

Date: 28 November 2017

Author/Interview subject: Phil Earle

Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth

Other speakers:

JF Hi there, a very, very warm huge welcome to Authors Live. I'm Janice Forsyth, really, really delighted that you could be with us today. I know that you've got a really busy day at school, it gets busy at this time of year, doesn't it, so really grateful for you to give up your precious time to join us today, you'll be richly rewarded though, we've got so many treats lying ahead for you. Now, today I'm joined by some brilliant young school pupils, they're fantastic, from very near here, actually, a school near here, the BBC in Glasgow, St Patrick's in Glasgow, and also Hayocks Primary in North Ayrshire. Don't take my word for it, have a look at them, aren't they splendid? And you guys here, Hayocks and St Patrick's, why don't you wave to all the folk here, wave to that camera, give them a big wave, even a cheer, smile, do whatever you like. Yeah, it's the morning, okay, we'll work up our energy levels later. Anyway, they're absolutely fabulous. They are genuinely excited, as am I, because it's a very special week this week, it's Book Week Scotland.

You can probably guess what that's all about, it's a national celebration of reading and writing. Do you like reading? Do you enjoy reading? Do you enjoy writing? You've come to the correct place. What's the chances of that happening? And that's also one of the things that we really like to celebrate, it's a special programme for us today to celebrate Book Week Scotland on this show, so we've invited a very special author, really successful, Phil Earle. Before he was an author though, he dreams...anyone ever dream about being a footballer? Yes, lots of hands...you too, yes, even the teachers had dreams about being a footballer. This guy wanted to be a footballer for Hull City, because that's where he's from. However, he's made a huge success of his writing career, especially with the Storey Street series of books. So Phil's going to tell us all about that series, and also the inspiration behind it, because you probably want to write your own books too, don't you, and you'll get some top tips. Brilliant. Now, I know you're going to have lots of questions for Phil before we say cheerio a little bit

later, so if your school or class has a Twitter account, just use that and use the hashtag #bbcauthorlive, can we do that together, one, two, three, #bbcauthorlive. You guys are absolute pros. So if you can get those to me if possible by half past 11 at the latest, I'll try my very best to put your questions to Phil, but I know there are already lots coming in. Right now I'll shut up so that Phil can talk to you and entertain you, please give a massive cheer here and out there to Phil Earle, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

PE: I've not said anything yet. How are you?

Aud: Good.

PE: Alright, good, in the classroom, good? Okay, so we're going to talk about this really weird thing that's happened to me in my life, which is I seem to have become a writer by mistake, and I've no idea how this happened. You're all readers and writers, I wasn't when I was your age, didn't get reading, hated it, thought it was boring, thought it was for the kids who had like more than one brain cell in their heads. I didn't feel smart enough or confident enough to read a thing. The thing that really mattered to me when I was your age, which has already been touched upon, was football. The only thing I wanted to do with my life was play for Hull City, who are of course the greatest football team the world has ever seen, correct?

Aud: No.

PE: Unbelievable. They are the greatest football team, ever, but something awful and tragic and sad happened to me by the time I was 14, in that I discovered I was addicted to something. I'm sure you all know what addiction is, I discovered that I was addicted to crisps. Didn't matter what the crisps were, bacon flavoured, they're my favourites, without a doubt, I ate that many crisps by the time I was 14, that I was so overweight and unfit that I couldn't run a bath without being out of breath, never mind up and down a football pitch, so strangely enough, Hull City never, ever called me ever, and I never made it as a professional footballer. The only writing I ever did when I was a little bit older than you was for all the wrong reasons. I thought that if I was in a band at school and I wrote songs, poems, beautiful heartfelt rhyming couplets, that I thought girls would fall at my feet and queue up round the block to go out with us. Do you think that came true? Do you think that happened?

Aud: No.

PE: No, what do you mean? No, of course it didn't, they were awful, terrible, but I genuinely thought if I wrote poems, these beautiful romantic poems, that girls

would find me really attractive and want to go out with us, and it never happened, so girls in the audience, if a young man ever comes up to you at any point in your life and says that he's written you a song, you need to like run for the hills, teenage boys are awful, terrible people. So I was like 26 years old and I hadn't written so much as a shopping list in my life, and I didn't really read a great deal either, but I got a job in a book shop at the age of 26, not because I liked reading, just because I had to pay the bills. But the woman who ran the shop was a really great woman, and she got hold of me and literally kicked me up the backside until I landed in the kids' department and she said, right, you're going to run the kids' department, and you're going to read these books and you're going to recommend them to the young people that come in.

