



917 Waterworks Road The Gap QLD 4061 • phone 07 3300 3939

Bomber Perrier Q&A



Author of *Where Angel Fears to Tread*, Robert “Bomber” Perrier answers questions about writing.

Do you remember the first story you ever read?

I don't remember reading any book as a child or having one read to me. This doesn't mean it didn't happen. My family didn't read much other than comics and the racing form on Friday nights.

Mum read TV Week and some of the women's mags. In my teens, I discovered Dad had a locked cupboard full of pornographic magazines, but they're not the kind of books you read.

The first poem I remember was A. A. Milne's *Puppy and I*. I had to memorise it for the under-eleven State recitation competition. I came second. In those days, diction trumped expression. I left school at fourteen.

The first book I bought was a cheap copy of the *Complete Works of Shakespeare*. It cost a shilling.

My reading expanded when I started work as a copyholder in a commercial printing factory. We printed an eclectic range of publications including *The Architecture Review*, *The Queensland Law Report*, *Queensland Country Life* and *Dog World*.

It was a great way to get to know about the big world outside the borders of Kirby, Robertson, Murphy and Zillmere Roads.

Where is your favourite place to write?

I write at home on a small silky oak desk. It has three drawers on either side, which mysteriously fill up again as quickly as I empty them.

To my left, on top of a low book cabinet is a statue of Buddha and above it a framed quote about love from Arundhati Roy. One of Roy's books appears in *Angel*.

Above the quote is a photo of my favourite dog, Atticus, a bichon frisse-poodle cross. I taught him circus tricks when he was a youngster. He has a walk-on part in *Angel*. It's a scene in Venice where he pisses on a cello case.

To the right of my desk is a linocut print of an Eastern Curlew. A couple of curlews appear in an early scene in *Angel*, but not for very long. They are shot by Guiseppe Di Guardo, the nastiest character in the book.

Also to the right of the desk is a large pastel drawing of a garden. The garden made its way into the book too, but it doesn't die. Thanks for asking me this question. I've just worked something out.

Who are your favourite authors?

I don't really have favourite authors. If I find an author I like, I tend to read a lot of their works.

In my thirties, a friend of mine gave me a Robert B Parker crime book to read. Subsequently, I read most of Parker's oeuvre. "Oeuvre" is a word that does not appear in *Angel* or even in a draft of the novel. If it had, my editor, Robert Whyte, would have tied me to a stake and set it alight.

I'm reading Murakami at the moment. I really liked Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*. In *Angel*, we used her serif typeface, Sabon. Sabon is going to be the name of a character in my next *Angel* novel. She'll be like the typeface. Easy to read.

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When did you first realise you wanted to be a writer?

I never wanted to be a writer. I fell into it. I first became intrigued by writing after a friend edited a two-page document of mine into one paragraph with two sentences. He was the same person who put me on to Parker.

What do you like to do when you're not writing?

I write songs. Although that's writing as well, isn't it? Writing songs is different from writing books. I think more when I write words. Music is about feel.

A psychiatrist once told me life is about developing our capacity to feel and think at the one time. That's hard to avoid in songwriting. There are references to music in *Angel*.

I often played the music as I was writing. My favourite was the Royal Albert Hall recording of Yo-Yo Ma playing Bach's six suites for cello which he performs entirely from memory.

When I'm not writing books or songs I like to garden, cook and help anyone who asks, if I'm able. I do yoga every morning. I particularly like watching my partner's kids play sport. At various times, they all played AFL. Last year one of the girl's teams won their comp's grand final, coming from behind in the last quarter. It was more exciting than any grand final I've been to at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your book?

Another thing my psychiatrist once said to me was "Never go into someone else's mind uninvited." In life, it's good advice. In fiction, it's impossible not to. Fiction demands you go into your characters' minds invited or not. There's a lot of freedom in that.

As a child what did you want to do when you grew up?

At the age of ten my mother asked me this question. Without hesitation and with the energy of puppy dog I said, actor. By twenty, I had found ways of fulfilling the goal. Most of my professional career was in the performing arts.

Where did you get your ideas to write?

Generally, I get my ideas from everywhere and anywhere. Getting into an open frame of mind is the most important thing for me. Yoga and meditation help. These practices help me empty my mind of its various obsessions with the past and the future. It's like clearing out the drawers in my desk. They always fill up again. So does my mind. The key is to keep emptying, so there is enough room for new things to drop in.

"Hello? Who are you?"

"I'm Sabon."

"What are you doing here?"

"The door was open."

"Oh. Okay. Do you want a cup of tea?"

"You have a very tidy place. Lots a space."

"Wait till the end of day. It'll be bedlam."

"Bedlam? Interesting choice of words," said Sabon, picking up her cup of tea and putting it to her lips.

What projects are you working on now?

After I finished *Where Angel Fears To Tread*, I wrote half-a-dozen songs which directly reference stories and relationships in the book. Once I have a few more, I'll make another CD. I'm thinking of calling it *Rust in the Heart*, another reference to an image in the novel. I'm also working on another *Angel* story.

What are you doing in self isolation?

I'm doing much more of what I'm already good at. Self-isolating.