

# A Q&A with Author HAYLEY LONG

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## What inspires your writing?

People, places, memories, other writers, song lyrics, films . . . everything.

## How did you first become an author?

I wrote things. I began with reviews of CDs and books that I wrote for free for a magazine, then I progressed to writing articles and short stories and novels. And I kept on writing even when people sent my work back saying “no, thanks.” Listening to feedback and not giving up are the two crucial ingredients to getting published, I think.

## Where is your favorite place to write?

I write in the front room of my house in Norwich. It’s not as good as the roof terrace of a villa in the south of France, but it has to do.

## Can you tell us a little bit about your writing process for *Sophie Someone*?

It all began with two thoughts. First was a fascination with a local news story that had been floating around in my head for years. I grew up in a seaside town in the U.K. and nothing ever happened there. Nothing. Not a sausage. Then one day a man drove away with a security van filled with money and was not seen again for nearly twenty years. In the gap in between, I often wondered what happened to him. And I wondered what happened to his partner and their little boy, because they disappeared, too. So I changed the little boy to a little girl, changed a whole lot of other details, and just made up my own version of the story. That’s how *Sophie Someone* started. And I knew this novel would be largely set in the Belgian capital of Brussels because that was my other thought: When I was younger, I lived in Brussels for a while and taught English, and I still really love that city. But there aren’t many stories that are set in Brussels, so I knew I wanted to write one.

## Why did you create new terminology for words like *mom*, *dad*, and so on?

*Sophie Someone* is a story about total and utter disbelief. It’s about discovering something about your parents—and even about yourself—that is so unexpected and so hard to process that it pulls the rug out from beneath your feet and results in a complete collapse of confidence. It’s about that feeling that makes you say, “What . . . ? But . . . ? I can’t even . . . Huh?”

Now, normally when I’m writing, I spend ages trying to choose exactly the right words for the job, but this time I had a problem. How could I give my readers any sense of Sophie’s gobsmacked bewilderment if I neatly explained everything? Then I had an idea! Why not let Sophie tell her story in her own way? That way she would be able to tell us this deeply personal story about her family without actually telling it at all. It’s kind of like a safety filter, I suppose. When some secrets are too shocking to put into words, we find ways to avoid saying those words. I knew I was asking my readers to have a little patience as they found their way through Sophie’s trauma, but, remember, her secret is all about her mom and dad—there was no way she was ever going to spill that one easily.

## Were there any funny stories behind the creation of certain words?

The words aren’t random. I tried to choose words that were near to their originals in the dictionary. So *person* became *pigeon* and *tourist* became *tortoise*. And then I found that Sophie’s language just started to invent itself, and I was writing crazy sentences like “There are a lot of pigeons in Brussels and some of those pigeons are tortoises.” I also smiled when I realized that my replacements for *face* (*fax*) and *book* (*bucket*) meant that Facebook was changed to Faxbucket. And that’s what Facebook is, really, isn’t it? A great big container full of messages. There was a time when I was dreaming about all these words. That was not so funny!

## What do you hope readers will get out of this book?

I’d like them to know that it doesn’t matter how completely complicated a situation might seem to be; there is always a way to tell a difficult story.



#sophiesomeone



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