

Val McDermid

The prolific crime writer on Scottish autonomy, feisty characters and a good curry

McDermid, 66, was born in Fife and read English at the University of Oxford. She then worked as a journalist before releasing her first successful novel, *Report for Murder*, in 1987. She has since become one of the UK's most successful crime novelists, selling more than 15 million books. McDermid lives in Edinburgh with her partner, Jo, a university lecturer.

“Most mornings I’m awake at 7.30, which I feel quite cheated about. I’d much rather be asleep for another hour and a half. But then one thing about getting older, particularly for women post-menopause, is that your sleep suffers. I’m awake at 4.30 sometimes whether I like it or not.”

Breakfast is porridge. I make my own with lots of seeds, fruit and nuts, which keeps me going. Then I’ll go up to my office on the first floor of our four-storey house in the Stockbridge area of town.

I’ve been writing a book a year since my first novel in 1987. That might sound stressful, but it’s the rate at which my imagination works. When I sit down at the start of the year to begin my next one, the idea has already been kicking around in my head for some time.

I’ll eventually settle down to work at about 10.30. I write in 20-minute bursts, often quite frenetically, but then I’ll stop and do something else for a bit: emails, play a game or two on the PC that sits next to my Mac, browse the papers, read the news.

There’s much talk right now

about whether Scotland will get a second referendum. I think we deserve one and hope this time we’ll vote for independence. At least 50 per cent of people in the country feel very strongly that this is what they want. Brexit has not been helpful to the cause of the Union, and we find ourselves laughing out loud at the notion of sending Prince William and his wife up to Scotland as royal ambassadors. We only have to look at the antics of politicians in Westminster to be just disgusted. A couple of royals swanning about won’t change that.

I always wanted to write books, and always crime. I’d read Agatha Christie as a child and in the late 1980s I discovered the US crime writer Sara Paretsky. I thought: wow, these are the kind of books I want to write — books with strong female protagonists with a brain and a sense of humour; women who didn’t have to get the guys in for the heavy lifting. I wanted my characters to be three-dimensional, and if some of those characters happened to be gay, they were not defined by it.

I never wrote to be successful, so success was a happy surprise. But I don’t particularly live the life of a rich person — no flash cars, no ridiculous jewellery, and I used to buy most of my shirts from Debenhams.

I won’t stop for lunch until three o’clock, but when I do it’ll be a bowl of soup. I’ve always got some soup in the house: vegetable, ham hock, Scotch broth. Then it’s back to my office for more 20-minute bursts of writing.

I enjoy going for a walk at some

point. Novelists like to eavesdrop on conversations in the hope they get ideas for future books, though eavesdropping has become much more problematical of late, since I started appearing on *University Challenge* and *Question Time*. You can’t eavesdrop discreetly when people know who you are.

I’ll stop working at seven o’clock, then it’s time for dinner. I’m fond of curries and Jo likes south Asian food, so whatever we have it’ll be spicy. Then we might sit and read or watch television. Like everyone else we were captivated by *Line of Duty*. We’ve all had a pretty dull year one way or another, and crime fiction — books and TV — gets the adrenaline pumping.

Bedtime is around 11 o’clock. People often ask if I dream a lot, if I think up crime plots in my sleep. Fortunately I don’t. No grisly nightmares, ”

I’m glad to report ■

Interview by Nick Duerden
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WORDS OF WISDOM

BEST ADVICE I WAS GIVEN

My father brought me up to believe I was as good as anyone and to call no man



my master

ADVICE I'D GIVE

Don't let anybody take
your dreams away

**WHAT I WISH
I'D KNOWN**

I wish I could have told
my 16-year-old self
that one day Debbie
Harry would kiss me



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