

When we talk about writers, we automatically think of those who write fiction. Well here's someone who writes both fiction and non fiction. James Pogson produces words that sell – not just tell. For more than 20 years he's written in the public, private, arts and entertainment sectors – wearing more than one hat. Brought up on stories told to him by both his parents, he's managed to create a living for himself doing just that. Here's his story.....



NSS: First of all James, thanks for taking time out from your busy schedule to talk with me. Please tell the readers a little about yourself; where are you from?

JP: I was born in Birmingham, England in 1969. I'm the youngest of 3 boys born to parents from the West Indian island of St.Kitts. We grew up in an area named Small Heath. I still live and now work within the city of Birmingham as a Writer, Speaker, Performer, Producer, Director and Business/Marketing Communications Consultant.

NSS: When did you first realise you wanted to be a writer? – What prompted you?

JP: As a child, I was extremely shy outside the family home, but I was always making up stories. In fact, I'd named every single one of my toys and gave them identities and characteristics to suit their appearance and occupations. For instance, I remember having a cavalry soldier who I named Wayne (after John Wayne). I was able to create stories and scenarios for my toys and this naturally transferred to the written word when I began scribbling stuff first at home then school. I don't think I realised I wanted to be a writer until I was a teenager (I had ambitions to become a journalist). However I always knew I could write and it was my teachers who told me I could write well. My written words became my 'voice' as I was still too timid to articulate myself vocally to all and sundry.

NSS: Which other authors have you felt inspired by in particular?

JP: I got hooked on the poetry of the First World War Poet Wilfred Owen at secondary school. I loved his descriptions, even though his poems were bleak. I also liked the journalist and novelist Keith Waterhouse (author of Billy Liar).

I got hooked on the works of thriller writer Eric Van Lustbader as a teenager and also loved the Dune novels by Frank Herbert.

NSS: What do you enjoy about writing?

JP: The creativity. Flexing my imagination to create characters, worlds, experiences – things that I can relate to. I love the individuality of it. Writing tends to be a solitary occupation and I've always been a bit of a loner – looks like the right profession chose me. Also when I write, I enjoy 'hearing the words' come alive on either the page or the computer screen. I suppose it's my inner voice narrating my written words.

NSS: I know you wear many 'hats' in the writing world; what genre(s) do you specialise in – Do you have a favourite genre?

JP: I write both fiction and non fiction. I've worked in film, theatre, radio, live performance, commerce and literature. In recent years I've concentrated on being a Copywriter – producing sales and marketing literature. They're still stories – just factual about products and services my clients offer. Fiction wise, I 'specialise' in comedy and comedy-drama, although I've been known to produce melodrama as well. I also specialise in one person shows/monologues, as a creator and producer/director.

NSS: Do you write full-time?

JP: Yes, I'm a Full time Writer and Professional Speaker (not bad for a once shy boy!).

NSS: Do you have or set a schedule when you are writing?

JP: I have to! Believe me; writing full time is completely different to writing for fun or pleasure (although I find my working life both fun and pleasurable). Put it this way, my clients don't care whether I've eaten, had enough sleep or seen my daily quota of soap operas. A deadline's a deadline – pure and simple. I'm not the only writer in the world. For me, if there's no structure to my writing (schedule) then I'm planning to fail.

NSS: Are you working on a current project(s)?

JP: Projects yes. I'm currently writing a comedy-horror film script, devising and facilitating a creative writing course for adults, developing a film trilogy aimed at young people, and planning to write a trilogy of one person shows around human nature.

NSS: What projects have you worked on previously?

JP: I've previously written, produced and performed my own one man show. Last year I produced and directed 2 one person shows and I also helped devise and create a comedy sketch show. I've been in the 'business' now for more than 20 years, so there have been quite a lot of projects I've worked on previously.

NSS: What kind of research is involved with your work?

JP: For my non fiction work – it involves a lot of background reading, interviewing clients, working out exactly what the benefits of the products and services are. As a fiction writer – I’ve written on sexual and mental health issues – there’s research involved too. I have to understand viewpoints, policies and current legislation.

NSS: What is your creative process like; what happens when you first sit down to write?

JP: My writing begins in my head. It would have been an idea that had been buzzing around for a while that suddenly springs to life. A theme, characters, a point of view – things like that. If it’s fiction, a character will pop into my head, along with a premise. There’s a problem, some sort of physical or mental obstacle that causes or will cause my protagonist some grief. I then ask the question ‘why’. If I can’t answer it, then it’s not a good idea. If it’s non fiction, I have a range of bullet points which are questions. I have to answer them before continuing. In both cases, if I don’t know what my writing’s about – what’s the point in continuing?

NSS: Do you impose a discipline on yourself regarding schedules, goals etc?

JP: I never used to, but I do now. I have to determine whether my idea “has legs”. What is it, how will I develop it, does it have a genre? I’ll usually work backwards – start with the end in mind. It’s good to set goals and work schedules, especially if you operate on your own. I can’t rely on others to motivate me. I have to get into a groove – it’s exciting and sometimes daunting. I’ll spend a lot of time preparing material, especially my non fiction writing. It’s laying the foundations correctly – otherwise the whole thing comes tumbling down. I can be ill disciplined too – sometimes that sparks much creativity; but at the end of the day, without an overall structure, I find it will all fall to pieces.

NSS: What does it take for a person to be a successful freelance writer?

JP: Depends what you mean by successful. I think I’ve been successful, but I’m by no means a household name. Success is relative, but I’ll answer by saying: Creativity, determination, attitude, confidence in self. Marketability – you have to sell yourself, but know what you’re selling first. Know what separates you from the crowd and make sure your intended audience is aware of that fact.

NSS: How do you promote yourself?

JP: By networking and selling the benefits of me and my services constantly. I got in with a business community that didn’t understand the concept of “I can’t” and didn’t rely on back up from arts council grants. I have a website www.jamespogson.co.uk. I post blogs on various sites. I take on speaking

engagements and deliver workshops – they’re a great source of promotion and you get paid too. I’m also a Consultant, Producer and Director. Word of mouth is a powerful tool. Stand for something and be consistent with your message. Not everyone is going to agree with you – it’s not about that. As long as people understand what you’re about, the right people will be attracted to you. Find allies and those who share your viewpoints.

NSS: How would one get in touch with you about the services you offer?

JP: Through my website initially, as it gives you a breakdown of my services. You can generate emails to me via the site. Otherwise just email me at james@jamespogson.co.uk

NSS: Outside of writing, what other interests and hobbies do you have?

JP: I love sport. Cricket is still my favourite, although I no longer play it. Thanks to my Dad in particular, I think it’s the greatest game in the world. I read a lot, watch films, enjoy meals out. I like hanging with friends, seeing my Godson and playing with my nieces – all 4 of them. I spend a lot of time on my own – I’m really great company!

NSS: And finally, do you have any advice and encouragement you would like to share with any potential budding writers?

JP: Become a dentist! No, seriously – read, read and read some more. Whether fiction or non fiction – read. Study what you read. Learn what works from what doesn’t. Discover your own voice and learn how people communicate. Watch people and study their behaviour. There are so many genres out there. Monologues, poetry, essays, reports, comedy, science fiction, etc. Understand what they are before limiting what you feel you can do. I always say that I know a little about a lot. I’m a Storyteller, so I approach everything as if it’s a story. I learnt how to tell myself a story before I practiced on others. I still try out my new material on me first.

Thanks again James for taking time out and blessing us with an engaging interview. May our creator bless you with more future gems from your pen.

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