

## **Q&A WITH VICKY ARTHURS**

**Your book *Limehaven* was inspired by your grandparents. What was special about them?**

My grandparents were ordinary people. My granddad worked in a butcher's shop from the age of twelve. My nan was one of eleven children. In later life, they ran a newsagents' shop together. They were special simply because they loved us. I spent a lot of time with my grandparents as a young child and I wanted to capture the simplicity and joy of that relationship in the poems.

**Why do you think grandparents are so important?**

Perhaps because they have more time to listen to children. They often help out with childcare, but they don't have the same agenda as parents. There's something wonderfully uncomplicated about the bond between young and old. They're able to share simple pleasures.

**Why is the book called *Limehaven*?**

*Limehaven* was the name of my grandparents bungalow. It had lattice windows and looked like a gingerbread house. It was set in a beautiful garden. My grandparents grew their own food, so there were fruit trees, raspberry canes and every kind of vegetable. They also had a tiny pond, with goldfish slipping beneath the water lilies. It was a wonderful place for a child to explore. I had fun revisiting it in my imagination and it gave the book a strong sense of place.

**How do you write through the eyes of a child?**

You need to retain a sense of wonder. For me, that means taking time out to quieten my mind. I like to meditate or walk in the park: it's good to be surrounded by trees and creatures. If you can turn off the mental chatter – the endless to-do lists – wonders are all around.

**Your poems explore nature and childhood innocence, but also war and loss. How do these fit in?**

My grandparents belonged to the generation that lived through two world wars. Looking back, it defined them. They told a lot of stories about wartime and they were almost self-sufficient. Surprisingly, it was the things they never spoke about that found their way into the poems. My grandparents told tales of ration books, air raids and narrow escapes. But they couldn't express their

anger about the people they lost. I think that was probably common for their generation.

**You've just recorded *Limehaven* as an audiobook. Do you enjoy performing your own work?**

Yes. Poetry works best read aloud. I like playing with the rhythm of words and love performing to an audience. This was the first time I'd worked in a studio. I enjoyed it. It's very different to performing live though.

**What are the challenges of working in the studio?**

You don't have the feedback of the audience to work with. You're alone in a small room with a big microphone, hearing your voice back through headphones as you speak. Luckily I worked with a great audio engineer, who quickly put me at ease. Once you get used to the sound of your own voice, you can really have fun with it.

**Why did you decide to write a poetry collection?**

I'd been feeling a bit lost, so I made a decision to write something as an act of love. Many of my happiest childhood memories involved my grandparents, so I wrote about them. I didn't start out with the intention to write a poetry collection. Poems just became the most natural way to convey the impressions that arose.

**Isn't it risky turning your family into poetry?**

Yes. The first risk is that you'll never start, because you're afraid they'll mind. That wasn't a problem for me. My grandparents died many years ago and I knew I was writing out of love, so it felt more like a tribute. I did worry about how my brothers and cousins would feel though. Once you start writing, the poems develop a life of their own. They are honest in their way, but wilful. Sometimes they refuse to follow the facts!

**How did your family react when you told them you were writing the book?**

I didn't tell them! Not until I'd finished writing the book. Everyone in a family has their own unique childhood memories. These impressions can be quite delicate. I needed time to explore mine without being influenced by other voices. I finally told my family a little while before the first edition came out. To my relief, they were delighted. They were helpful too. My publisher had asked

me to write a longer introduction for the book and my cousins gave me fresh information that I was able to include.

**What do you enjoy most about being an author?**

Meeting readers and audience members at festivals, events and book groups. I've learned that a writer doesn't work alone. Stories and poems only live when they are shared. It's lovely to hear that your work has touched someone or connected with their personal experience in some way.

**Vicky Arthurs** is a poet who writes about family life with warmth and charm. Her book *Limehaven* is available worldwide in audiobook and paperback editions, published by Cedarbird. Find out more at [www.vickyarthurs.com](http://www.vickyarthurs.com)

**ENDS**

**(857 words)**

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