

Dyan Sheldon says:

"My parents moved to Long Island, New York, when I was six so that I could have all the benefits of fresh air and a beach and a lake that froze over for ice skating in the winter. I think I'd have been happier if they'd left me in Brooklyn. I spent five years in the beginner's swimming class (finally passed out of pity), I never learned to skate and my most intimate experience was sledging into a tree (the first time in my life I saw my stars, like in a cartoon). On the other hand, if I'd stayed in Brooklyn, I would have missed being taught in high school by Mr Streb, Mr Tripp and Mr Sutcliffe – three men to whom I owe a lot. I moved around a lot once I left home. I lived in upstate New York, Maine, Mississippi, New Jersey, the Bronx, Staten Island, Brooklyn (again!), Manhattan and, eventually, I ended up in London. The first place I lived was in a squat in Paddington. We had a loo in the garden and a bath tub with feet in what was once the wash house (it still had a giant copper kettle). I felt like I'd been beamed back in time. It was pretty brilliant really, except that back then, it was always hard to get a pumpkin for Halloween.

"Being a writer is like being a spy (but without the guns and stuff like that). You look like just a regular person, staggering onto the bus with your shopping, but you're not. You're always watching and listening. You take notes. You take stories or lines people told you and you use them shamelessly. You never think, Wow, I wish I'd said that. You think, I'll be saying that soon."

Things you didn't know about Dyan Sheldon:

Among my passions are pumpkins, lizards, chilli peppers and Volkswagen Beetles. I was mugged on a beach in Peru. I'm always thinking of getting a dog, especially an English Bull Terrier or a Jack Russell. Halloween is my favourite "holiday". In high school, I won a good citizenship award from the Daughters of the American Revolution. I haven't done my shopping in a supermarket in over five years. My car is a "historic vehicle", which means the doors fly open when you go round a bend and things fall off on the motorway! I went out in a small boat to see the whales when I was in Canada. I cried when they came up next to us. One of my all-time favourite TV programmes is Columbo. My motorcycle is named Arlo, after Arlo Guthrie who wrote "The Motorcycle Song".