



## The Best Advice I Ever Received as a Writer

---

Paul Dodgson

**T**HE BEST ADVICE I EVER RECEIVED as a writer was given to me one sunny spring lunchtime in 1996, sitting outside a café on Great Portland Street in London.

At the time I was a producer for BBC Radio Four and one of the programmes I made was *A Good Read*. It's still going strong. The format is simple: a presenter and two guests each choose a book and read each other's choices. The guests and presenter take turns to recommend their title and this is discussed. Find the right guests and the programme sort of makes itself. And I got to read lots of interesting things I wouldn't have come across otherwise. After the recording I everyone for lunch and on this day was joined by writers Julie Myerson and Peter Godwin and the generous and affable presenter, Edward Blishen.

We made our way from Broadcasting House to a table outside a nearby café. The conversation gravitated towards what everyone was writing. I remember how Julie, Peter and Edward all described the exciting projects they had on the go. I sat quietly and listened. Then someone, I think it was Edward, asked me if *I* was writing anything? I leaned back in my chair and thought for a moment. I wanted to sound like one of the gang. 'I'm busy being a producer,' I said, 'but hope, at some point, to take a career break and dedicate myself to writing...something. There just isn't time right now'.

I really *wanted* to be a writer. A few years previously I'd been on a radio



drama-directing course at the BBC, where we were given the chance to write our own ten-minute play. I had done so and the distinguished producer who came to listen to our work liked what I'd written. So much so that he got in touch afterwards and told me to keep at it. I fell in love with the possibility of being a writer but didn't do anything to make it happen. Years passed, until I believed the only way to change was to take some serious time out of the daily routine. I remember Julie shaking her head as I suggested it. 'Don't do that,' she said, 'it will never work.' I was shocked and asked for an explanation. 'If you give everything up and expect to be a writer, it's very likely nothing will happen. You need to find a way to fit writing in to your busy life.'

This simple piece of advice was the wake-up call I needed. I started mapping out an idea for a play and although it took a while, it became my first commission. I was no longer waiting for when I had the time I needed to write, but was finding it within the time that was already there. And *that* has made all the difference.