



Suzie Tullett, novelist

Jon Now then Suzie, how long have you been in Brittany?

Suzie Uh we got the house four years ago, so 2013, uh, used it as a holiday home and then my husband retired earlier this year, so we moved here full-time.

Jon And were you a writer in England?

Suzie I was, yes. I began writing as a script-writer. I did a Master's degree ... ooh, a long time ago in Television and Radio scriptwriting, and then decided after a couple of years of doing that I would have a go at novels. So I've been novel writing for about seven years.

Jon Yeah. It's big change though isn't it, screen-writing to writing novels?

Suzie It is, it is.

Jon Did you find it easy to adjust?

Suzie Um, not initially. Um, some of the way of writing is useful for both, like building characters, dialogue, everything like that you learn as a scriptwriter is ... it makes you a better novelist. But then, as a scriptwriter, you don't go into people's emotions and feelings. You leave that for the actors and the director to sort out. Whereas with novel writing you can get into your character's head in a more obvious way. Um, so um, adapting to that um, was ... um ... not a difficult process but something I had to get used to doing.

Jon What's your latest book? What's it called and what's it about?

Suzie The latest release is *Little White Lies and Butterflies*. It's not the latest book that I wrote. I had a publishing deal with a different publishing house, but unfortunately they closed their doors. I've since got a new publishing deal, they signed me for three books, so *The Trouble with Words* my last book that I wrote, but they released it first. Um, so, the one that I wrote before that was *Little White Lies and Butterflies* and they released it second.

Jon Could you actually say a little bit about the book?

Suzie *Little White Lies and Butterflies* is set in Kalymnos, an island that I used to live on. It's a romantic comedy. It's about a woman who, growing up in the late 80s and 90s, when women could have it all. The nanny, the great job, the career, everything. But she's from the north of England, where that didn't work out in practice. So her influence has always been quite an old-fashioned family set-up. Although her mum did go out to work full-time, um, her mum came home, did all the



housework, did all the cooking, etc. etc. So she grew up with the notion that women can't have it all, and made a decision that she was going to choose either domesticity or a career. And she chose domesticity. So the story starts when she's coming up to her thirtieth birthday and hasn't found the perfect man. So she's missed out on both, really. So she takes herself off to Greece to reassess her life, and she tells a lie. Because nobody understands a woman in the 21st century who would choose domesticity. So when somebody asks her what she did for a living, she said she was a chef, a professional chef. But then embellishes, gets into character and says that she's famous. And it's the, uh, *Little White Lies and Butterflies* because it's the roll-on effect of telling the little white lie, and al... the consequences of that. And she has to then try and deal with the snowball effect that that little white lie creates.

Jon So she goes to Kalymnos as an escape.

Suzie She does, yeah. Just to reassess her life and decide, you know, 'it looks like I'm going to have to get a career after all', um so ...

Jon Suzie, is that why you went to Kalymnos?

Suzie No, no, no. We had, em, we had a holiday home there, initially, and then I ended up spending more and more time there because it was a good place to write, and ended up being there full-time.

Jon Could we actually be very cheeky and ask for a sample paragraph?

Suzie You can ...

Jon We'll leave Suzie to put her glasses on ...

Suzie Right, so this is *Little White Lies and Butterflies* by Suzie Tullett.

'That's it,' I announced, having just landed at mum and dad's house for our customary Sunday lunch gathering. 'My life, as I know it, is officially over.' I paused, waiting for that all-important condoling response, daft enough to expect at least a modicum of sympathy from within the bosom of the family. I rea.... I quickly realised I should have known better. The Livingstones didn't do compassion. Instead, mum appeared with a mass of cutlery, her arm outstretched as she thrust it my way. 'If you wouldn't mind,' she said, pointing me in the direction of the dining-room table. Mum headed back into the kitchen, leaving me no choice but to get on with it. However, as I spotted dad, already seated and eager to eat, I did suppose the woman needed all the help she could get. Certain members of our family had always preferred a more observational role when it came to mucking in with the household chores - dad being a prime example. 'Oh yes,' I continued regardless. 'My dreams have finally been crushed once and for all.' I began laying the table, sucking myself



in as I squeezed myself in beside my somewhat unaccommodating father, a man more concerned about his belly's rumblings than those of his beloved offspring. Leaving me no choice but to think about joining convent, I carried on, where I shall no doubt remain for the rest of my days.

Jon Thank you very much. Now every writer probably has a different method of writing. How do you go about writing a novel yourself? Do you start with an idea, a vague idea, and let the characters take over? Or are you a meticulous plotter?

Suzie Um, I do a lot of planning. I always start with character. I'm very much a character writer. Um so I always start with a character, and work out what their life is past, present, and hopefully future. And then I think about what's the worst thing that could possibly happen to this person, and then that's when this story idea starts to formulate and I take it from there.

Jon So how important is plot to you?

Suzie Well it's obviously important because you need uh, you need the conflict, and you need the journey that your character goes on. And at the end of a book, a character has to be a very different person than what they were at the beginning, because readers are interested in the emotional journey that the characters go on, and obviously you need action to propel that journey forward, so a plot's important to a story, but I do, I do like my strong characters.

Jon Now what about your own reading? What are you reading at the moment, for example?

Suzie At the moment, I'm not reading anything ... I tend to read, I like books that make me laugh, so I do tend to read comedy. Um, I like Marian Keyes, especially her books around the Walsh family - you know, they're quite humorous - although Marian Keyes does tend to tackle some pretty serious subjects within that. I don't tend to read a lot of crime fiction, or thrillers, but I have recently read a book called *Losing Lear* by Sue Welfare, which was a psychological thriller, and it was very, very good. I read it at one sitting.

Jon Wow! You're a quick reader, then. Are you a quick writer?

Suzie No, I'm not. I'm not a quick writer. So there are only six stories in the world to tell. And it's the job of every script-writer, radio-writer, novelist, to tell that story fresh and new, from a different angle. So it is important not to be formulaic, because you're just repeating, repeating. Which is where your 'voice' comes in, because that's what makes you different from everybody else.



Jon That's more what ... not necessarily a formula, but say Mills & Boon, for example, I dare say the average reader of Mills & Boon has certain expectations that they want fulfilled, so to that extent it's got to be formulaic.

Suzie That's about reader expectation, so they are expecting a certain thing. So you read a book, if you don't give that reader what they want, they will tell you. You'll get emails. But as a reader, you know yourself, or myself, there's nothing worse than investing time reading a novel and you get to the end and it's rubbish. It's not a satisfactory ending. You're never going to read that author again. You're going to think, what have I wasted my time doing? I can't get those hours of my life back. But in a way, you have to bear in mind, but that's where the genre comes in. Those em ... not everything has to be happy ever after and tied up in a neat bow. But there has to be a degree of satisfaction for the reader. If you write romantic comedy, the odds are your readers gonna want Happy ever after. If you write a thriller, or a crime drama, you can leave it slightly open because, you know, you might want to bring back your detective again. So you just have to be aware of reader expectation. You don't have to be formulaic. It's about being fresh and bringing a new angle to the stories that you want to tell.

Jon Yeah. Okay, a little ... a last word on Brittany, then, Suzie. What do you like about Brittany?

Suzie I like the relaxed atmosphere, you know, the slower pace of life. I like the fact that I don't have to go shopping on a Sunday. I can't go shopping on a Sunday.

Jon No, they're all shut.

Suzie I just like the, the way of life here. It's calmer, it's quieter, it suits me.