

When you tell people you're an author, you may get a raised eyebrow or an 'ooo-get-you' look but it's when you tell them you're

self-published that they start treating you like a rare species. Julia Edwards is an independent children's author and, fresh from the Waterstones launch of her fourth book, she opens up to us about the mysterious world she inhabits...

Are you Salisbury born and bred?

Not exactly but I did grow up in Lyndhurst. I read Modern Languages at Cambridge, and then worked as an Orchestral Touring Manager in London but all the time I was away I missed the New Forest. When my husband got a job back in the area, I was delighted.

These days, which part of the region do you call home?

I live in Laverstock, and I really like it – feels like a village, but very close to Salisbury. We have a house with a huge garden and a river, where we will live for the rest of our lives. And – a sight that always lifts my heart - we can see the cathedral spire from the garden.

Tell us about your writing

I'm writing a series for eight- to 12-year-old children. *The Scar Gatherer* begins when Joe Hopkins slips through time and finds himself in Roman Britain. It's the start of a sequence of adventures that see him riding with vikings, hunting with the Tudors, and trying to save London from the greatest threat it has ever faced. I've just published the fourth book, *The Demon in the Embers*.

How did you find writing – or did it find you?

I started to write as a hobby: to begin with, it was bits of improvisation and some short stories. Early on, I did the NaNoWriMo challenge (National Novel Writing Month), where you write a 50,000 word novel during November. I have no intention of ever looking at that novel again but the process definitely helped me to learn the discipline of writing!

Any tips for wannabe writers?

I've two: write even when you don't feel like it and finish what you're working on.



JULIA EDWARDS

The upside of being a self-published author is a flexible life and total control over your leather-bound beauties, Julia Edwards explains

People talk about turning points in their lives. What prompted you to move from hobbyist writer to jobbing author?

It was a huge leap giving up my job to write. 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 for as long as you can bear to. But when I finally left my job after 10 years of part-time writing, my husband and I had already agreed that he would support me while I took the plunge. I was so much happier working as a writer.

What's involved in self-publishing?

As an independent author, my work is varied. I wrote my own website ready for the publication of *The Scar Gatherer* series, which I update regularly, and overhaul every time I have a new book out. I also do my own marketing and promotion, finance, distribution management, and book production.

The only thing I don't do is design the covers. When I decided to publish the series myself, I knew I would have to get a really good cover for the first book. I was impressed by the range of covers by Peter O'Connor at bespokebookcovers.com. In some ways, it's the most exciting part of the project, receiving his design for each new book! I can't wait until I've got all seven books!

Whose writing do you love?

I really like books with a strong sense of place and mood, whether they're adult books or for children. *The Dark is Rising* series for older children by Susan Cooper is fantastic for that, and really exciting, as is Philip Pullman's wonderful *Northern Lights* trilogy.

What issue gets you on your soapbox?

The government's insistence on children learning endless pointless grammar. The basics are a good thing but the trouble is it paralyses children when they write because they're terrified of making mistakes. We should be freeing our children's imaginations and helping them communicate what's in their heads, not fencing them in with technical jargon.

Tell us about one of your most prized possessions

My flute. I played it until I was in my twenties but I don't play it often these days, so I'm very rusty which is rather sad. But now and then, I get it out and play it all the same. My dad is a very good pianist, and just last month, we played through some of the old pieces we used to play together. It was a huge pleasure!

What's your favourite place to eat in the area?

We have a bit of a takeaway habit – you'll find me at Hox Brasserie collecting our dinner every couple of weeks at least. My great food passion, though, is sushi. If a sushi shop opened here, I would try to single-handedly keep it open!

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 every time I reread it.

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. **SL**

www.scargatherer.co.uk