



# JULIA EDWARDS

## 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*. It took me 6 weeks to write the first draft. Then I tried to think of a title. (I always write all or most of a book before I have the title.) I came up with this title as a metaphor for the situation that one of the main characters lives in. However, there was no leopard in the first draft of the book! I realised that for children, a wholly metaphorical title is no good - there had to be an actual leopard in a golden cage. I knew where it would fit in, so I wrote it into the second draft.

In September of the same year, I began writing the second book, *Saving the Unicorn's Horn*. That book was more difficult to write, and it took three months to write the first draft. Around the same time, I decided to publish the series myself as an independent author. *The Leopard in the Golden Cage* 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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?

## Contact

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## **Do you write full time?**

I combine writing (and all the associated tasks of the independent author) with looking after my children who are 11, 8 and 5. I would love to be able to spend more time writing, but I know that my children won't be young forever, 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.

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. I'm sure it's really terrible! 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 feel like it; 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 created my own website for the series, which I update regularly, and overhaul completely every time I have a new book out. I also do my own marketing and promotion, finance, distribution management, and book production. There are all sorts of companies out there offering every service you might need, but I prefer to keep tight control over the project. 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

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a really good cover for the first book. I was really impressed by the range of covers produced by Peter O'Connor at [bespokebookcovers.com](http://bespokebookcovers.com). He understood exactly what I needed, and got it right first time. He has since produced another six stunning covers for the series.

As a children's author, I also go into schools quite often. I was really nervous the first time I did it - standing up in front of ninety children is a bit scary when you haven't done it before. I even had an Ofsted inspector observing one of my earliest sessions! Fortunately, the children have always been really positive, and I love doing it now. I've been Patron of Reading at five schools in 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 this year.

**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.

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

I really like books that have a very strong sense of place and mood, whether they're adult or children's books. I recently read *The Lie Tree* by Frances Hardinge, which has an amazing feeling of darkness and isolation. I found it totally compelling!

Among my favourites for the 8-12 age group is *The Dark is Rising* series by Susan Cooper, as well as Philip Pullman's wonderful *Northern Lights* trilogy. A couple of years ago, I read the *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness* books by Michelle Paver, and enjoyed those very much too, especially all the little details about how people made their clothes and shelters, how they made fire and what wild foods they ate. You could sense that the author had done very careful research, but the information was just slipped in so you would hardly notice. As a writer, I know how hard that is!

**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 don't play it often these days, so I'm very rusty. But now and then, I get it out and 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

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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 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!**

Tricky. I did once make an 18 inch long motorised rat.

For more information about *The Scar Gatherer* series or Julia's school visits, go to [www.scargatherer.co.uk](http://www.scargatherer.co.uk).

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