And she made me read a book called Holes by Louis Sachar, that absolutely changed my life, and the reason it changed my life for starters is because it's short. When I was a little bit older than you, teachers, who are magnificent human beings, by the way, they were making me read books that were like seven, 800 pages long, but Holes is super short, 250 pages long, but it covers 250 years of history, and it's a drama and it's a comedy and it's a family saga and it's a murder book and it's a mystery book and it's got lizards in it, and when they bite you, you die instantly. It's got everything, and this book literally blew the top of my head off, and it's a book that's aimed at people your age, so there I am at 26 reading it, and for the next two years after reading that book, all I wanted to do was read books for people your age. And now I'm 43 years old, and all I do is read books for people your age, because books for people your age are the greatest stories, the greatest adventures, with the best characters.

Why would I want to read a book for an adult, they're long and long winded, and they're full of words that I don't understand. Kids' books are the greatest, and after two years of reading everything I could get my hands on for people your age, I decided I wanted to try and write something for people like you as well, which meant I had to have some ideas. And this is a difficult thing, that big question, where do ideas come from, but this is the beautiful thing about writing, yeah, is that writing is amazing, because there's nothing I can't write about. When I sit down in my shed and open my laptop and start to write, there's nowhere I can't go, there's no adventure I can't have, there's no person I can't pretend to be, there's no world I can't create. I can do anything, be anyone and go anywhere, and the wonderful thing about it is, there's nothing I can't write about. We're surrounded by stories, every single second of our lives.

The only thing that will stop you spotting these stories, I promise you, are these things. How many of you have got these? How many have you have got phones?

Okay, terrifying, isn't it? If you're like me, this is what you do every day. You walk down the street, texting, Facebooking, tweeting...put your phones in your pocket five minutes every day, you will see stories waiting for you to spot and write down. When you get on the bus, don't put your earphones on, on the bus, listen to other people's conversations, eavesdrop on what they're talking about. When your parents think you're in bed asleep, don't be. Be sat at the top of the stairs listening to what they talk about. Oh my goodness, the stuff that you can hear people talking about is great content for any story. Here's somewhere else that I get ideas from. What are these?

Aud: Doors.

PE: Doors, you are geniuses. What types of doors? Don't say blue and red ones. Front doors, someone said it, excellent. They're front doors. Allow front doors to be the starting point for your story. When you walk home tonight, I want you to look at every single front door on your street, because I can guarantee that behind every single front door there's at least one story waiting for you to spot and write down. The next time your neighbour leaves for work in the morning, I want you to watch them. Now, don't do this with binoculars and a notepad from your bedroom window, police generally don't like that, they call it stalking, you'll go to prison, don't do that, but watch your neighbours as they leave for work. Does your neighbour leave for work one morning dragging behind them a suitcase that is so heavy it looks like it weighs a ton, only to come back ten minutes later, and the suitcase is empty, as light as a feather? What do you think, in the classroom here, what do you think might have been in the case? Stick your hand up if you know what was in the case? What was in the case?

Child: Maybe some paperwork?

PE: Maybe some paperwork, good, it could be. Let's think about even more dramatic than that though, what could have been in that case?

Child: Money.

PE: Money, how much money? Ten quid? Yeah, it could be ten quid, let's go bigger. How much, what?

Child: Gold.

PE: Gold, how much gold bullion was inside that...

Child: A ton.

PE: A ton of gold, so what's that worth, five million quid? Five million quid's worth of gold bullion in this case. Where did they get it from? Where did they get the five million quid's worth? Back in the classroom, think about this, where did they get the gold from? My friend, where could they have got it from?

Child: The bank?

PE: The bank. They broke into the bank, maybe, under the cover of darkness with the most up to date gadgets and drills and everything that they could get their hands on. What are they going to spend the money on? If you've got that money in gold bullion, what are you going to spend that money on? Yes.

Child: A mansion?

PE: A mansion, how many bedrooms? 15, yeah, excellent, with 15 swimming pools and a cinema and a bowling alley and everything. Who's going to stop them getting away with this awful terrible crime, because in any story, someone stops them.

Child: The police.

PE: The police, good. Let's give the policeman a name, what's the policeman's name, go on?

Child: Sammy?

PE: Sammy, brilliant, okay. One minute ago, all we had was a suitcase that was heavy and then it was light, but now we know that inside the case was five million quid's worth of gold bullion, and they stole this from a bank using high tech gadgets to break in there under the cover of darkness, and they're going to take that five million quid, and they're going to spend it on the greatest mansion the world has ever seen. It's going to have 15 bedrooms, loads of swimming pools, a cinema, a bowling alley, and the only person that can stop them getting away with this crime is a policeman called Sammy. Great. One minute, we've got a story. You can take that story and mould it and remould it and rewrite it and reshape it, but that's how easy it is. We're surrounded by these doors every single second of our lives. All you have to do is take your imagination for a walk, let yourself go through those doors and see what's happening behind them. I got so obsessed with front doors because my brain is so full of crisp crumbs that I decided I was going to spend three or four years just writing about front doors, or rather writing about the people that live behind them.

