



## Why I Write

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**T**O MAKE SENSE OF A COMPLEX WORLD: to understand life, to defy death...

The first thing I ever remember writing, aside from schoolwork and diaries, was a film script; well, it was a scene within a film. It was a scene inspired by my then boyfriend's life. He'd grown up in a household with a violent father, had witnessed things that a child should never have to see: his father throwing a knife at his heavily pregnant mother's belly. I couldn't get the image out of my head, and I guess to try and make sense of it I started to write. That image made sense of my boyfriend's character...the person he'd become, his relationships; his relationship with me.

I remember lying behind the settee trying to get some peace as I wrote... The TV was blaring in the background...me scribbling...my boyfriend being chased down the street in his bare feet, running from the family home, away from his father...a man who couldn't stand another male adult in the house.

I'm drawn to dark material. I've written plays about genetic sexual attraction, a family annihilator, a teacher who has sex with a pupil, and the deaths at Deepcut.

I was brought up in a loving working-class family. This instilled a level of safety and security that allows me to investigate the darker side of life, exploring another person's pain and injustices. But there's always humour



to be found in the darkest of moments, and that's what I love to write: the co-existence of darkness and light.

I'm fascinated by this; fascinated by death, by tragedy, how people's lives can turn on a ha'penny. How one minute we're here and the next we're gone. I guess my writing is about making sense of death, of loss.

When I was nineteen, my neighbour Dot died in front of me. Dot was like a second mam to me. The experience was profound. I saw the fear in her eyes. The disbelief that her life was being cut short. I've experienced a lot of death of people close to me: my brother went to sleep one night and never woke up. I've seen a lot of dead bodies.

I remember my nana Bidy said 'It's the living you need to be frightened of, not the dead'. And that stuck with me. The wisdom of ordinary people, the stories we tell ourselves to cope, to make sense of the world. My love of storytelling comes from my Catholic upbringing, steeped in Irish heritage, the wake, bringing the bodies home, the community coming together to mourn, to pay respects through stories, the ceremony and the drama.

My aunties were great storytellers...telling stories about dead relatives and folk from the East End of Sunderland, stories with humour, stories about human nature that told as much about the teller as the subject. I wanted to capture the wit and humour of folk like my Nana Bidy... working-class sages whose lives aren't dignified with fancy obituaries.

My family's stories were a way of keeping memories alive, of honouring those who had gone before. I want to capture the lives of working-class people, to pay tribute to their wit and wisdom, to celebrate their skills, talent, extraordinariness, kindness, badness, to dramatise them all, to dignify them, to immortalise them. And there we have it...we're back to death.