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Author profile questions

Please try not to give one-word answers but rather provide detail that will help readers understand who you are.

About writing, work and books:

1. Who is your inspiration? And why?

From a writing perspective, I love the work of Pat Conroy. His prose is like poetry and his characters are incredibly robust. Nelson de Mille is another favourite – he writes such wonderful dialogue, but his insights are always so masculine – it's always interesting to see female characters as men envision them. That doesn't mean I don't think his writing is realistic – it is – and so perceptive.

2. What book do you put out on your coffee table to impress or intrigue visitors?

The Joy of Writing Sex – Elizabeth Benedict.

3. How would you define 'success'? And have you achieved it?

Success is a constantly mutating thing. You can be successful in work, as a mother, wife, daughter, friend. I'm my own harshest critic, so I'm never successful enough to rest on my laurels.

4. What do you like about your work?

I love spending time with my characters. They entertain me and often take over when I least expect it.

5. What is your next project?

I am working on a mystery novel set in Thailand.

6. Name your top three books (with authors please)

Pat Conroy – The Great Santini

Nelson de Mille – The Charm School

Anita Shreve – The Weight of Water

7. What task or project have you been procrastinating about for a long time?!

I am still trying to learn how to use the sewing machine I begged my husband for, actually, I'm not very technical, so this is not surprising.

8. What was your most interesting experience while researching your books?

Travelling to Saint-Girons and meeting the people who lived there. The owner of the hotel where I was staying laughed at me, I always had a new 80-year-old on my arm. And these old men loved the attention, a young blonde hanging onto every word they pronounced!

- 9. Which of your own characters do you most identify with? Why?**
Writing my first book, I Pack My Bag of Africa which has not yet been published, I felt a strong affinity for Lauro.
- 10. Which book have you read the most in your lifetime?**
*I don't tend to read books twice... so many others to read. But I love Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*.*
- 11. What advice would you give to aspiring authors?**
Make the time. There are so many reasons not to write, but so many more to get down to it.
- 12. Where do you get your greatest ideas for writing?**
I get my ideas everywhere – from conversations, snippets on TV, reading, dreaming, travelling, visiting museums...
- 13. What is your favourite word?**
Too many to choose from.
- 14. What books are sitting next to your bed at the moment?**
*Anita Shreve – *Testimony*
 A book about natural healing and acupuncture.
 Mr Funny. Mr Clever.*
- 15. What was your worst job?**
I worked as a waitress for a while in Cape Town, and hated it, because men usually thought they could pinch my bum as I went past – usually laden with something that didn't give me any free hands to retaliate.
- 16. Was there a defining moment in your life that made you decide to become a writer?**
I wanted to be a writer from the moment I picked up a pen. So I don't remember not writing.
- 17. When you lack inspiration or creative drive, where do you go, or what do you do to get it back?**
I love sitting in coffee shops and watching the world go by. I also go to the gym to swim or lift weights. Reading is another great relaxer for me – especially in the bath. And ultimately, I love to travel – and the less I know about my destination before I get there – the better.
- 18. What profession other than yours would you like to attempt?**
A therapist or psychiatrist. I tend to empathise with other people's issues – and would love to help other people who are battling. Hopefully my book will give people something else to think about so that they can escape for a bit.

About life, attitudes and quirks:

- 1. When you were little, what did you want to be?**
A writer. A chef. A hotel manager.
- 2. What is the first thing you think of when you wake up in the morning?**
Usually my son, as he is mostly the person who wakes me up. Oh, and chamomile tea. I don't rise until I get that. Luckily my husband learnt that long ago.
- 3. What makes your blood boil?**
People who take advantage of others – children, old people, people who are less educated, especially when they can't protect themselves.
- 4. What makes you cringe?**
Untidiness and clutter.
- 5. Do you like small cosy spaces or large open spaces?**