So this is Storey Street. It's a made up street in a made up town called Seacross, but actually it's not. It's actually the street I grew up on until I was 11 years old in

Hull. This is Bellfield Drive, and I used to live here at number 59, and every day I would cycle my bike out of Bellfield Drive, along the street, past the terraced houses, past the school that I went to, until I got the corner of Well Lane, and I genuinely used to think that if I cycled onto Well Lane, I'd cycle off the end of the world. I used to think that everything that was cool that happened on my street, that was the whole world, everything that was happening in the world happened on my street. So I thought, do you know what, I'm going to put someone your age behind every single one of those front doors, and I'm going to tell their story for them. So I thought, okay, I need an idea, where am I going to get an idea from? What writers often don't tell you is that often their ideas come from other people's stories. It's a terrible thing to admit, but it's true.

Who's read this book back in the classroom, Danny Champion of the World, by Roald Dahl? Dahl's amazing, one of the greatest storytellers ever, and this without doubt, is my favourite Roald Dahl book, but it's actually quite a quiet little story, isn't it? It's just a story about a boy and a dad and this boy thinks his dad is the greatest dad in the history of dads ever, and Dad has a secret. He's a poacher. When everyone else is asleep, his dad steals away into the farmer's field and he hunts birds, not because he's a bad man, he's a great man, he's doing it just because they're hungry, just because he needs to put sort of food on their plates. And me and my son Albie read this for the first time about six years ago, I was about 37 when I read this for the first time, what a waste of my life, and when we read it at bedtime, a chapter every night, we completely and utterly fell in love with it, because it was this beautiful story about a boy and his dad, and how much this kid loved his dad, and when I finished reading it I thought, do you know what, that's sad. I'm never going to experience what it's like to read that book again for the first time.

But actually, when you're writing, what you realise is, people say there's only seven stories that you can actually tell. In the whole world, there are only seven stories, but you can tell those seven stories an infinite number of ways, so why can't I write my own version of Danny Champion of the World, why can't I take the idea of that and write about a boy who's got a dad, and his dad's got a secret. So I did, but I couldn't make the dad in my story a poacher, because Dahl's already done it. You've got to have your own twist on these stories, so I thought, right, what am I going to write about, what can my dad's secret be, and one thing I loved more than crisps and trying to get a girlfriend and football, when I was your age, was this, I love this. Anyone know who these guys are?

Aud: [inaudible 12:41]

PE: Good, okay. These were my favourite human beings when I was around your age. Look at this man, Hulk Hogan, one of the greatest wrestlers the world's ever seen. When I was your age, he was like heavyweight champ for years and years and years and years, and I loved him so much, but I didn't love him as much as this guy. Anyone know who this is? Back in the classroom, do you know who this is? Shout it out if you know who it is?

Child: Ultimate warrior.

PE: The ultimate warrior. He was amazing. He appeared from nowhere. No-one knew what his real name was or where he was from or what his age was, he just appeared out of nowhere and destroyed everyone in sight, including the Hulk, and I used to lay on our living room floor every day and watch hour after hour after hour of wrestling, and my dad used to come in and say, Phil, you are wasting your life watching this muck, what are you doing with your life? But I loved it, because it was like the worst, most stupid soap opera you've ever watched. It's really funny, but they're also really athletic. But the amazing thing was, there was a time when we didn't have American wrestlers on our TV screens, we only had British wrestlers.

Now, British wrestlers did not look like this. Do you want to see what British wrestlers look like? In the classroom, here you go, this is what British wrestlers look like. Look at the state of them, compare and contrast. These guys, they look like they spend 17 hours a day in the gym and seven hours a day on the sunbed, they're like perfect human beings. Look at the state of these two? They look like they spend 17 hour days in a burger joint, don't they, looks like all they do is eat burgers and fried chicken, it's amazing, but these two are two of the most famous wrestlers ever, Giant Haystacks and Big Daddy, but look at the state of them? By the time they've waddled through the crowd and into the ring, they're going to need an asthma pump before they body slam anyone. Big Daddy though, was one of the most famous wrestlers ever, but he didn't have a really cool name like John Cena. Do you know what his real name was?

Child: Shirley.

