Writers Aloud

Episode 393

Introduction: Hello and welcome, you're listening to *Writers Aloud,* a podcast brought to you by writers for the Royal Literary Fund in London.

Hello and welcome to episode 393 of *Writers Aloud*. In this episode Jonathan Edwards speaks with John Greening about Welsh tradition and the impact of Welsh nationalism in poetry; writing about family in the context of truth and fiction; the impact of winning a major poetry prize and the Bic four-way pen as the most essential tool in his creative process.

John Greening: The Welsh poet, Jonathan Edwards, was born in Newport in 1979 and grew up in Crosskeys where he still lives. He studied English and American Literature and was a secondary school English teacher for over a decade. He's particularly committed to the development of other people's writing: he mentors emerging writers as part of Literature Wales, and has led workshops at festivals, in universities, and in prisons. He's also edited the distinguished and long-established magazine *Poetry Wales*.

Among his diverse writing projects he's written speeches for the Welsh assembly government and articles for the *Big Issue*. After gaining his MA in writing from the University of Warwick, he quickly came to prominence winning several awards and a writing bursary. In 2014, his debut collection was published by Seren: *My Family and Other Superheroes*, is described as reflecting a sense of Welsh pop culture and its relation to broader Western culture, history, family, and the lives of ordinary people.

The collection was not only shortlisted for the Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and the Roland Mathias Poetry Award, but was a Wales Book of the Year and winner of the prestigious Costa Poetry Award. This was followed in 2018 by a second collection: *Gen*, also a people's choice Wales Book of the Year. A third, *Talk of the Town*, is promised soon. In 2020, he was a Gladstone library writer-in-residence, and in the same year he published a selection of the poetry of the super-tramp W. H. Davies. His gift anthology of *Ten Poems About Work*, appeared from Candlestick Press in 2021. Jonathan Edwards can be heard reading from his collections on the poetry archive.

Jonathan, lovely to be here with you in Crosskeys, obviously a very important place for you. Is this where poetry began for you?

Jonathan Edwards: Well I suppose it did in terms of subjects really, but poetry really started in university for me. I've got memories of poems from school, particularly R. S. Thomas and Ted Hughes and I think probably a lot of the writing about people and some of the writing about animals comes from those first exposures to poetry. But really it was Warwick University and the writing department at Warwick University, and David Morley and Michael Hulse and a lot of the other people who were teaching there.

And I think the thing about that time really was the extent to which it was enabling and confidence building: that poetry suddenly seemed like something that someone from my sort of background could do. So this area has always been the root of the subjects I think but then the whole notion of poetry being something that can be done really, I suppose, came through university and education.

John Greening: So was there at a fairly early stage, a sense of being part of a Welsh tradition?

Jonathan Edwards: I don't know really, I think Dylan Thomas was a writer

that I always loved, so I suppose if you're discovering poetry for the first time in university, and you're in an English university, then that is part of your difference or part of your identity that you want to explore. The key anthology really was *The New Poetry*, which David and Michael and David Kennedy edited.

And I can remember, really looking for the Welsh writers in that and finding Tony Curtis and grasping onto Tony Curtis. To be honest, I think that the Welshness is something that's developed. I think I was probably interested initially in quite a lot of surreal accessible writers: writers like Paul Durcan and Geoff Hattersley, who are really important figures in that anthology. And then of course you start thinking about: okay, where am I, what are my subjects, there's Dylan Thomas, there's R. S. Thomas, there's Owen Sheers, there's Gillian Clarke. And so that side of things really growing for me, for sure.

John Greening: That's fascinating to hear that it was the *later New Poetry* that influenced you, I've heard somebody talk about the original Alvarez *New Poetry* influencing them, so that's really interesting. R. S. Thomas who was in that Alvarez anthology I believe, he had a certain exasperation about English culture overwhelming the world. So that isn't really a part of your makeup, or...I perhaps detect a few twinklings of that in your writing, the occasional...particularly poems about the reservoir, elegies about the reservoir that you wrote.

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. R. S. Thomas is hugely important for me. Particularly in terms of writing about people, and the way that he writes about hill farmers and so on. And then also the way that tradition of the character sketch is passed down, it's very much there in Owen Sheers, and so a hell of a lot of those poems, like Owen Jones in the first book, and in a lot of the stuff I was just taking the approach that those writers had taken.