- I like both. I love a cosy library with a fire – our house in London had a tiny lounge with an art deco fireplace, it made me feel very peaceful. But in nature I love wide open spaces – like the Bolivian desert or the Pyrenees.*
- 6. What are your addictions (any activity/passion)?**
Reading. I can read as many as five books a week – even though I work full day and am a mother and a wife. Lattes. (Although I have to avoid them for a few months at the moment). Häagen Dasz – dulce de leche. Country music. Travel and languages. Words.
- 7. Cluttered or clean spaces in your personal life?**
Clean. Fairly minimalist.
- 8. What are you afraid of?**
Violence especially any that affects anybody close to me.
- 9. How do you spend your Sunday afternoons?**
I love to read, spend time with my family. Sleep. Often we have an extended family lunch. My parents' house is a haven for me. I always feel happy there.
- 10. What do you know for sure about life?**
You're always going to get curveballs. It doesn't matter how much you plan. (And I am planner of note.)
- 11. Which is sexier... sense of humour or intelligence?**
I don't think I could choose. I love intelligent men, but if they couldn't laugh? Luckily I don't have to choose.
- 12. Favourite magazines?**
I'd rather read a books than a magazine. But I do read lots of magazines for my work.
- 13. Worst feeling in the world?**
Realising that one day the people I love most may no longer be in my life.
- 14. When did you last have a good laugh, and what made you laugh?**
My son, of two, standing on the second step of the pool, twisting up his arms, pushing out his belly, and announcing: "This is the life." He mimicked my husband exactly.
- 15. Do you feel younger or older than your current age?**
Younger. Although sometimes I feel as though I was born in the wrong era. I should have been a flapper in the 20s or a suffragette.
- 16. Would you rather be in a really cold place or a really hot place?**
Cold – I love winter clothing. Coats and scarves. Hats.
- 17. Name one thing you'd never travel without?**
Notebook and pen.
- 18. Do you wake up easily in the morning or require coffee, exercise, or something else to get you going?**
Chamomile tea, exercise. But actually I used to be a morning person until I got woken up all night by my little one.
- 19. What is your most treasured possession?**
My journals. I stick in all sorts of things from my life. Reading them takes me back. They make me feel that age again.
- 20. Thinking back, what have been your happiest moments?**
I am lucky. I have many. Realising my husband was The One, and marrying him. Having my son. The day my parents announced that I would be allowed to move to France for a bit to study French further. Graduating from UCT as the top grad in my year.
- 21. What do you do as a hobby?**
Cook, paint, write, read, travel.
- 22. If you could meet one person, dead or alive, who would it be? Why?**

- Pat Conroy – his books fascinate me. Roald Dahl – he is one of my greatest heroes of all time. I mean, who could have survived childhood without the BFG, the Twits and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory?*
- 23. What is most important in life? How do you make that a priority?**
Family. I would do anything for my family, and they know it.
- 24. What quality do you most admire in a person?**
Integrity. And passion.
- 25. What do you love about Johannesburg (the city where you reside)?**
The thunderstorms and lighting. They are so invigorating and cleansing.
- 26. What strange habits do you have?**
I often talk about my characters as though they are real people. (Well, they are to me.) Sometimes I talk to myself. I love country music – many people would think that's strange – but the lyrics make my heart warm.
- 27. What is the most interesting place you have ever been? Why?**
I have travelled a lot, so that is quite difficult. I loved Iceland for the amazing landscape, Peru for the colourful festivals, Thailand for the delicious food – especially the Phad Thai, and France because it is part of me.
- 28. Who or what has been the greatest love of your life?**
My husband Dave, and words. My son is a different sort of love.
- 29. What are you looking forward to today?**
My son's school concert. My holiday in Malaysia and Thailand.
- 30. Which three words describe you best?**
Passionate, loyal, driven.
- 31. What was the best advice your mother/father ever gave you?**
I don't remember any words specifically, but my parents taught by example. My mother is the most honest and generous person you will ever meet. My father knows the value of hard work, and is never above doing it himself.