PE: Shirley, yeah. His real name was Shirley Crabtree. How is that possibly a good name for a wrestler? But tens of thousands of people every week used to turn up at theatres and leisure centres to watch these guys wrestle, and I thought, do you know what, this world is brilliant. It's larger than life, this is a world I can write about. I can make the dad in my story a secret wrestler, because when you're writing, always write about things that you're passionate about. Writing is quite a solitary business, it's you and a laptop, on your own in your shed, in your office,

wherever, you on your own writing, so you've got to write about things that matter to you, because that reflects in the quality of the work that you do. So I thought, do you know what, I'm going to write about a boy whose kid...a boy whose dad is a wrestler, and this is Jake. He's your age, he goes to a school just like yours, he lives in a house that's just like yours, and he's got a dad, and he thinks his dad's amazing. Five days a week, Monday to Friday, his dad knocks down buildings, but at weekends, that's when it gets interesting, because his dad knocks down people instead, he's a wrestler.

He's the demolition man, but nobody turns up to watch him fight. He fights in dilapidated churches and derelict leisure centres, and a dozen people turn up to watch him, so behind his dad's back, because Jake thinks he's better than that, he enters his dad in a competition, a worldwide competition to become like a new wrestling superstar, and the winner of this worldwide competition is going to be flown to Las Vegas in America to fight in front of 100 thousand fans, with billions watching around the world. And do you know what, millions enter it, and his dad wins. He's flown all the way to America, he gets in the ring with the Tsunami Terror, the most terrifying wrestler the world has ever seen. Do you think his dad wins? Stick your hand up if you think his dad wins. Okay, do you want to know if he wins? Do you know want to know if he wins?

Aud: Yes.

PE: Good, then go away and read it. This is somewhere else that you get ideas from, this is a massive part of my life and always has been. When I was your age and all the way through my teenage years, I didn't think I was a reader, but I always was, because I used to read Batman, Superman, the Avengers, Hulk, all of them, I used to read them, devour them, but I used to get told, that's not proper reading, Phil. If anyone in your life ever tells you that if all you do is read comics that you're not a proper reader, then you need to stand up and argue with them about it, because they're wrong. This doesn't sum up what reading is, reading can be reading comics, reading can be reading the internet, it can be reading match reports from football, cinema reviews, music reviews, theatre reviews, fashion reviews, anything on the internet that's written. Reading a menu in a restaurant, you're still reading it.

You don't have to be reading this. I was terrified of this at your age, because all it was to me was bank upon bank, word upon word, and it was too much, but comics, words and pictures together, they allowed me the confidence to go on and read, and I'm 43 years old, and I still read comic after comic after comic, and I'm really proud of that. But I never thought I could write a novel about superheroes. Why? Because I thought all the great superheroes had already

been invented. How could I come up with a hero who had like better gadgets than Batman, or better powers than Spiderman, until about five years ago, I got on the train, and because I'm an idiot, I'd forgotten my book, I had nothing to read. The only thing I could do was pick up a newspaper that someone had left on the seat next to me, and do you know what, it wasn't even that day's newspaper, it was from the day before, it was yesterday's news. So I picked up that newspaper and I started to read it, and I opened it, and there inside was a small article about a man who had quite a sad life, really, little bit older than me, lived down in the south of England, and no matter how hard he tried, he could not get a job. Couldn't get one for love nor money. And as a result, he didn't earn anything.

He couldn't go and meet his mates and go to the cinema or go watch football or go to the pub, couldn't do any of those things. The only thing he could do was sit on the balcony outside his flat and watch the world go by, and he lived on the seventh floor of a council block, and he'd sit on his balcony and watch this really busy road that ran in front of his home. And he realised after a few months of living there that nobody could park their car properly. Every time someone tried to parallel park their car...do you know what that is? It's when you get a car and you reverse it into a parking space, it's a hard thing to do. Every time someone tried to do that, they'd hit the car behind, hit the car in front, hit the kerb, hit a pedestrian, hit a sign, they couldn't do it, and after a few months he said, do you know what, I've had enough of this, I am going to reinvent myself as a superhero and make sure this never happens again. Do you want to see what he looked like? Do you want to see? Okay, good, I need a volunteer. Who's going to volunteer? My friend, you were first, up you come. Big round of applause please. Hello mate, what's your name?

Child: Ian.

PE: Say again?

Child: Ian.

PE: Ian, nice to meet you. Turn round, we are going to transform you, my friend, into the greatest superhero the world has ever seen. Now, what do many superheroes wear upon their backs that flutter in the breeze? Yes?

Child: A cape.

PE: A cape, good. Now, this guy had no money, did he, no money to buy a cape, he couldn't go to Capes R Us and have one made. The only thing he could do was go to his wardrobe and find what he had there that would do as a cape, and the

only thing he had, my friend, that he could wear as a cape, was this. He had a towel, a beach towel. His didn't have penguins on it, mine did. His was washed...oh, probably more recently than mine was, but don't worry. Are you ready? This was his cape. He didn't even have Velcro, all he had was a butterfly clip. Okay, my friend, how do superheroes stand? Shall I show you? Feet slightly apart, one hand on your hip, chest puffed out like you're really proud. No, not pregnant, proud, proud. Good, ready to fly? Good, okay, this is a great costume, but we can still see his...