And looking at people who live in Risca and who live in Crosskeys and

trying to take the same sort of approach really. But yeah, the Welsh nationalist part of it is definitely there. I think the Byron Rogers biography of R. S. Thomas is fantastic and the anecdotes about Glyndwr getting in touch with him and hero worshipping him and all that stuff like: where he'll go and give a talk at the Oxford Union and his first words are in Welsh, and he'll say in Welsh: 'I'm not going to speak in English tonight', and then he'll just keep going!

So I think he's heroic for those sorts of reasons. And I think also a bunch of Welsh historians: Jan Morris in particular, and John Davis and they're... well actually, the really beautiful way in which they write about the history of working-class descent and class descent, but also nationalist politics. And that sequence about Tryweryn...

John Greening: that's the drowned village?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I interviewed one of the people who was involved in the attack on the dam site. So that whole aspect of Welsh history... because of literally what was done: because of the forced eviction and the fact that this water ends up over the border, but then the symbolic resonance of that event.

So yeah, I think that Welsh nationalist politics is very definitely there. In some ways it was accidental because at the point of putting the first book together in particular, I looked at the manuscript and thought: *oh my God, there's all these poems about being Welsh!*

So in some ways it was a surprise. And then of course you start thinking: well, how does this relate to the recent Welsh writers that I really admire, like Steven Knight for example, and that generation of writers. The level of Welsh content seemed to be different to what was happening immediately before me. So I was very conscious of that.

John Greening: Coming to your first book, *My Family and Other*

Superheroes, apart from the tremendous title, family is clearly very important, it's presented quite fancifully in those opening points. How did the family react to that?

Jonathan Edwards: They were really fine. This is a question that I keep going back and forth about: the presentation of the family, and the relationship between the book and reality and you're right, the fanciful nature of that. One thing I'm interested in, probably particularly with family, is the extent to which there's a relationship between the family that appears on the page, and the real-life family. So I always think in particular about Heaney when I think about this. There's a way in which, if you went to Ireland in the Sixties or something, Heaney's father is not going to be the father that we see in 'Follower'.

There's a difference between the poem and real life in other words. But I also think it's shortsighted to think that there's no relationship. So I've been doing some academic writing recently on presentation of the family in Welsh poets and you'll get editorial feedback, like: don't talk about the poet's family, real life family, because this is a poem. Every poem's a construction, and so on.

And so you can go to that extent of thinking the poem's made up, in the way that a novel will be. So people will credit novelists with scale and creativity, whereas people will assume that a poem is real.

So I think that I'm constantly aware of the relationship between the family on the page and the family in reality and knowing as a writer, they're not the same. But also I think by this point, knowing that most readers will read them as the same. But then also I think the other thing about family poems being fanciful is that the crucial thing really for me in writing poems, is that there has to be space for the writer to do something.

So in other words, if you are just replicating reality, then you're going to be bored as a writer. So the stuff about Gregory Peck or the stuff about

Evel Knievel or something, in part is a way of having me do something in the poem, so that the act of writing isn't boring.

John Greening: Yeah. You've got to be the Evel Knievel in a sense, and that's the thing that struck me, they're wonderful stories and wonderful characters, but that's not enough, and it's the sound which is what I always respond to first. The sound, the music, all the tricks you're doing. It's very Welsh in that respect, I can hear the sort of thing that Bernard Watkins does – a poet that I admire: the echoes of one word with another and fancy line breaks – all of which one might miss, because there's so much that's interesting in narrative and character, which are the novelist's gifts. So that collection, how did you go about organizing it, it's in four parts isn't it, that first collection? They did seem to have a distinct character to them, each of those four parts.

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I think really what I ended up with, because there was basically ten years after university of really just writing, and really the goal was to get a poem in a magazine. So I was really trying to write single poems for magazines and competitions and try and build towards a collection in that way.

I suppose really what I ended up with was a quite messy arrangement of individual poems, because that was really how they'd been written, and then thinking about how does this work, how do these go together? So they ended up with this kind of loose arrangement of the family poems, and then the second section there's poems about Wales, and then there's relationship poems. And then the fourth section is really a miscellany of things that didn't go in any of the other sections.

So, I get attracted by the collections, which are concept albums, which hit one theme repeatedly, but then I'm never quite brave enough to commit to one idea, because I get worried: well, what if people don't like that one idea or something like that? So the four sections are an attempt to have your cake and eat it; of having the benefits of sequence building, but then hopefully not just hammering one subject to death.

