



Gervase Phinn

**1. Tell us a bit about yourself.**

My first story to be published was a funny account called 'The Last Laugh' which I wrote for my class of eleven year olds. I was a teacher in my first year and if I couldn't find material that I wanted I wrote my own.

Since then I have written 69 books - picture books, short story collections, plays, edited anthologies, novels, poetry collections and a memoir.

I have always loved books and as a child never had my nose out of a book. On the back of reading is writing and I soon found I was quite good at writing stories. I used to read on bus journeys and often missed my stop as I was so interested in the book.

**2. When did you start writing? How old were you?**

I won a Brook Bond PG Tips competition when I was 12. I wrote a poem and received a certificate, a book and a Brownie box camera all of which I still have.

**3. Tell us a bit about your first piece of writing.**

After winning the competition I composed jingles and won some book tokens and then had a story published in the local paper. I tell would-be writers to start small and build up a portfolio, to keep on trying and believe in themselves.





**4. Why do you write? What motivates you?**

I just love words - particularly poems - and I'm still an avid reader. It is thrilling to see your writing take shape from the early drafts to the final published book. There is a great feeling of achievement when I see my book on the shelves in the bookshop. (If it is at the back of the shelf, I move it to the front!)

**5. How do you start to write?**

I think about the story of a poem for a few months. You might see me staring vacantly out of a train window, on a bus or sitting in a park just staring at the sky.

I daydream a lot. Then later I sit at my desk in my study in front of a blank computer screen and get started, writing fast and furiously. I don't bother about spellings and punctuation, grammar or paragraphs. I just write and get my ideas and thoughts down on paper. Then I go over and over the writing, improving, cutting, adding, polishing and I put in the corrected spellings and grammar.

**6. How do you get inspiration for writing?**

I watch people, listen to conversations, and get ideas from books and newspapers. I don't watch television or play computer games so I have plenty of time on my hands.

**7. Where and when do you write? Is there a good time of day?**

I write between doing other things. I do not have a routine but get up early and go to bed late. I work in my cluttered study, piled high with books, papers, journals, photographs, letters, CDs and boxes of all sorts of things. I am the only person who comes into this room. It is taboo for the family.

**8. What achievement/s are you most proud of?**

One of my adult books was a Number 1 best-seller in the charts. I walked on clouds that day!





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Love reading.

9. What was your favourite book as a child and what did it mean to you?

My very favourite author is the great R L Stevenson. I read *Treasure Island* over and over again until the spine fell apart and the pages fell out.

The story about the treacherous cut-throat mutineers, murderous pirates and a character who kills with a crutch frightened and fascinated me. I remember the fear I felt inside when, at the age of eleven, I first heard my father read those episodes in the novel and I came across Long John Silver and felt something of Jim Hawkin's terror of 'the seafaring man with one leg':

*How that personage haunted my dreams, I need scarcely tell you. On stormy nights, when the wind shook the four corners of the house, and the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs, I would see him in a thousand forms, and with a thousand diabolical expressions. Now the leg would be cut off at the knee, now the hip: now he was a monstrous kind of creature who had never had but the one leg, and that in the middle of his body. To see him leap and run and pursue me over the hedge and ditch was the worst of nightmares.*

R. L. STEVENSON, *Treasure Island* (1883)

As I listened to my father I was there with Jim hiding in the barrel of apples from Long John Silver and overheard his murderous plans. I was with Jim in the sweet smelling darkness trembling with fear in case I was discovered. I was there in the stockade shoulder-to-shoulder with Squire Trelawney fighting off the mutineers. Stevenson as a storyteller is unsurpassed. It isn't only his powerful command of narrative, description and character and dialogue, it is the way he creates suspense which is so vital to keep the reader entranced.

10. What are your 5 top tips for young budding writers?

1. Read, read, read and read.
2. Keep a writer's notebook.
3. Persevere - don't give up.
4. Learn from other writers.
5. Be prepared to accept criticism, advice and suggestions for improvement.

Gervase Phinn has written the following titles for Collins Big Cat:

978-0-00-723108-9 *The Golden Turtle and Others Stories*: Band 16/Sapphire

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