Child: Face.

PE: We can still see his face. Many superheroes wear helmets, do they not? Batman wears a cowl with little bat pointy ears. He needed a helmet, he had no money for a helmet, he had to go to his wardrobe, and all he had there was this. A 1940s US Air Force hat with woolly ears. Are you ready? You've got majestic hair, but not for long, my friend. Yes, okay, good, but we can still see his...

Child: Eyes.

PE: We can still see his eyes, exactly. Most superheroes, do they not, they protect their secret identity. The only thing he had...what are you doing? Get in character. The only thing he had in his wardrobe that he could use as a mask, my friends, not sunglasses, these. He had a pair of old scratched scuffed swimming goggles. Can you hold them at the front, because if I smash these into your face, your parents are going to sue me for a zillion quid. Okay, good, the transformation is complete, every day this man would sit on his balcony and he would wait until someone couldn't park their car properly, and the second he saw that, he would sprint down seven flights of stairs, burst through the front door, hurdle the fence and park their cars for them. He called himself Parallel Parking Man. Do you believe me? Show me your hand if you believe me.

Back in the classroom, do you believe me, because I tell you what, put your hands down, I promise you, it's true. Go away, look it up, Google it, you can see this man. Every day he parks people's cars for them, and at that point, from an old newspaper that was left on the train seat to me, I realised I could write the superhero book that I always wanted to write, because the thing that would make my superhero original is the fact that he was actually a little bit rubbish. I'm sorry, but it's true. That could be my different take on it. At this point we're going to pause and give our hero friend here the greatest round of applause ever heard in BBC Scotland. Go. Louder. Great work. Do you want to keep the costume?

Child: No.

PE: He does want to keep the costume, he says there's a girl that he'd like to impress, but we're not going to let you do that, give me the costume. Well done, mate, you were brilliant, have a seat. Well done. That second that I saw that article, I knew I could write that superhero book, so I sat down at my desk and I wrote 500 words seven days a week for two and a half months until I had this. This is Mouse, Michael J Mouse. He appears in Demolition Dad, he's Jake's best friend. He's your age, he lives in a house just like yours, he goes to a school that I guarantee you is just like yours, and every day he goes to school with his cape on under his school uniform, because he's desperate to be a superhero, but he's got no powers, no powers whatsoever, and he's hoping beyond hope that a radioactive spider's going to bite him at some point, and he'll get these amazing powers, but it never happens. And as a result he gets a little bit bullied by the other kids, until something truly amazing happens.

One day, his mum, Jo, who is the local lollipop lady, she manages to do something miraculous. One day, as she's escorting the last child across the road to school, she hears a growl from behind her, and it's not lions that have escaped from the local zoo, it's two supercharged motorbikes that have turned onto Storey Street and are haring along it at like 100 miles an hour, because on board those two motorbikes are two of the deadliest criminals that Seacross has ever seen, and they've just robbed a bank, and in their rucksack is like a million quid's worth of diamonds. Jo hears this noise from behind her, spins round, and in doing so, the lollipop stick, you know the big lollipop sticks that they hold, it flies out of her hand, it knocks one of the robbers clean off his bike, he flies six foot in the air, his rucksack opens, and all of a sudden it's raining diamonds. Amazing. And she stops this guy from getting away with like half a million quid's worth of diamonds. And everyone says, oh my goodness, Jo, you're amazing, you're like some sort of superhero. In fact to us, you are a hero, so we're not going to call you the lollipop lady anymore, we're going to call you Lady Lollipop, and they literally think she's some sort of superhero, which is ridiculous, because all that happened is the lollipop stick flew out of her hand by accident.

But to Mouse, this is the greatest thing ever, because if his mum gets to be a superhero, he does too, because he gets to be her sidekick, he gets to be like the Robin to her Batman. So he calls himself on the spot, Mouse the Mighty, and at this point things have started to get really exciting, because onto Storey Street start arriving reporters from the local newspapers, reporters from the local TV, and they're interviewing, they're shoving cameras into their faces, and Mouse gets super excited, grabs hold of the microphone and says, I'm Michael J Mouse, I'm 11 years old, I'm a normal kid, but I also think I'm a superhero. So if you think you've got powers, or even if you've got no powers at all, but you want to be a

hero, come and join us, come knock on our door, we can be like the Avengers, but just like on a much lower budget. And over the next 24 hours, people do come and knock at his door, and they do indeed have rubbish powers. Dan Druff.

Child: Dandruff?