John Greening: There seemed to be some sort of links between that book and the following book. There was one that seems to carry on: the bloke and the coffee shop in the one and then the second book you've got the...is it the girl and the coffee shop? And there were one or two other things, I thought that were a real sense of development, which is lovely to see actually, not every poet has that chance to – you get it with Heaney and Hughes – that sense of one collection shaping the next collection. I love that.

Jonathan Edwards: So again, that was a real balancing act: because the first collection did well, you're then in a position of: okay, people like this sort of thing, but then also you want to develop as a writer. So there's a real balancing act of not wanting to entirely reinvent yourself and yet not wanting to do exactly the same thing again. So that's a real balance, I think.

John Greening: Yes. I was struck by the use of juxtaposition in the first book. Then you've got the nun on a bicycle and Raskolnikov in Ebbw Vale, you like those kinds of shock juxtapositions.

There's that poem, 'The Restaurant Where I Am the Maître d' and My Chef is the Unconscious', I just wondered if that was, in a sense, a statement about how poetry works for you. Could you tell us a bit about that poem because not everybody will know it?

Jonathan Edwards: Absolutely. Yeah. I suppose it's a manifesto poem really. Actually the way that that poem was written, and this is true of a few poems in the first book, is basically, that phrase was in a page of automatic writing. So particularly with the first book, I did a hell of a lot of automatic writing to generate the poems.

And there's another poem in that book about a bookcase and those titles were in a page of automatic writing, so I simply took it. And then the act of writing the poem was about explaining that phrase to myself really. But

I can remember there was also at the time, one of these terrible celebrity cooking shows and Bruce Grobbelaar was one of the contestants, who was a big hero from childhood, so I think that worked its way in somewhere. But I think that that poem is about really the wildness of the imagination and the places you can get to in those surreal poems. But it's also, that poem, about the frustrations of trying to regulate or manage the creation of a poem in a way that's impossible. And then the poem actually coming, when you let go of all of that. So yeah, definitely, it's a kind of manifesto really.

John Greening: Automatic writing, that's something Yeats used to do. Is Yeats an important influence on you?

Jonathan Edwards: I got that really from Thomas Lux. But yeah, I was just reading that, I was reading some of Muldoon's Oxford lectures and he talks about Yeats and automatic writing. But I got it really from...I think Thomas Lux was really very, very disciplined with it, and he'd do it every day and he'd combine two or three pages of automatic writing and shape them and do what needed to be done.

John Greening: How did you discover Thomas Lux because he's not that well known over here, I think Bloodaxe did a selection of his work.

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I think that was really through *Staying Alive*. So *Staying Alive* was really huge for me.

John Greening: The Bloodaxe anthology?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I discovered a hell of a lot of writers through that anthology and it was probably...I think it was 'Wife Hits Moose', the Thomas Lux poem, which was in *Staying Alive*, which I just thought: *oh my God, this is amazing!* And then just pursued everything that he'd written.

John Greening: I'm interested in other poets that have been an influence.

And I see some... there's…I thought of James Merrill, and Cavafy indeed, in your 'Days of 1995' and 'Days of 2005'. And also there's one called, 'Rilke at War'. And I wonder if he was an important poet for you because in the collection, that precedes a group of animal poems, which Rilke himself famously did. Just say a bit about that poem, 'Rilke at War', and the poems that follow it.

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, definitely. He was a really, really important writer for me. I mean the *New Poems* basically, so everything that he does in the *New Poems*, the animal poems in the *New Poems* and the way that he writes there.

John Greening: If I'm right in remembering they were the poems where he just determined just to *look* at things and really get down to the physicality of actual things, and look closely at just ordinary objects. Is that right?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, absolutely. And the thing I always say is, which I found in…Greta Stoddart's talks about it in one of her readings on the poetry archive, where Rodin told Rilke: *go to the zoo, if you've got a problem writing a poem, go to the zoo and look at the animals for a couple of hours and just stand in front of the*...and I very much completely swallowed that, but that poem 'Rilke at War', is interesting because it basically comes from nonfiction; so it comes from one of the Rilke biographies, I'm not quite sure which one, to be honest, I've read a couple. But it's an incident which is in Rilke's biography. I do quite a lot of that, there's a whole bunch of nonfiction poems: there's one about Coleridge in the second book, there's the one which came out in *Long Poem Magazine* about Oscar Wilde: but they're really about reading nonfiction, and a lot of the pop culture poems about Kurt Cobain and those, they're quite often about reading nonfiction.

