

A Q&A with Gill Sims

Are your books autobiographical?

No. I am definitely not Ellen, though I am fond of wine and have been known to mutter 'FML' on occasion. The only character in the books who is based on someone real is Judgy Dog, and that is because he insisted no one would want to read a book that didn't have him in it.

What other titles do you wish you could use, but can't...?!

'Why Mummy Runs Away with Jamie Fraser from Outlander to Live on a Desert Island with Copious Supplies of Gin and Mint Clubs?'

What writers inspire you?

It's hard to go wrong with the divine St Jilly of Cooper – one of the hardest parts about writing is not reading any Jilly, in case I subconsciously steal one of her wonderful jokes or fabulous puns. It took everything I had not to describe Bardo, Louisa's husband in *Why Mummy Drinks*, as 'a caring beard' which was Jilly Cooper's brilliantly succinct description of a character in *Riders* who was probably a 1970s version of the awful Bardo – but luckily smoothies hadn't been invented then!

What's your favourite tippie?

Depends on the day, the occasion and the weather. I am a great fan of the pink sunshine wine on a nice hot sunny day, or a big glass of Rioja by the fire in winter (so basically all year round in Scotland, where I live) and I have only recently

discovered vodka martinis, which are basically a socially acceptable way of quaffing neat booze without any need for recourse to mixers! What's not to love?

Swear word?

Unprintable. Though I am a great fan of a good portmanteau swear, where you just run several obscenities together!

How do you juggle writing and your family life?

Very badly! It's amazing how things only start flowing and you get the best ideas about fifteen minutes before school is due out. The children have learnt that if Mummy is on her laptop, then she is working and therefore this is an excellent time to start whinging for snacks/demanding forms are filled out/twatting the everlasting fuck out of each other.

What are your top tips for getting through the school holidays?

Lower your expectations. It is not going to be a fabulous Famous Five summer filled with japes and frolics, it is going to be an expensive six–eight weeks (depending on where you live) that will mainly consist of your children whining they are bored and you fobbing them off with Mini Cheddars.

Ellen's signature dish is a lasagne (or is it?!) – what's yours?

Probably the now traditional #FIAF burnt pizza. And since we got the nasty sneaking smoke alarm that texts my husband's phone, every single time I burn the pizza and the smoke alarm goes off he thinks it's hilarious to send me a text saying 'I take it dinner is ready?'

What's your worst ever #parentingfail?

Oh God, so many to choose from! Possibly my daughter falling while ice skating and complaining she had hurt her ankle, and me telling her to stop being a drama queen and suggesting she could just hop back to the car – she had to have her ankle pinned back together in two places. Or maybe the time that my son had been complaining for weeks that his foot hurt, and I had been ignoring him, and my daughter finally said 'I think you should take him to the doctor, Mum' and I pooh-poohed her and she reminded me that the day before I had had a mercy dash to the vet with Judgy for what turned out to be a cramp, yet my son had been limping for ages and I had done nothing. Anyway, it turned out he was fine, so I was right!

How are Judgy and Billy enjoying their new fame?

Judgy is completely convinced the world revolves around him – as far as he is concerned he is the star of the show. And in fairness he is – he has come to a few book events in Scotland that are close enough to home that he doesn't have to travel too far, and he has absolutely loved it. At one event, we were waiting in a back room before the event and he started barking because he could hear His Public outside and he was determined to go and greet them. It rather puts one in one's place as well when there is a longer line of people wanting selfies with Judgy than there is of people wanting me to sign their books! He pulls such fantastic faces when I point a camera at him. Billy is still learning though – his first inclination is to try and eat my phone when I take a photo of him. He is also keen on trying to eat my laptop, though I keep telling him that if he eats my laptop, I won't be able to buy him any more chicken!

What's next for Ellen, Simon, Peter and Jane?

Growing up, teenage hormones, teenage angst, wondering how frowned upon it would be to put the children on eBay, insisting that she doesn't love Judgy more than Simon and the children, she loves him *differently* (more).

What was your finest parenting moment?

Muttering 'shit' in the car about something and having my son pipe up 'MUMMY! You said S.H.I.T!' Until that point I had been firmly convinced he would never learn to spell, so it gave me hope!

Who would play Ellen in a film?

I honestly don't know! People playing book characters can be so subjective – one person's idea of what that character looks like might not be yours and then it is ALL WRONG! I still refuse to see the film of *One Day*, because although I think Anne Hathaway is a great actor, she just is not even close to what my idea of Emma is. I have such a clear picture of Ellen in my head, and I can't think of anyone who would quite fit the image I have, but in lieu of that, obviously someone devastatingly gorgeous like Keeley Hawes would be fabulous!