

# Interview with Louise Walters, author of Mrs Sinclair's Suitcase.



Roberta likes to collect the letters and postcards she finds in second-hand books. When her father gives her some of her grandmother's belongings, she finds a baffling letter from the grandfather she never knew - dated after he supposedly died in the war.

Dorothy is unhappily married to Albert, who is away at war. When an aeroplane crashes in the field behind her house she meets Squadron Leader Jan Pietrykowski, and as their bond deepens she dares to hope she might find happiness. But fate has other plans for them both, and soon she is hiding a secret so momentous that its shockwaves will touch her granddaughter many years later...

Mrs Sinclair's Suitcase is a dual timeline novel set in the modern day and 1940s Britain. Flawlessly written by local author Louise Walters, the novel shifts between its two main characters, Roberta and Dorothy, as a 70-year-old mystery slowly unfolds. I caught up with Louise recently to chat about writing, motherhood and um, Benedict Cumberbatch...

**I believe you grew up around this area – have you lived here all your life?**

I was born in Banbury and grew up in north Oxfordshire, and now I live in South Northamptonshire, so apart from a few years living in Lincolnshire, I've always lived in this area.

**Have you always wanted to be a writer and if so, why?**

From quite a young age I wrote little stories and felt the urge not to "be" a writer, but to write. I loved reading and I read an awful lot as a child so it felt natural to me to write as well.

**Where did you come up with the idea for your novel, Mrs Sinclair's Suitcase?**

I had several sources of inspiration. One was an old suitcase I own with a label inside with "Mrs D Sinclair" written on it. That gave me the title. I also used to work in The Old Hall Bookshop in Brackley which is the inspiration for the bookshop in the novel. And I once found a letter inside a book from a Polish squadron leader, written at the very end of the war. Those three things buzzed around in my mind for a while and were the basis of my story.

**How long did it take to write?**

From the first tentative ideas to the manuscript finding a publisher was around six or seven years. There were a few false starts but once I started

to work on the novel in earnest it took about two years, followed by another year and a half of further edits between getting the book deal and the book being published.

**Did you know how the novel would end before you started?**

I had an idea of the ending from the start, but all the plot points and characters came to me gradually and it's difficult to pinpoint exactly when I "started" to write it. A lot of the writing process is thinking.

**You write lovingly about books in the chapters about Roberta so I'm assuming you love books and reading. Who's your favourite author and what style of writing do you like to read?**

I do love books and reading. You can't write if you don't read. I think I'll always regard myself a reader first, a writer second. I love literary/commercial fiction. I like stories to have a plot and be well written. I read fairly widely but some of my favourite writers are Penelope Lively, Rumer Godden, Joyce Carol Oates and Sarah Waters. I also love the Brontes, Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy.

**Did you read much as a kid?**

All the time. I've kept many of my childhood books and still re-read a couple of them.

**You were awarded a degree in English literature in 2010. You also have five children, (Oliver, 20; Emily 17; Jude, 11; Fin, 7 and Stanley, 5) - how on earth do you manage to fit everything in at the same time?**

Well, it wasn't quite all at the same time. It took me 12 years to get my OU degree and after that I started work on the novel. I've managed to fit everything around the kids. I don't watch much TV!

**I bet you don't! With so many distractions in modern life, it's so difficult to get kids to read these days - do you encourage your children to read, and if so, how do you manage it?**

Books have been part of their lives from birth. We have a lot at home (too many!) and we go the library. I try to read to the little ones every day, although it doesn't always happen. I've found the most important thing apart from access to books is to enjoy books myself. If my kids see me engrossed in a book I think they understand books are engrossing! I also talk about the books the kids are reading, with interest and enthusiasm, even if I think Goosebumps are not actually that great...

**How do they feel about having a published author as a mother? Are any of them showing an interest in following in your footsteps?**

I think the older kids are proud of me. For the younger ones it is what it is. I'm just Mum, which is true. The younger ones love making their own books, with lots of lovely pictures and stapled-together pages.

**How do you find time to write - do you follow a particular routine?**

It's difficult to get into a routine with five kids. I don't set a daily word count. I just write whenever I can.

**Your description of life in the countryside in 1940s Britain is very well observed, did you do a lot of research for that, and if so did you enjoy it?**

I did some research but mostly it was based on my experience of living in a cottage on a farm in Lincolnshire. I just re-imagined that cottage in

the 1940s. I had to check on dates and historical facts of course, but the location was half known to me, half imagined. I must confess to not enjoying research. It's a chore. I just want to get on with the writing. I tend to write a first draft, then do the research, and edit or re-write accordingly.

**Would you write another novel set in the past and if so, any particular period you'd enjoy researching/writing about?**

I have written another novel set partly in the 50s, 60s and 70s. But I'm not a "historical novelist". My work so far always has a contemporary thread alongside an historical one.

**Did you put much of yourself in your two main characters?**

Of course. But I put myself in all my characters. At the same time these are made up people, they are not me. Often they say, think and do things I wouldn't. It's a lot of fun making people up.

**Roberta's ending is quite Jane Austen-esque; she gets the perfect man. Do you like happy endings?**

Sometimes. Don't we all? I felt this novel needed one of the protagonists to have the fairy-tale ending... although I think both Dorothy and Roberta get what they truly want, or need.

**Would you like to see your novel adapted for the small or big screen? If so, who would play your main characters? Hahaha! Fantasy casting is fun. I think James McAvoy would be a fantastic Jan, and Rachel Weisz would bring Dorothy to life I'm sure. I wonder if Benedict Cumberbatch could have a shot at playing Philip?**

Ooh yes, now that I would go to the cinema to see! So, Louise, what's next for you? Do you have a second novel coming out and if so, when? Any clues as to what it's about? I have written a "second" novel (actually the third I've written) but so far it hasn't found a publisher. It is very hard to be published these days, even if you already have one or more under your belt. So I'm now writing a fourth novel, which is a re-hash of my first. Confusing isn't it?! No clues I'm afraid, I like to keep my writing to myself for as long as possible!

**Thanks so much for talking to me Louise, you are truly an inspiration! Follow Louise on Twitter @LouiseWalters12**

For a chance to win a paperback copy of Mrs Sinclair's Suitcase, signed by the author, email [Claire@yourletterbox.co.uk](mailto:Claire@yourletterbox.co.uk) and we'll choose one lucky winner out of the hat.