John Greening: People are often surprised at this, but books are often a great stimulus for poems. Not very romantic probably, but a book, a nonfiction book, I certainly find that's a great stimulus.

Jonathan Edwards: Definitely, definitely.

John Greening: And those animal poems that follow the Rilke fascinated me, again, it was for this sound and you seemed to be a bit like Les Murray actually, with his *Translations from the Natural World*, relishing the sound of the language.

You don't quite go inside their heads as he does, but we had a seal, a hippo, flamingo, and then cheerleaders, which I love! It reminds me of Saint Saëns' 'Carnival of the Animals', where he has all the animals, and then he brings in pianists at the end, as one of the... it's the same sort of joke, really.

And that's what I love about your books. There's that sense of fun, having fun. The books are a delight to read but they're not trivial. Not all the subjects are light, there's a great depth in them, but you're always aware of your audience. 'What is your body but the verb to wallow', you're saying in one of those poems about the hippopotamus.

So that first collection had huge success. It won the Costa Prize, which is extraordinary. Do prizes make any difference to anything, there's a bit of money, which helps?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, it made a huge difference in all sorts of ways, basically. The point at which that came...so the book had basically been out for a year by that point, so it came out in the February and there was quite a long time of really not much happening and traveling everywhere to give a reading to three people and all that sort of stuff. All of the lovely stuff actually, that poetry does.

So, it was just great when that happened, and the radio and the TV, and that the book really sold. So definitely makes a difference, I think that also that there probably are specific difficulties I suspect, in terms of a Welsh writer with a Welsh publisher, developing an audience outside of Wales, I think that that's probably so.

So that when you get that recognition from outside of Wales and elsewhere in the UK, that's really, really great. But the other thing is that, when that happens, you're also intensely aware of other writers in Wales who have published in a similar period who would in truth have probably written a much better book than you have who don't get that luck. So the downside of prizes is very much the lottery of it and the books that get overlooked, for the reasons of luck, basically.

John Greening: So four years later: *Gen*, again a wonderful title. They say the second novel is difficult, was the second collection? You were talking a bit about it earlier, but it doesn't feel like a book that was a difficult birth, but is it different, you wanted it to be different you say, but is it, what is the new direction there, would you say?

Jonathan Edwards: Well, I don't know really, it was a balancing act. Among things I was keen to try is to be more ambitious in some ways. So I think that there are more longer poems.

So, the poem about Kurt Cobain for example, is more sustained than I probably would've been with that sort of idea in the first book. There's a poem called 'Autumn Song', which is quite intricate formally, it's the sort of thing that I've always tried, but...

John Greening: It's scattered across the page isn't it, the actual layout on the page, William Carlos Williams-ish or something. So that was a deliberate attempt to break out of traditional forms or what was it?

Jonathan Edwards: I suspect probably one of the reasons why I really loved Thomas Lux when I discovered him was because...when I really, really first started with poetry, the people I was reading were Thom Gunn and Glyn Maxwell, and even now, Auden is really big for me and Hopkins in particular, I'm hugely keen on Hopkins. So that notion of that really very strong rhythmic form, standard form, those sorts of things, which I've always written in right from the start. So I think that that's probably the most ambitious poem I've written in that sort of style.

John Greening: 'Autumn Song'?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah.

John Greening: Although sestinas as well, which are pretty tricky to bring off. You said in another interview I think, you admire the vernacular energy of *Trainspotting* and things like that. There's a vernacular energy in your writing, and the tone: you have an utterly convincing tone, is that something you work hard at or is that you just have to get yourself into the zone for finding the right voice and tone, or what?

Jonathan Edwards: So basically, really important to me in terms of the writing process is reading the poem aloud. So that's really the point at which I know that a poem might be a poem. Most of the time and most of the things I write, remain dead things on the page and they never really get up and announce themselves and want to be spoken. But if the poem is going to be a poem, there'll be a point in the writing at which I'm literally saying that poem aloud into an empty room.

And at that point I know it's a poem. And that does a hell of a lot in generating the sounds that you were mentioning, and the rhythms but also getting you to an ending that might work. So I do really tend to think of a poem as essentially a spoken act and what happens on the page to be really a script.

John Greening: Well, have you written plays or masques, something like that. Bernard Watkins did, have you?

Jonathan Edwards: No.

