

As a child

I was born in Chiswick, West London. I had a very happy childhood and I remember stories, and the pictures that went with them, made a deep impression on me from a very early age. Maurice Sendak's *Wild Things*, and Tomi Ungerer's *Ogre* caught my imagination; I've always been drawn things that are bizarre, strange and a little bit scary. I'm sure that's why I liked science fiction and comedy. I loved films too. I suppose my fascination was always for the "other world", the place through the wardrobe, down the rabbit hole: the magic land that's so close you can almost touch it.

As an adult

I studied history at Oxford, but I didn't work very hard – something I now regret. I also wish I'd studied ancient history as well as modern (modern history at Oxford begins with the fall of the Roman Empire). Swords and battles and myths and all that – from a safe distance, of course - have become a great passion as I've grown older. When I left university, I wrote a few plays for grown-ups, but no one came to see them; then a friend got me translating comic Italian operas, which got people laughing and the next thing I knew, everyone was having children and I was reading lots of picture books. I didn't think "this is easy, I could do it" but I was intrigued and inspired by the possibilities of the form: so few words, so few pages, and yet you can create worlds, and (if you work very hard and you're really lucky) memories that children will carry for the rest of their lives.

As an artist

I work best in the morning. Generally speaking, I will sit at my desk from 9 to 12 from Monday to Friday. That's the concentrated writing bit. For the rest of the day I will read, or go and see a film, or go for a walk, or see friends. Anything that means I'm not concentrating on the story in hand. I find that not thinking consciously about the story allows my unconscious mind to come up with new ideas, and to solve problems that I've encountered. For longer stories, especially when they're nearly finished, I will work through the afternoon too. I find a momentum builds up and the moment comes when you're having to write as fast as you can to keep up with all the ideas that are pouring out of your head. My big sin as a writer is starting too many things all at once, but I like to have lots of different projects on the go so I can flit from one story to another. I think writing each story helps with the writing of the others. My collaborators, who have to wait for me to finish things, don't quite see it that way, and I am very grateful for their patience.

Things you didn't know about Timothy Knapman

The first job I wanted to do was be a stunt man. I liked adventure films, and the idea that I could be the person doing the really exciting thing in the middle of one of them was too good to resist. Then someone told me you had to be good at PE to be a stunt man, and I was rubbish at it, so I gave up.

My favourite colour used to be red, but then my parents painted my bedroom red because I asked them too and it was soooooo bright. My favourite colour is now purple, but I have never had a purple bedroom.

I like laughing and making people laugh. It is my favourite thing. When you think of a funny idea when you're walking along, it's like you've stood on a vent in the ground and all this laughing gas suddenly shoots up your trouser legs and makes you giggle till your ribs are sore.

My favourite words are "ocean", "archangel", "berserk" and "riotous". Just saying them out loud makes me smile.

I don't have any pets, but I've always wanted a dragon. I know you have to get a big cage, and it has to be fireproof, but I still think it could be fun.

Making things up – stories and jokes – is like playing. The more relaxed you are, the easier it is. I believe that if you think about a problem too hard, you might just break your brain.

Often when I've seen a film I will come out pretending to be one of the characters. People find this odd.

If you're working on something with someone else – an illustrator or a composer, say – you should always leave a space for them to do their work. If the words you write tell the whole story, you are not leaving anything for your collaborator to do.

It took me ages to get to be any good as a writer. Far longer than I expected when I started out. I did lots and lots of practising and making mistakes and being rubbish.

I have three bits of advice to anyone who wants to be a writer: 1) Write a lot; 2) Read a lot; 3) Whatever you're writing, get to the end of it. Often when you're writing a little voice in your head will tell you it's no good. Ignore this voice. It doesn't matter if you don't like what you're writing the first time through: you can always go back when you've finished and make it better.