

SIMON HALL



Simon Hall reports on real life crimes, while creating a few imaginary ones of his own. His day job is as a BBC TV Crime Correspondent, but in his spare time he's also an author of detective fiction.

Now 41 years old (born 3/2/69), he began his broadcasting career as a disc jockey in nightclubs and on the radio, then moved into radio and TV news with the BBC. He worked in Europe, London and Northern Ireland before settling in Devon.

Simon is married to Jess, they live in a Grade Two listed townhouse by the banks of the River Exe in Exeter.

He regularly lectures at Plymouth and Exeter Universities on careers in the media, as well as giving talks at local schools, and is proud to have helped many young people into jobs in broadcasting.

Memorable moments from Simon's career include finally discovering the secret memorial to the late poet laureate Ted Hughes on Dartmoor – it was this which led him to meet Jess – being sent into London to cover the 7/7 suicide bomb attacks, and reporting on the wonder of the total eclipse of 1999.

He enjoys food and drink, particularly beer – regularly judging at real ale festivals – going to the gym, walking in the wonderful Devon countryside, crosswords, and studying pop lyrics.

Cyprus Well got the chance to ask Simon a few questions about his writing career, and writing in general.

Could you tell us a bit about your usual writing environment and approaches? Do you have a set place where you write, do you write a set number of words a day, for example?

I write in my study, the converted attic of my house, by the river in Exeter. It gets beautiful light and looks out over the city, which are both great for helping the creative process. I don't set myself a number of words to hit each day. I think that's a sure way to scare off any inspiration. It's better just to let it flow. I strongly believe you shouldn't judge your day's worth on a word count - surely it's far better to write 200 words that capture a feeling, or a character, with style, charm and power than several thousand which are bland at best.

How much planning do you do before you begin a novel, in terms of the plot and the connections between events earlier in the books, and the eventual untangling?

I do more planning than actual writing. Some people see planning as tedious, and wasted time, as nothing concrete comes from it in terms of actual pages of a book, but in my view it's not, very far from it. It's absolutely vital. My planning phase usually lasts about six months. I take the original idea and work on it, to see what twists and turns could spin around it, what sub plots, and what new characters might be needed. I start to think about the structure of the book, the start and the end, and all the angles in between, the locations, the dialogue, the key points and those that look that way, but are actually designed to put a reader off the trail of what's really going on. Only when I'm so full of ideas for the book, so sure of how it'll run, so bursting to write it, do I begin to actually type. That way I'm awash with energy, and you need that momentum to carry you through writing a hundred thousand words or more.

What drew you in particular to crime fiction?

I love - and chose - crime fiction because it taps into such a primeval human instinct, the modern day personification of the age-old battle between good and evil. The only problem is that it's so very popular, it's difficult to find a new angle. That inspiration came from my day job - I report on crimes, why not cross the line a little and start solving them too? That was where the concept for the TV reporter turned detective came from. It taps into a little known area of real detective work; how often the police use the media to help them catch criminals, and in some very subtle and cunning ways.

Are there other crime writers you particularly admire?

I like the intellectual writers, like Conan Doyle. Great crimes conceived by clever people, which takes someone equally smart to solve. I also love Agatha Christie for her extraordinary imagination and wonderful plots.

Do you have any tips for writers in the South West who want to see their work published?

My most important tip is - never give up. Everyone has days when it's hard, or impossible to write, and believe me I know how dispiriting that can be. But just remember this - a good day usually follows a bad one. Tomorrow will be different! And likewise with rejections. It's part of being a writer to be rejected by publishers - I've never heard of a single well-known and acclaimed author who doesn't have a stack of rejections to their name. Keep trying and the break will come. Keep believing.

We keep a close eye on the revolution that seems to be happening in the world of digital books, the Kindle, iPad, etc. What are your thoughts on this new development and where it is headed?

I think digital books will become popular, but I don't believe they'll ever replace the physical company of a good paperback. There's something so reassuring, so comforting about holding a book, the feel of it, the sound of the pages turning, the smell. It becomes a friend, and we can't live without friends.

Do you have a favourite writing exercise you'd like to share with our readers?

This is an exercise I set in workshops - develop a character for me. Start with the appearance; age, hair colour, gait, weight etc. Then go deeper, like a Russian doll, right into them. Favourite pair of socks? Any pets, and if so, what and why? Likes beer, wine, gin or teetotal? Hot or mild curry? Soap opera fan? What newspaper do they like, if any? Then go deeper still. A criminal record, even from teenage days? Infidelities? Most shameful secret? Would they pick their nose if no-one was watching? And keep going, to greater and greater levels of detail and quirk, until you feel you know this person. Get a pal to ask questions about them. When you can answer them all, without too much hesitation, you're well on the way to developing a convincing character.

Thank you Simon! To win a copy of *The Balance of Guilt*, enter the competition over at the [Cyprus Well Community](#).

www.thetvdetective.com

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