John Greening: It sounds as though perhaps you could?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah so basically, plays were really what I wanted to do. And the year that I got into poetry at Warwick, I was down to

do a playwriting course, and the playwriting tutor was on sabbatical, so the course didn't run. So I ended up in the poetry, which had been my second choice module. The furthest I got...I wrote a really terrible one-act black comedy about a suicide bomber when I was in university and it was played over the student radio in the student's union, which is quite a surreal experience at three o'clock in the afternoon! But it's definitely something I'd be interested in.

Although this might not be apparent from the character sketches, I'm not really good at creating characters in fiction. I think the poems are quite good at probably observing people, but I do tend to find it difficult when I've tried fiction and I've tried things like this. The ability to create characters I don't find easy.

John Greening: You could probably do an *Under Milk Wood* for Crosskeys! We haven't really mentioned Dylan Thomas have we, whether he's an influence. Perhaps he's one of those poets that isn't so much of an influence, he's just there, Dylan Thomas?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I'm just obsessed; Dylan Thomas is the biggest thing!

John Greening: So he is?

Jonathan Edwards: Oh yeah, yeah.
John Greening: It's not that you've just ignored him. He's there and...

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, he's it for me. But of course the difficulty with Thomas is that his poetic voice is so distinctive.

John Greening: Yes. Like Ted Hughes, actually similar, a dangerous influence if you're not careful!

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. But I think in some ways what's been most important with him is actually his stories. So, *Portrait of the Artist as*

a Young Dog, and the humour in those stories, and the voices of those stories, the world that he creates, but no, he's a writer I'm just obsessed with, he's a real hero.

John Greening: Well, by the time this interview goes out, there may be this third collection, which is provisionally titled *Talk of the Town*, you said. Is that going to be very different I think you mentioned to be an email there are going to be more monologues, is that right?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I think it's recognizably a development of the first two books.

And I suppose when you get to the third collection; you start thinking more consciously about the sweep of the book and what can be done with a collection, more than what can be done with an individual poem. So there's an extended sequence about my grandfather, my mother's father, which sustains that interest in family, but it's an attempt really to spend some time with one character really, across a whole sequence.

He's a fascinating character because he died when I was about five. So I've got these sense impressions, but there's a hell of a lot of mystery and enigma. So there's place to imagine certain things into...he's a representative working class values man of his era: so: the working men's club, the factory and all of that sort of world.

John Greening: Talking of work, you've edited an anthology of poems about work; work is an important theme in your writing. So this is the new book, tell us a bit... because we haven't really talked about how you set about writing a poem?

I seem to remember an anecdote about a band you were in, and a drummer's candle, that I read or heard of somewhere. I can't quite remember the details?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, the town hall, which is a few miles up the road – this is when I was a teenager when I was in a band – we rehearsed in that town hall, but another band rehearsed in that town hall who ended up burning down the town hall. So there's actually just a piece of land now where the town hall was. But basically, they were quite successful and they were far more successful than we were because they had more songs. By the time they recorded their first album they had 200 songs.

I've always been like that, I used to say that the ratio is, write a thousand to keep one, I don't think that's a million miles off. But it's been really interesting, some of the work that I've done with writers recently, because I realized that I'm...I thought everyone was like this, but it turns out a lot of writers simply write one poem and keep that one poem, and there's a hell of a lot more going on in terms of the gestation. Whereas for me, it's really: write lots of poems and keep a very, very small percentage. The writing process tends to be quite swift. So it'll happen reasonably swiftly, but there'll be a lot of...so it's all handwritten, so a lot of handwritten drafts.

John Greening: Pen or pencil?

Jonathan Edwards: Pen. And so I'm really big on the four-way pen, which is why there are so many of them. I'm very pleased with the Bic four-way pen! Because the drafting is happening so fast, because it's going: zoom zoom, zoom, zoom, so keeping one version of the developing poem in one ink and then all of the alternate...because you've also got seven different versions of a line in your head for that, so the different coloured inks on a practical level, I just couldn't be without really!

John Greening: Sounds unique actually. Now you talk about just being remembered for one poem or getting one poem right, 'What is this life, if full of care,/ if we have no time to stand and stare?', a line my mother used to quote to me and that's W. H. Davies, perhaps the one poem that many people remember of his. And you've edited a small selection of his work. Just tell us what led to that?

Jonathan Edwards: Well, basically I was asked to, that was the impetus.

John Greening: There was a local connection for you, isn't there?

