

Q & A with Val McDermid:

1. **What made you decide to write a children's book?**

I made up the story for my son as part of our bedtime reading/storytelling time. I didn't intend it to be a book, just a little entertainment for both of us.

2. **How is it different writing for this audience as opposed to adults?**

The obvious differences when it comes to writing for children are the vocabulary and the subject matter. My writing for adults is pretty dark and twisted, so I had to exercise a different side of my imagination.

3. **Where do you get your ideas and inspiration from?**

The world around me and the people in it. There's always something that I see or hear that makes me go, 'Wow, that's really interesting.' When I'm excited by something like that, I investigate it and find out more information. And sometimes that leads me straight into a story for a book.

With this book, the idea started when my son asked if I could make up a story for him, instead of only writing for adults. At the time, he was obsessed with pirates, so that was the obvious topic. Then I remembered the caves and the ruined castle at East Wemyss, where my grandparents lived and I spent a lot of time as a child. That provided me with a setting. It started as a couple of verses, then it grew.

The idea of the handbag attack on the skeletons came from my son—I had to pay him for using his idea, it seemed only fair! For a very long time, my son thought my granny really had been a pirate. This was reinforced by my mother, who backed me up and talked about how exciting it had been to have a mum who was a pirate. I think he was a bit disappointed when he realised I had made it all up.

4. **How long did *My Granny Is a Pirate* take to write?**

It's hard to say—it developed over a few months, growing and changing as we went. I chose to make it rhyme because it's easier to remember.

5. **What advice would you give a budding author?**

Just do it. Don't be put off by anyone who doesn't believe you can do it. And don't keep making excuses to yourself. Just sit down and start writing. If you do a little bit every day, or even every week, you'll be amazed how quickly it grows.

6. **What is the best thing about being an author?**

Being in charge of what you do and when you do it!

7. **Finish this sentence: "If I hadn't been a writer..."**

I'd probably have been a musician. I've played guitar since I was a teenager and I love to sing.



**My Granny
IS A
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8. **What is your favourite animal?**

My dog, Melrose. She's a smart, loyal, clever and funny Border Terrier.



9. **When you were a child, what was your favourite toy?**

Lego, because it let me use my imagination to make up stories that I could act out.

10. **Favourite book:**

Treasure Island, by Robert Louis Stevenson. The best adventure story ever told.

11. **Favourite song:**

The Ugly Duckling, by Danny Kaye. Probably because it's got a great story at the heart of it.

12. **Favourite film:**

Dumbo.

13. **What is your most treasured possession?**

My Martin guitar.

14. **What would your pirate name be?**

The Silver Scoundrel.



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15. **Favourite place in the world and why?**
The beach where I live in Northumberland because it's different every day and beautiful whatever the weather. And because it's home, where the people I love are.

16. **What has been your biggest achievement?**
Learning to seize opportunities before they slip away.

17. **If you were to collaborate with anyone else to make your dream book, who would it be?**
Probably Arthur Robins, the illustrator of MY GRANNY IS A PIRATE, because he captured so perfectly the creatures of my imagination.

18. **Who is your favourite character in *My Granny Is a Pirate*, and why?**
Jolly Roger, because he makes me smile.

19. **What character would you be in any children's book?**
I'd be Jim Hawkins from TREASURE ISLAND. He has a great adventure and lives to tell the tale.

20. **Is reading important to you?**
Yes. I read every day, and sometimes late into the night when I should be asleep. I love being taken by the hand and led through somebody else's imagination.

21. **Tell us about your typical day...**
I get up, shower and have breakfast with my family. Two cups of coffee are necessary at this point. Then I walk fifteen metres along a path lined with fragrant lavender bushes from the back door to my office, which is an old stone building with two-foot thick walls. I sit down at my desk and turn on the music, which can be anything from classical to contemporary favourites. I start off revising what I did the day before. Then I answer emails and deal with any paperwork I have to do before settling down to write. I stop to cook and eat lunch with my partner, Kelly. Then it's back to the office to write. I usually take the dog for a walk on the beach at some point during the afternoon. Then it's time to cook dinner and hang out with the family, maybe making music or watching TV or playing cards or building vast Lego complexes. It's a pretty nice life.



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