

# Sample Q and A

What made you want to write about something that must be so personal and emotional?

The period after my husband's stroke was so intense, it got under my skin... I wanted to reach out to others in our situation, share the positives, and let them to know that things can get better.

Why a novel, not a memoir?

I'm a novelist! I wanted to create a fun read that would appeal to the imagination and evoke empathy. Memoir limits you to one person's experience, but I wanted to show how stroke affects a family and friends in the round. With 4 point of view characters, you can also show how perceptions change with experience.

What did you enjoy writing about most?

All the made-up elements of the story, and characters, especially the boyfriend Matt. Writing about Shetland, and the fiddle music.

What was the hardest thing about writing *Joe Faber and the Optimists*?

Making sure that actual stroke experiences were narrated in a fresh way, happening in the moment – when in fact we'd reflected on these things and talked them through with family and friends many times.

You've described this as a double story. Why is that?

It's the story of two couples at life-changing periods – Joe and his wife, Fran, with the stroke; and their daughter Jess and her fiancé, Matt, who are planning a wedding. There's a rom-com element that helps keep the texture light.

Has the lockdown affected your writing in any way?

In terms of fiction, I spent most of 2020 writing about music and musicians... Rehearsals, bars, cafés, pubs. Celebrating conviviality and re-enacting what we lost. Laughing and arguing at volume.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've been given?

Drawer time. If you still snag on something months later...when in doubt, cut out.

Where do you find inspiration?

Under my nose. News items, things that people say, small happenings that leave an impression... I'm not a natural plotter, but reading helps, and I definitely had one eye on Voltaire's *Candide* when writing my own anatomy of optimism. He was ruder than me, though. As well as brainier.

Who are the readers you'd most like to reach?

My natural readers are people who like to look beneath the surface of things, and who have a sense of irony. With *Joe Faber*, though, I did have carers very much on mind, and I'm thrilled that not only practitioners but stroke survivors themselves are giving it the thumbs up. Under Covid restrictions, families haven't had the opportunity to learn at the bedside or come to terms with the changes in their loved ones, so I do hope this is a useful book as well as a well-written, enjoyable one.