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah, he's in Newport. There's actually a statue of him. Some of the caés that I write in, in Newport...there's a statue of him, which is this kind of surrealist artwork. So I didn't even know it was W. H. Davies for a long time, but there is that about him, that poem 'Leisure'. So everyone thinks W. H. Davies, 'Leisure', or *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, his prose gets really well known. But the things that I was really interested in with him are all of those gritty, social realist, again, character portraits. It's not impossible to see a relationship with R.S. Thomas, so when he's writing those poems about living in doss houses basically, and this cast of alcoholics and all sorts of characters that he was coming up against in his daily life, that was really the part of his writing that I found most engaging. Because I think he does.... certainly as a poet, not so much in prose, but certainly as a poet, there is a perception of him as essentially a nice nature writer. And he does have that, but the gritty realism of some of his poems I think is really, really interesting.

John Greening: Surely humanity in the poems, a real sense, quite unusual for its time really, but it's a lovely anthology. The other thing you told me that you've been working on is this collection of Sam Adams's 'Letters from Wales', which have been appearing in *PN Review* for goodness knows how many decades. Tell us a bit about that — that may be out by the time this interview is broadcast.

Jonathan Edwards: Yeah. I think this is a really interesting project and Sam again is a local writer, he's in Caerleon. I think among the things that are really interesting about those 'Letters from Wales' columns is that there's a concerted attempt there to represent Wales to a readership primarily outside of Wales.

I suppose like any small country, breaking Welsh writing into other parts

of the UK is not always easy. So I think that column has been quite an important thing. Those letters are brilliant in all sorts of ways: they're brilliant on Welsh writers; some of them are wonderful capsule essays to introduce Welsh writers to a wider readership.

But they're wonderful on history actually, and the history of mining. Sam writes beautifully about his family, there are some really moving letters about family. But then also he's really very astute and really quite brave and quite honest in terms of how he talks about the literary scene in Wales. He celebrates what's good, but, he's also brave enough to say when things need improvement. And I think that that's really, really important. So yeah, it's been fantastic.

John Greening: Well, look forward to reading that. Do you have one poem that you regard as your signature piece, a bit like Heaney had 'Digging' and I suppose Douglas Dunn had something like *Terry Street*?

Jonathan Edwards: I don't know if it's a signature piece, but the poem that I always mention is the one about the hippo actually. Of all my poems that's my favourite one, and I don't entirely know why.

I think probably in some ways, because it wasn't super difficult to write it. That poem was almost like...you get this sometimes don't you, whereas you feel as though the poem already exists and it's just saying itself to you, that was the experience with that.

John Greening: I was thinking of Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring:* he was the vessel through which it came, it's like that sometimes isn't it?
Jonathan Edwards: Absolutely yes.

John Greening: So that's your *Rite of Spring*. Do you have a favourite quotation about poetry?

Jonathan Edwards: I do. It's a James Tate quotation, and I'm not going to

be able to remember it word for word, but basically it's a quotation about wanting poetry to be funny, but also wanting to break people's hearts. So wanting poetry to make people laugh but also have emotional resonance. And I'm not going to be able to remember it word for word, but that's basically the punch of it.

John Greening: And what are your interests other than poetry?

Jonathan Edwards: Oh, well I suppose really the things, which are in the poems, so: Wales and history, and Welsh history, and family of course, and football, I'm huge on football, which is why I end up writing about that, and animals really. So the kind of things that are in the poems, that's really it. Yeah.

John Greening: And what advice would you give to someone setting out as a poet?

Jonathan Edwards: Well, basically to keep at it. I mean, I know that's the boring advice, but that's really the advice that I was given by David Morley and then by other people like Hugo Williams and that's really the advice that matters. You can only really keep at it and keep at it. And sometimes it's not easy because it goes badly almost all of the time: most days you set out to write a poem, you don't get one written, but it will give back. It will give back that day when you're not expecting it to.

I don't think there's anything else. I can remember when David Morley gave me that advice, he was apologetic and: *I'm sorry this isn't more exciting!* But that's really the crucial thing: that you just keep going.

John Greening: Jonathan Edwards, it's been a great pleasure to talk to you, and I hope we meet again soon.

Jonathan Edwards: Thank you so much.

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Writers Aloud

That was Jonathan Edwards in conversation with John Greening. You can find out more about Jonathan on the RLF website. And that concludes episode 393, which was recorded by John Greening and produced by Kona Macphee. Coming up in episode 394 in 'Poetry Break', Lawrence Sail and Julia Copus discuss classic poems by Emily Dickinson. We hope you'll join us.

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