PE: Dan Druff? What sort of superpower is Dan Druff? Do you know what dandruff is? It's when you've got a really dry scalp, and poor Dan's got so much of it, as he walks down the street and shakes his head, it's like a snowstorm erupting, and it's falling behind him in a shower, and kids are like walking up behind him and sweeping it up in their arms and chucking it about like snow, it's disgusting, but not as disgusting as this man's powers. I don't think we need to spend too long on guessing what Skid Mark's powers are. Not only can he fart loudly and smellily, oh my goodness, he can fart a tune, he can guff a lullaby, he can send babies to sleep with the power of his bum cheeks alone, he is absolutely incredible.

Now, this could be, if you wanted it to be, the end of your story, the moment with Mouse gets this amazing band of rubbish superheroes together, that could be the entirety of the story, but actually in this story it's not, because the best advice I can give you about writing is, sometimes – in fact, always – you have to make bad things happen to good people. You have to take your hero, in this case Mouse, and you have to wring out every single bit of drama from their lives as possible, and that's so important, because your book has to be a journey, and it has to be an exciting journey. If it's a journey that just goes along like this, travelling along like this, travelling along like this, what sort of journey's that, is that an interesting journey? No, it's really, really boring. If you have chest pains and go to the hospital and they hook you up to a monitor and it does that, what does it mean?

Child: You're dead.

PE: You're dead. Do you want to read a book that makes you feel like you're dead? No, so you've got to make bad things happen to them, and that's what I do in this book. Think about when you're writing a story, think about this as the basic shape for your story. Think about the story mountain. This is a decent way of thinking about writing stories. This is how stories might be shaped. Every book has an opening. In *Superhero Street* it's about Mouse and he wants to be a superhero, but he's got no powers. The build up is when his mum foils that robbery by mistake, and Mouse gets to become a superhero and have his jolly band of superheroes with him. The dilemma, the cloudy rainy moment at the top of the mountain is when Mouse realises that amongst his band of superheroes is

actually a bad guy who's come back for a diamond that Mouse doesn't even know that he possession of.

The resolution is how Mouse solves that problem, and the ending is the ending, it's the happy ever after. Now, this is good, I like this shape, teachers, this is a good shape for a story, but when you go away, don't go away and write the story mountain. What you should be going away is writing this. You should be writing a story big dipper. If you've not written a story big dipper, let me explain to you how it works. You get on down here in a rickety old carriage, and as soon as you sit down, a bar comes over and locks into place with a clunk, and when that bar locks with a clunk, you're not getting off that ride until it's over, and for the next two or three minutes, you climb and you climb and you climb, and then you climb, and as you climb, your body starts to do weird things. Your stomach rises from like here to here to here to here, and then it feels like it's being wrung out with a dishcloth, and then it's like butterflies are hatching, your body starts to feel a little bit excited, and a little bit nervous, but a little bit scared at the same time, and you continue to climb until you get to the top, and oh my goodness, it feels like you can see the whole world. It feels like you can see all the way to Australia, and it's windy up there, and it's noisy, and your body by this point is going mental because you don't know what's going to...how you're going to feel.

You know what's going to happen, but you don't know how it's going to make you feel. And at the top, you sit there for a minute, and you wait and you wait and you wait, until bang, the floor disappears and you're hurtling down at a million miles an hour, and the wind is blowing so strong that your cheeks that used to be here, the G force now has them tucked behind your ears, and your body's going mental. You don't know whether to laugh, cry, scream, yell, burp, vomit, fart...maybe not the last bit, but all those bodily things at the same time, it's the most thrilling, exciting, terrifying ride you have ever been on. Isn't that how a great book should make you feel? Yes, it should. In fact, don't go away and write the story mountain, don't even go away and write the story big dipper. What you should be writing, my friends, is this. Because what I always argue is, it's not enough as a storyteller to take your readers on a journey that's over after the first big drop.

When that first big drop is over, just for a second let them get their breath back and compose themselves, and then turn them on their heads, write the story rollercoaster. Turn them on their heads once, turn them on their heads twice, make them go quickly to the right, quickly to the left, then take them up the biggest slope you can find and hang them upside down by their ankles and shake them until the money falls out of their pocket, and then go back and do it all again

in reverse. Think about the greatest books or the greatest films that you've read and watched, that's what those great things do, they make you feel all of these emotions, sometimes simultaneously. So my advice to you from this session, keep your phones in your pocket when you walk down the street, you're surrounded by stories every single second of your lives. Don't write poems for girls thinking it's going to get you a girlfriend, doesn't work, and thirdly, don't go away and write the story mountain, don't go away and write the story big dipper, you've got to go away and you've got to write the story rollercoaster. At this point we will pause, take a breath and answer any questions you might have.

