

GILLIAN CROSS - by Gillian Cross

“Books have always been an important part of my life. As a child, I spent a lot of time writing stories, or acting them out with my friends. I write because I love telling stories and finding out about things. My stories don't have 'messages', but I like to write about people in difficult and dangerous situations. I'm interested in how they cope and the decisions they make.”

I was born near London, on Christmas Eve 1945. I can't remember a time when I couldn't read, and books have always been an important part of my life. As a child, I spent a lot of time writing stories, or acting them out with my friends.

When I went to secondary school, I travelled there and back on the London Underground and for a while I told my friends a serial story on the train. It was all about us, and a lot of famous actors and tennis players came into it as well. I left school when I was nineteen and spent nine months as a Community Service Volunteer, working in a school and helping on a course for teenagers. It was one of the most important periods of my life – I met lots of different people, learned a lot and had a wonderful time.

Then I went to Oxford, to study English, and met my husband, Martin. We got married when we were both twenty one, had a baby son, Jon, and lived in a village outside Oxford in a cottage next door to an old-fashioned bakery. I used to help the baker twice a week. Jon came too. He sat on the floor and played while I kneaded the dough.

We moved from there to Lewes, where our daughter Elizabeth was born, and where I did some more studying, at the University of Sussex. After that, I began to write seriously, and my first book was completed in about 1974. Nobody wanted to publish it, but that didn't put me off and I went on writing books and sending them off to publishers and, five years later, I had my first two books accepted – *The Runaway* and *The Iron Way*.

Ever since then, I've had a happy time looking after my family and writing. Martin and I now have four children – Anthony was born in 1984 and Katy was born in 1985. We've moved a couple of times and at the moment we're living in a beautiful village in Warwickshire. When I'm not writing, I orienteer (like everyone else in the family), play the piano (very badly) and edit the Parish Magazine.

I've done quite a lot of travelling abroad to speak about my books. I've been to Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Brazil, Australia and Mexico, among other places. Wherever I go, I like to talk to people (of course) and to look at paintings and sculptures.

Praise for Gillian Cross and her novels:

‘Genuinely moving’ Times Educational Supplement

‘A winner’ Carousel

‘Taut and beautifully written’ Mail on Sunday

‘a tour de force’ Financial Times

‘Exciting, fast-moving and brilliant.’ Lancs County Library Children’s Book of the Year Reviews

‘Packed with tension and drama’ Books for Keeps

‘Outstanding’ The Scotsman

‘Believable, emotive, captivating, interesting and very enjoyable’ In Brief

A Q & A with Gillian Cross.

1. Where do you get your ideas from?

It's hard to say where my ideas come from. I usually get a picture of a place or a person. Sometimes I get a tiny little scene in my mind - very short, like the trailers you see on television. There's never very much of an idea to start with, just a little snippet and a very strong feeling that it can grow into a story. Then I ask myself lots of questions about the characters, and I find out what happens by starting to write the story down. I hardly ever know the whole story before I start writing the book.

2. Do you earn a lot of money from writing?

Yes, I earn quite a good amount of money from writing, but I never know how much it's going to be. Every time someone buys one of my books, some of the money (around 7 per cent) goes to me. The publishers collect up all that money and pay it over to me twice a year. And in April, I add the whole lot up and find out how much I've earned that year.

3. What was your first book called?

The first book I ever wrote was called *Such a Nice Girl* - and it was terrible. But I learned two important things from writing it. The first was that I could get to the end of a book, and the second was that I liked writing books better than almost anything else. So I went on doing it and, in due course, I wrote *The Runaway*, which was my first published book.

4. Do you ever base characters on real people?

No, I never base my characters on real people - not on purpose at least. If I did I would find it very hard to make anyone in my books do anything bad - in case the real person was cross about it. And anyway, it's much more fun to make people up. But sometimes, I find I've made a character a bit like a real person by mistake.

5. What do you do in your spare time?

My main hobbies are playing the piano (very badly!) and orienteering, which involves finding your way round forests with a map, and running as hard as you can. I also like swimming and gardening, though I don't have much time for those. I read lots and lots, as well.

6. What is your favourite book by someone else?

I haven't really got a favourite book - because I have so many. I always seem to be discovering wonderful new things to read. But one book which has always been among my favourites is *'The Secret Garden'* by Frances Hodgson Burnett.

7. What is your favourite book you have written?

I haven't got a favourite out of my own books, I've had good fun writing all of them - but the best one is always the one I'm writing NOW.

8. Do you have any tips for young writers?

I've got two main tips. First, tell the story as well as you can. If you get to the end and you can see things that are wrong - go back and put them right. There's no point in rewriting for the sake of it, but you're very lucky if you get everything right first time. I usually have to rewrite a book three or four times. The second tip is - have fun! If you don't have a good time while you're writing, how can you expect readers to enjoy themselves? (But that doesn't mean telling jokes all the time, of course. You can enjoy being sad or serious too.)

9. How long does it take you to write a book?

It usually takes me between five and nine months to write a book, depending on the length. In that time I rewrite it three or four times, and I've always spent quite a long time thinking about it before I start.

