

Minette Walters Biography

I currently live near Dorchester in Dorset with my husband Alec. We have two boys, Roland – who's just finished university – and Philip, who's still at university.

I was sent to Godolphin boarding school in Salisbury at the age of 12, which had a great influence on the rest of my life. It was a year after my father died, and it made me very independent, both emotionally and practically. Plus, since the school was keen, even in those days, for girls to go to university, it pushed me academically. The most useful experience I had there was to be made head girl, which gave me a terrifying crash course in public speaking that has stood me in good stead ever since!

During a gap year between school and Durham University (where I read French), I went to Israel as a volunteer with a group called The Bridge. There were 23 of us and we were there for nearly seven months, working on a kibbutz and in hospitals and other institutions in Jerusalem. The live-in collegiate system of Durham was very restrictive after the freedom of Israel, and I only really enjoyed my last year when I moved into a flat above a house owned by an ex-miner and his wife. They taught me more about life than I ever learnt at university and they have remained friends ever since!

During my three years at Durham, I worked as little as possible, rarely attended lectures, and was allowed to do my degree in three years because I refused to spend a year in France (I knew I'd never come back!). Of course, my tutors undoubtedly must have been thoroughly irritated by my lack of enthusiasm, but it was a valuable interlude out of which I got a degree, a husband (Alec and I met at Durham but were 'just good friends' for the next seven years until we married), and a healthy cynicism.

After graduation, I joined IPC Magazines as a sub-editor on a romantic fiction magazine, writing articles, short stories and 30,000 word novelettes to help pay the mortgage. After a period as editor, I decided it was time to go freelance and so I started writing full-time for women's magazines. Writing is appallingly hard work, you need skin like a rhinoceros to take the knocks, but when someone says — 'I really like your work'. WOW! The whole exercise is one long ego trip.

Alec and I married in 1978. Our first son Roland arrived at the end of 1979 and Philip was born a couple of years later, in 1982. Of course, after Roland's arrival, I quickly found out how impossible it was to try and work around noisy children, so I decided to stop writing until they were a bit older! Of course, the next seven years weren't exactly idle ones — Alec and I renovated three houses, I became a school governor, chairman of a PTA, and a candidate for political election.

When Philip began full-time education in 1987, I started *The Ice House*. I was 37-years-old and I thought if I don't do this now, I'll never do it! It took two years to write, another two to sell and was finally published in 1992 when I was 42-years-old. Meanwhile, I was already at work on *The Sculptress* (published in 1993). *The Ice House*, I'm proud to say, won the Crime Writers' Association John Creasey Award in the UK for best first novel and was translated into several languages within six months of initial publication.

To date, I've been published in 35-plus countries around the world - when *The Sculptress* won the Edgar Allen Poe Award in America, I was absolutely thrilled! It's very satisfying to know that your work strikes chords across continents. I receive letters from all over the world and am always fascinated to find how well crime fiction travels.

My third book, *The Scold's Bridle* (published 1994) won the CWA Gold Dagger Award in the UK, which gave me a rather unique treble: winning three major prizes with my first three novels. Since then, I've been shortlisted several times with my later novels, both in the UK and abroad, and I've won other prizes, most notably the prestigious Pelle Rosenkrantz prize in Denmark for *The Shape of Snakes*.

I've written a book practically every year or so for the past 10 years. *The Dark Room* was published in 1995, followed by *The Echo* in 1997, *The Breaker* in 1998, *The Shape of Snakes* in 2000, *Acid Row* in 2001, *Fox Evil* in 2002, and now my latest, *Disordered Minds*, has just been released. (Have a look in the Books section for more details.)

My first five books were adapted for television by the BBC and they're still regularly shown in the UK and around the world. However, I'm a bit pickier these days about how, when and if they might be adapted. As a result, the only book I've agreed to release in the last few years is *Acid Row*, which is currently under option with Company Pictures.

In addition to full-length novels, I've written feature articles for magazines and the broadsheets, some short stories including *ENGLISH AUTUMN*, *AMERICAN FALL* and a novella, *THE TINDERBOX*, which was voted third favourite in the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Readers Poll and went straight to the bestseller list in Germany.

Alec and I currently live in an 18th Century listed manor house in Dorset, and we recently celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. Roland, who's now 23, and Philip, who's 21, visit home whenever they're bored or need pampering. Until recently, we had our three surviving parents living with us. Sadly, we lost them within nine months of each other, which was quite a shock. They were all so feisty and indomitable that we expected them to live forever.

My family is very different from the people I write about. Alec and I were far from perfect children and far from perfect parents, but we like being supported ourselves and we believe that supporting others - as far as we are able - is important. It doesn't always work — families have flashpoints — but abandonment, dysfunction, isolation and loneliness are so destructive of lives, confidence and community that it's better to keep mending fences than erect them so high that people are cut out of your life forever.

In addition to my writing, I am a patron of numerous charities and I try to give as much of my time for free as I can to libraries, schools, charities and prisons. To relax, I spend time with my family, our dogs (Benson and Hedges — after the pair of Labrador retrievers in *The Ice House*), chickens, sheep, and horses.

I also adore watching TV, listening to the radio, walking, swimming, playing tennis, sailing, doing crosswords, quizzes, and gardening, but my absolute favourite way to relax is DIY. I find the physical disciplines of decorating, plumbing and carpentry are so different from the cerebral disciplines of writing novels that DIY comes as such a relief when I finish a book!

And, since I'm a news/current affairs junky, my idea of perfect bliss is to decorate a room while listening to Radios 4 & 5. That gives me exercise, creativity and information at a stroke. What more could an author want!?! The radio is where I get my ideas, and the DIY is how I prepare myself, physically, for the stamina-draining marathon of the next book!

I'm an atheist with left-of-centre politics. I dislike promoting myself, loathe having my photograph taken, and people often describe me as 'a bit of a mystery' because I'd rather spend my time in Dorset than attend 'celebrity' author functions in London. I'm much more inclined to believe in public taste — it's the best indicator of merit, in my opinion. Cream naturally rises to the top, and self-promotion and glad-handing never improved the quality of anyone's writing. Today's classics were yesterday's bestsellers. I'd rather put in the hours on the books and be remembered as a good writer.