JF: Let's give a big round of applause for Phil, please. Wow. I wish you'd come to my school when I was wee, absolutely brilliant top tips there, thank you so much, Phil, and great about the wrestling too, any wrestling fans here? Yeah, a lot. We have had lots and lots of questions coming in on Twitter, so I'll try to get through as many as I can, but first of all, we've got a couple of questions from the people who are here, so why don't you come up with your question first of all, come on up and join me. Hello. Hi there. So which school are you from?

Child: St Patrick's Primary.

JF: St Patrick's Primary, and what's your name?

Child: Amna

JF: Lovely, and what is your question for Phil?

Child: Are the characters in your story based on the people you know?

PE: Sometimes, yeah. I've written...so I've had 13 books published now, and I can pretty much guarantee you that in every single one of them, there's at least one of my friends in there. People often say you should write about what you know, and that's true. Sometimes it's a really good idea if you can take people that you really love from your life and feed them into your story, as long as they're cool with that, and you're not going to say they've got a big nose or stink of cheese or something like that. No, loads of people. I've worked in all my best friends, my kids, I've written books for my kids, so yeah, always try and get characters from real life into stories if you can, but try and give them a little bit of a twist, make them a little bit different to how they are in real life. That's a great question.

JF: Great question, great answer too. Are you interested in writing?

Child: Yes.

JF: And are there people in your life that you might want to include in your writing?

Child: Yeah.

JF: Okay, we won't let on who they are, shall we? Thanks very much indeed, you can go back to your seat, great question, thank you. Big round of applause, and we've got another question. Come on up to my settee. Hello there, hiya. What's your name and which school are you from?

Child: I'm Keril and I'm from Hayocks Primary.

JF: Brilliant to have you here, and what is your question for Phil?

Child: What other authors inspired you?

PE: Oh man, loads. Not many when I was your age, because I really struggled to read anything. The thing that inspired me most to read when I was your age was something called Roy of the Rovers, which was a comic, a 32 page comic strip every week about football, and that was like heaven sent, so I used to read that every single week, and the Beano I used to read religiously every week, and that was great because there's loads of comics, you know, the Beano's still out there, you can get the Dandy annual, there's the Phoenix comic you can get every week, comics massively inspired me, and Batman and Spiderman. Now it's people like Louis Sachar, I love Holes. I love Lemony Snicket's books about A Series of Unfortunate Events, and there's loads of great writers in Scotland as well, there's people like Keith Gray who lived in Edinburgh. I mean, if I'd been a teenager and Keith had been writing, I would have been a reader, because he just...he got inside my head as a 26 year old man, so there's a...you've just got to find that one book, that one book opens the door, and for me, that was Holes, so give that a go, and if you struggle with the book, read the film. Films can be an amazing way into reading, because it takes away some of that pressure of having to understand what's going on in the book, if you can follow it visually.

JF: Another great question, another fantastic answer, thank you. Do you have a favourite author?

Child: Roald Dahl.

PE: Yeah, can't go wrong.

JF: Thank you very much. Cheers, thank you. Round of applause, please. Right, well, thank you very much indeed for getting in touch using the hashtag, #bbcauthorslive, and let's see how many we can get through, Phil, because you haven't worked hard enough already.

PE: No, that's good.

JF: Yeah, we have to keep working you. This is from P7 Dedridge Primary School, I like this, what does it feel like to be an author? Exhausting?

PE: No, it's great. I mean, I love writing, I'm really lucky, and I go and...my first four books that I wrote, I wrote completely on the bus, because I used to go into London and back on the bus every day, and I used to write 500 words on the bus to work, and 500 words on the way home, and now...

JF: And how did you...was that a notebook?

PE: No, no, laptop.

JF: Wow.

PE: Yeah, I used to have to sit near the window, so it wasn't easy for people to nick it as I was writing, but...and that's great, because it's like for me, I write because it's like there's a story burning inside us, that's how it feels to be a writer, that's how you know if you're telling the right story, because you're excited, because I don't plan my books. When I...I sit down with a basic idea and I just write, I don't...some writers are meticulous in the way they plan, and I don't, because I want to be entertained first and foremost, so writing should make you feel excited. If you're not excited, if you're not feeling the emotions that your characters are feeling, then I'd argue you're writing the wrong book.

JF: I love that idea though that sometimes you feel a bit bored. I love the idea that using just thoughts in your head, you can invent your own story and be in your own adventure.

PE: Well, being an adult's rubbish, because like playtime disappears. When you're at junior school you've got playtime twice a day and you can go out, and I used to tie my coat around my neck and pretend to be Batman, and then when you're an adult that kind of disappears because you have to pay the bills, so when you're writing, it's like having your anorak around your neck again, I can go anywhere and do anything.

JF: That's fantastic. Thank you very much. And Anna, hi Anna, wherever you are, hello Anna, P5 Bargarran Primary, is it hard to come up with book titles?

