

THE STORY BEHIND *DAMAGED GOODS*

THE CHARACTERS

Since I first began writing, I've always found the inspiration comes from things which have touched my life. Mostly it's the characters – the good and bad in people and the humour that can result when terrible things happen to them. Truly gutsy characters seem to leap out at me and create their own storylines. My first novel, *Trust Nobody*, introduced Daisy, Vera and Roy, and it almost felt as if they demanded to be heard again and again, in *Broken Bodies* and then *Damaged Goods*! Vera still had things to say; Roy needed to profess his feelings for Daisy while still maintaining the upper hand as a gangster; and Daisy – well, she's a little like me, a very down to earth person but fiercely protective of her loved ones.

So, the characters always come first, and then their stories unfold with their friends and their secret lives. These are always more to me than just fictional people written on a piece of paper. I sincerely hope my readers believe in their vulnerability, hopes and fears, for these are all the emotions I have experienced. Several novels later I am still grieving for murdered Eddie because, like Daisy, I fell in love with him.

THE SETTING

I feel very lucky, because I think the area in which I live is a rich seam of gold for storytellers, so I chose to set the Daisy Lane books in my home town of Gosport. It has had its fair share of violence – my own brother-in-law was knifed in a fight over a girl – and I have had first-hand experience of what it's like to sit in court awaiting a verdict, and then visit the prisons. I also know what it's like to have kids to feed and no money, so I hope I can reach out through my own life experiences and touch my readers going through similar bad times.

Gosport has its 'posh' area, the village of Alverstoke where you can walk past Robert Cruickshank's celebrated crescent of tall white houses, which were completed in 1830. Gosport, like any town, also has its areas of ill repute, but here the people are gutsy and make wonderful characters to base stories on. There are also many other aspects of Gosport which inspire me – it is surrounded by the sea, so we have plenty of shingle beaches. Also, as it is an old market town and port, it once had in excess of seventy pubs in its high street alone! In the eighteenth century it was written that Gosport had little attractiveness, its town containing a full share of Portsmouth's vice and harlots, polluted by the fortunes of sailors. However, Gosport to me feels like a warm, comfortable overcoat. It's certainly a wonderful place to write about and I should know, I was born here.

HOW THE STORY UNFOLDS

I like to write the book in one hit – preferably somewhere quiet and warm. I always end up living the story, day and night, until it's all out. *Damaged Goods* took shape when I was on holiday, and, just like my first novel, *Trust Nobody*, was written in a series of Asda notebooks, with 2B pencils. Being on holiday, away from the normal stresses of home life, I had the luxury to become totally immersed in the storyline of *Damaged Goods*. I always use the same method, resolving to complete one notebook a day, both sides of the paper, and I am quite strict, not allowing myself to be sidetracked by reading or even drinking a single glass of wine until the notebook is full. Gradually the pile of notebooks grows as the gritty story takes shape. I found that I was still scribbling away, on hotel notepaper, as the taxi arrived to take me back to the airport, at the end of the holiday!

RESEARCH

I think that, for an author, including your own experiences is very important for authenticity. In my time I've been a barmaid, shop assistant, fruit picker and ran a second-hand book stall at Gosport market for years. Getting up at four o'clock in the dark and freezing cold and returning home in the dark after erecting a stall and setting out stock and standing out in the weather all day is a killer – but it gave me an

insight into the cheeky traders and diverse customers lives. Even on the direst days market traders find something to laugh about.

I was inspired to write by my own experiences but as the novels progress I realise my memory plays tricks on me. It's far too easy to get things wrong, to misremember how things really were, so that's where research comes in. My books start in the sixties, where *Damaged Goods* opens, but just as people grow old, so my characters age and change and in the latest book the seventies are now drawing to a close.

When I am researching for a book, I read all about the period. I check that the clothes, vehicles, films and songs on the radio are all absolutely correct for the time. The Internet is a powerful tool, but I do feel it's important to double-check information, so I also watch films from the right genre and period. All this hard work comes in force upon my return from holiday.

WHAT COMES NEXT

After filling up those Asda notebooks, my next task is to transcribe them to my computer. I'm lucky enough to have a workroom. (It's really just my second bedroom and it's in a terrible mess but I do know where everything is!) I love books and my shelves are bowed down with them. I think it's important if you aim to write, to read all sorts of novels, including those in a similar genre.

So, I work through the notebooks until the novel, in its raw form, is on the computer and change things as I go along. Sometimes as I work I don't even get dressed – my dressing gown, like Daisy's has seen better days but it's warm and comfortable, another old friend. All this sounds as though I have all the time in the world to indulge my passion for writing. However, like everyone, I have plenty of other things I need to do. I teach three Creative Writing classes a week; I sing with a choir who perform for charity (the other singers are my second family). I also have five cats I adore and four grandchildren I love to be with. I also like to travel – if I have just enough money for a holiday or a new washing machine, the holiday wins hands down.

Damaged Goods is perhaps my favourite novel because of its very dark characters. Readers may be familiar with Valentine Waite's final resting place. The boxer is an evil man and deserves his fate but he lies in a well known local beauty spot. I could never stop writing. As soon as one book is completed Daisy, Vera and Roy start demanding to be heard again.

June Hampson, 2009

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED IN 1966 . . .

- January** Beatle George Harrison marries model Patti Boyd

 Indira Gandhi is elected Prime Minister of India
- February** Nancy Sinatra at Number 1 with *These Boots are Made for Walking*; helped to popularise knee-high go go boots
- March** Ronnie Kray murders George Hall in the East End's Blind Beggar pub; he was convicted in 1969

 In an interview, John Lennon comments, 'We're more popular than Jesus now,'

 Demonstrations are held across the USA in protest of the Vietnam War

 Alfie, starring Michael Caine, is released in UK cinemas

 The USSR launches *Luna 10*, which on April 4 becomes the first space probe to orbit the moon
- April** *The Sound of Music* wins Best Picture at the 38th Academy Awards

 The world's first external artificial heart transplant is carried out in Houston, Texas

 Opening of Parliament is televised for the first time
- May** Moors Murderers Ian Brady and Mira Hindley are convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment

- Cassius Clay beats Henry Cooper to retain the world heavyweight championship
- June** Barclays introduces the first British credit card
- The Beatles at Number 1 with *Paperback Writer*
- July** Billy Jean King wins her first Wimbledon Championship
- 50-year-old Frank Sinatra marries 21-year-old Mia Farrow in Las Vegas
- England wins the World Cup at Wembley, beating West Germany 4-2
- August** The Beatles at number 1 with *Yellow Submarine* / *Eleanor Rigby*
- Plans are unveiled for Radio 1 – the BBC’s new popular music service
- September** *Star Trek* premieres on American TV
- October** NATO moves its HQ from Paris to Brussels
- November** The Beach Boys at Number 1 with *Good Vibrations*
- The Green Grass of Home* by Tom Jones is Number 1 – and the biggest hit of the year
- December** Animator Walt Disney dies age 65
- Paintings worth millions of pounds are stolen from the Dulwich Art Gallery, London

