

As a child

I grew up in a large Catholic family in Felling-on-Tyne: four sisters and one brother. I always knew I'd be a writer – I wrote stories and stitched them into little books. I had an uncle who was a printer, and in his printing shop I learned my love of black words on white pages. I loved our local library and dreamed of seeing books with my name on the cover on its shelves. I also dreamed of playing for Newcastle United (and I still wait for the call!). There was much joy in my childhood, but also much sadness: a baby sister died when I was 7; my dad died when we were all still young; my mum was always seriously ill with arthritis. But it was a childhood, like all childhoods, that provided everything a writer needs, and it illuminates and informs everything I write.

As an adult

After school, I read English and American Literature. When I graduated I became a teacher – long holidays, short days, just perfect for a writer. After 5 years, I gave up the job and lived in a commune in rural Norfolk where I wrote and met my partner Sara Jane. I wrote a long adult novel that was rejected by every UK publisher. I had two collections of short stories published by the tiny IRON Press. I started another adult novel, put it aside, and suddenly, out of the blue, I found myself writing *Skellig*. It was as if the story had been waiting for me, and once I began, it seemed to write itself. I hadn't expected to write a children's novel, but in some way it was the natural outcome of everything I'd done before, and was the stepping-stone to everything I've done since. I now live in Northumberland with Sara Jane and our daughter Freya. I'm a full-time writer. Sara Jane makes ceramics, Freya goes to school.

As an artist

For years, I was hardly published and hardly anyone knew about me apart from a handful of keen fans. And I made just about no money at all from writing. That didn't really matter to me. I'd keep on writing, no matter what. Then I wrote *Skellig* and everything changed. I began to sell lots of books, to be translated into many languages, to travel, to win lots of prizes. I've written a number of novels after *Skellig*, including *Kit's Wilderness*, *The Fire-Eaters* and *Clay*. There have been stage versions of the novels, and films and an opera are on their way. I used to write in the attic at home, but there were lots of distractions – especially from email and telephone. So last year, I had a cabin built at the bottom of the garden. It's very nice, blue-grey and surrounded by trees. I have a radiator to keep me warm and I have a tap and a kettle for making tea. Every morning – when I'm at home and not travelling or making school visits or talking to people on the phone or answering emails – I carry my laptop down to the cabin and I set to work.

Things you didn't know about David Almond

I once held the school high-jump record – 5 ft 2.5 inches.

I have a pet rabbit called Bill who can grunt.

I dream about football – and kick in my sleep!

I love Japanese food – except for the thing I was given once that looked like an alien's brain.

I've taken part in three Great North Runs (half-marathons).

My favourite place is Upper Swaledale in Yorkshire.

I love bikes, camping and fires.

My first TV appearance was as an altar boy in a televised mass when I was eleven.

My grandfather was a bookie (he took bets on horse races). His advice? "Never bet." He also told me, "Never read novels. They're all just lies."

My nickname at school was Dai, and several old friends still call me that.