I've designed the covers for *Time was Away*, and also for *Unlucky for Some* (with the help of the illustrator, Evgenia Malina).

As a children's author, I also go into schools quite often. I was slightly nervous the first time I did it and I had an Ofsted inspector observing my second ever session! Fortunately, he liked it, and the children have always been really positive. I love it now, and quite often speak to very large groups of children (sometimes as many as 400 in one session). I've been a Patron of Reading and Writing at a number of schools over the last few years, which is fantastic, as you get to work with the same children over and over again, and I also had my first workshops abroad in 2019.

Self-publishing vs traditional publisher - would you like to be taken on by, say, Random House or someone?

If a traditional publishing house came to me with a good offer, I'm sure I'd take it! One of the most difficult things about being an independent author is getting your name known. People tend to buy books they've heard of, but I don't have a huge publicity budget to splash out all over the London Underground! I imagine that would be the area where a traditional publisher would probably help me most.

On the other hand, I really like having total control over the project. I can access sales information for every single day, so I'm not sitting at home, wondering whether my publisher is doing anything, not knowing whether my books are selling or where. On balance, I'm very happy as an independent author.

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Who are or were your influences artistically? And what do you admire about them?

My favourite children's book is *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. I love the characters and the arc of the story - it's a book with a really big heart; *Holes* by Louis Sachar has the most perfect structure of any book I've ever read; and I also love books that have a strong sense of place and mood. I recently read *The Lie Tree* by Frances Hardinge, which has an amazing feeling of darkness and isolation. I found it totally compelling!

Tell us about one of your most prized possessions?

I think the object I could least bear to get rid of would be my flute. I played it until I was in my twenties. I hardly ever play it these days, so I'm very rusty. But it's a part of who I used to be, and when I do get it out, I still get a lot of pleasure from playing it.

What's your earliest childhood memory?

Falling into a frog pond aged 6, and desperately swimming to the side (even though it was only about 2 feet deep), because I was afraid of stepping on a frog. When my parents saw me all bedraggled, they burst out laughing. I was really cross and upset, but now I'm a parent myself, I know I would laugh too!

What always makes you laugh?

The book I most wish I had written, which is called *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Schaffer. That book makes me laugh out loud over and over, every time I read it.

What's your indulgence of choice?

Smoked salmon. My sister-in-law once gave me what she thought was a month's supply for my birthday. Two days later, it was all gone.

What issue gets you on your soapbox?

The last government's insistence on 11 year old children learning endless pointless grammatical analysis. A bit of basic grammar is a good thing - when I came to learn other languages, I had to learn what nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs were because my generation wasn't taught much grammar. But kids now have to learn about noun phrases and fronted adverbials, and all manner of other things that seem completely pointless to me. It paralyses children when they come to write, because they're terrified of making mistakes. We should be freeing our children's imaginations and helping them to communicate what's in their heads, not fencing them in with elaborate technical jargon.

Tell us something eccentric about you that might surprise people!

I once made an 18 inch long motorised rat.

For more information about Julia's books or school visits, go to www.juliaedwardsbooks.com.

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