



Questions, Questions...

In our series in which we talk to various people about their lives we chat to writer **Minette Walters**, 'the queen of the psychological thriller'

Tell us about your childhood; where did you grow up and what is your most vivid childhood memory?

My father was in the army so we never stayed anywhere very long. He died when I was nine, and two years later I became a boarder at Godolphin School in Salisbury. In some respects, I had an unsettled childhood, but it seems to have given me a strong sense of independence and the confidence. My most vivid childhood memory is of the fire brigade coming to remove our ancient gas fridge after it exploded. I remember watching from the top of the stairs while my father donned his gas mask to dial 999.

Was writing always your first choice as a career?

Yes. I wanted to be an author from the age of eight when I discovered the 'Sherlock Holmes' stories in some copies of *The Strand Magazine* from the 1880s. The copies had been collected and bound by my great-grandfather and sat on a shelf in my parents' bedroom.

Who is your favourite novelist and why?

Graham Greene. He wrote literary thrillers with an intense spiritual quality because his protagonists suffer so much angst about their faults and failing. It's a rare achievement to be a great writer – his prose is beautiful – but at the same time construct books that appeal across the genres. In my opinion, it was a shocking miscarriage of justice that he never won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

If you could invite one person from history to supper who would it be?

Well, it would have to be someone amusing because three hours of serious conversation with a 'worthy' person over a chicken leg and a glass of wine might put me off them for good! I'd probably invite Samuel Pepys – quite a 'lad' if his diary's to be believed – and get the lowdown on Charles I, the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell and the Restoration under Charles II. His tale about how he buried his cheese in his garden to keep it safe from the Great Fire of London would certainly make me laugh.

You could live anywhere in the world. Why Dorset?

Because Dorset is a landscape of contrasts – hills and valleys – precipitous cliffs and sandy beaches – coastal walks and rolling seas – and I can't think of anywhere more beautiful, or more welcoming, to spend my time.

What makes you cross?

The Iraq war... the nanny state... political correctness... the compensation culture... football and rugby commentators who love the sound of their own voices... the ignorance about rural issues at Westminster... incomprehensible official documents... parents who neglect or abuse their children... the Barnett formula that favours Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland against England... the rising gang culture... lack of support for carers and the elderly... the fact that 17 million adults in this country struggle to read fluently... etc...

What book is beside your bed, and what CD is on your car stereo?

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* – tenth time of reading. The Three Tenors, and five Queen CDs.

What can't you do without?

Cigarettes, my family and other animals... but not necessarily in that order.

What would you like on your gravestone?

The same epitaph that Anne Cattrell suggests for herself in my first novel, *The Ice House* – 'Here lies Minette Walters who laughed her way through it. The joke was on her but at least she knew it.'

The Pan paperback edition of Minette's latest novel, The Chameleon's Shadow, is out on 2nd May, priced £6.99. ISBN 978 0330 449557. □

Next time: Roger Holman, photographer whose work regularly graces the pages of this magazine