PE: Yeah, it can be really difficult. The first book I got published was called Being Billy, but it wasn't called that when I wrote it, it was called Never Tear us Apart, and the publisher just said, no, that's garbage, and they said look at alliteration, alliteration can be, you know, starting two or three words with the same letter, that catchiness, because hundreds of books are published every month, never mind every year, so you've got to make your title stand out, so sometimes

alliteration can be a really...Demolition Dad, you know, Superhero Street, sometimes that can work.

JF: And do they come to you...the good ones?

PE: No, sometimes you need the help of publishers and friends, yeah, no, I'm pretty bad at titles, yeah.

JF: Thank you very much, Anna. What do we have next? Oh, this is good, this has come from Deanston Primary, and also Casey, who's in P6 of St John's Primary, and Sandwick Junior High up in Shetland, and Tony in St Ninian's in Livingston, all these people with the same question.

PE: Great, okay.

JF: From across the country, I love that, and the question is, Phil Earle, what is your favourite book that you've written? Can you choose one?

PE: No, I can't choose one.

JF: Go on.

PE: I can't, it's like saying, which of your children do you like the best?

JF: All these people all over the country...

PE: I know, but I've got three kids and I can't choose which one of them I like the best, because I don't like any of them, they're all horrible, so it's kind of...I honestly didn't think I would write anything in my life, so to choose one, when every single word's come out of my weird imagination, is hard. Honestly, it's...

JF: Okay, that's an honest answer.

PE: Being a salesperson I should be, it's like the last book that I wrote, because I want that to sell.

JF: Available in a shop near you now. No, that's a good answer, so you're fond of all of them, that's lovely.

PE: And for different reasons.

JF: Thank you. Great question though, absolutely fab question, and Nesting Primary School in Shetland, hello there, is it this camera? Hi, I'm just going to wave randomly at that camera anyway. Was the wrestling...well, we kind of know the answer, but maybe you can tell us a bit more, was the wrestling in Demolition

Dad based on real life knowledge, so we know you've got a bit of that, or research, so did you do extra research?

PE: Researching a wrestling book's the best thing in the world, because I just went back on YouTube and watched all my favourite fights again, and Albie's...my son, my eldest son, he's like first year of senior school now, and he's obsessed with it, so it's brilliant, I just sit down with him and watch Roman Reigns and John Cena and all these guys. Yeah, best research in the world, I just sat down and re-watched all those old fights. You can go on the internet and find Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks fighting and look at it, because it's absolutely hilarious.

JF: Being an author's great fun, actually, isn't it?

PE: Yeah, there are worse jobs.

JF: Make up your own adventures and then go and watch wrestling. This is from Coull Primary, they say, we love how you use alliteration in your writing, like Michael Mouse, the mighty boy from Storey Street. What other tools do you use to keep readers hooked? Do you have actual tools that as you're doing it you think, right, this'll keep them going?

PE: No, I think the only thing you have to do is write the book that you'd want to read yourself, because you're your first audience, do you know what I mean, you're the first person that's going to read what you write, so my rule of thumb is, if I'm enjoying it, there's a much better chance that someone else is going to do the same.

JF: And I guess what you said about not being dull...

PE: Yeah, don't be boring. Marcus Sedgewick, who's the greatest...one of the greatest young adult writers, he has one rule for writing which is don't be boring, which sounds obvious, but it's the greatest advice you can give, yeah, absolutely.

JF: And let's see whatever...do you prefer writing funny or serious stories, this from Smithton Primary School in Highland.

PE: That's a good one. I like to do both, actually, because it's funny, I really tried with Demolition Dad and all the Storey Street books, that I wanted them to be funny, but I wanted them to have like a serious theme at the heart of it, like in Demolition Dad, Jake's dad ends up depressed, and so I wanted to be able to do both. I think you can do funny, but also talk about things that are quite serious as well, and that's about a marriage breaking down, so...but they're also meant to be slapstick, that's a 200 page gag about breaking wind, but it's also about marriage breakdown.

JF: Made me laugh. Thank you very much. Can you believe that's us run out of time.

PE: Wow.

JF: Incredible. Thank you very much indeed, thanks again for all your fantastic questions, and shall we just have a huge round of applause right now for Phil, another one, massive, you as well. Thank you. We'll have another round of applause again in a minute. Don't forget if you missed any of this or you just want to tell your pals or your mum and dad to watch, you can do so by going to the watch on demand page over at scottishbooktrust.com, we've got 60 recordings there for you, suitable for all ages from nurseries right up to S6. We'll be back again in the New Year, it's almost Christmas, with more Authors Live. Thank you so much for joining us, give us a huge round of applause and another cheer for the fabulous Phil Earle.

PE: Thank you.