



'IN THE SPOTLIGHT'

Each month we put a different person 'in the spotlight' and pose 12 wide-ranging questions to them. This month, we feature **Leena Batchelor – Worcestershire Poet Laureate 2020-21**.

1. Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that not many people know.

I'm half-Finnish. My parents met whilst they were both working at Customs in London; my mum was on an assignment to England and my dad worked in the clerical offices. When my mum returned to Finland, my dad went after her, found her in northernmost Finland, and married. They lived there for several months before they both returned to England when my mum was 7 months pregnant with me! Also, my English great-grandfather was one of the 2 scientists who discovered the human hormone (he was knighted for his work!).

2. What book made most impact on you as a child?

As a child, my dad had a great collection of sci-fi books by Isaac Asimov, E.E. Doc Smith and Robert Heinlein, and I was given free rein among his bookshelves! I would lose myself among the Lensman series by Asimov and often wondered whether our world would ever emulate the depictions of these amazing writers. I still have a penchant for sci-fi, but also adore horror, fantasy and historical writers.

3. What is your favourite film, and why?

Ooohh.....this is difficult as when not reading or writing, I'm streaming films and love so many! Often it depends upon my mood, but if I had to stick to just one I think I'd go for *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* – a powerful and poignant drama following a 24-year old caring for his family after the suicide of his father, with a morbidly-obese mother and severely autistic brother, while he attempts to navigate all the usual trials of a young adult (though ask me tomorrow and I'll probably pick a different one!). Very emotive and thought-provoking; a spotlight on families and society's perceptions.

4. What are your main hobbies/interests, apart from reading, of course?

Writing – an immense release for me emotionally. When the madness of coronavirus has dissipated travel will definitely be back on the list (I actually find huge inspiration from travelling to different locations in the UK and am a member of both the National Trust and English Heritage). History is a passion, which is being fed by my appointment this year as Poet in Residence for The Commandery, Worcester; and cooking – at home I'm often happiest messing in the kitchen (and making a mess!).

5. What would be the three things you would like to have if you were stranded on a desert island?

Presuming I had the basics (water, food, shelter), then I would have to say pen and paper (counts as one, right?!), a group photo of my children and grandchildren, and bug spray (can't stand creepy-crawlies!!).



6. What would a look at your bookshelves tell us about you?

That I have a very eclectic taste in books! Authors on my bookshelves range from Alison Weir, to Stephen King, Barbara Erskine to Shaun Hutson, Bernard Cornwell to George RR Martin, Susannah Dunn and all sorts of random authors, including several local poets! I recently rediscovered the novels I loved when studying English Literature at school – Brave New World, Animal Farm, 1984.

7. If you could invite any three people, dead or alive, to a dinner party, who would they be, and why?

My Swedish grandfather, because I never met him (he died when my mum was 3) and I'd like to know more about him. Then it would be Tim Burton – he has an amazing imagination and I think between us we'd weave a fantastical world. Finally, I'd choose Alice Cooper – a very intelligent and interesting man again with an incredible imagination (he'd entertain us with his music too!).

8. What kind of music do you like, and is there one favourite soundtrack?

Again, very dependent upon my mood. For quiet reflection it's music by Clannad and Enya, or sometimes Enigma. If I want to blast the cobwebs away it's Hollywood Vampires and Pink (good driving tunes too!). I have two favourite soundtracks at the moment, both by the Hollywood Vampires – 'Heroes' (check it out – someone surprising sings the lead on this version, not Bowie!), and 'Congratulations'.

9. What are your favourite charities/good causes, and why?

Mental health charities – such an important cause which affects us all in different ways. It's important to remove the taboo and stigmas surrounding this, so I often support events using my poetry to highlight personal experiences and support people.

The National Deaf Children's Society – my youngest daughter is deaf and has received (and given) a lot of support through this organization. After learning that there are 45,000 deaf children in the UK, my two sons ran the Worcester half-marathon in 2019 carrying 45lbs weight to raise funds for them. Deafness is a very lonely condition.

Charities that support the armed forces. My eldest son is in the REME (he served in Iraq recently) and my youngest is about to join the Royal Marines. Regardless of your thoughts on war and conflict, our armed forces personnel do a very difficult role all over the world in extreme circumstances – we often forget that these are real people with real families, and deserve our support.

10. Who is the person who has influenced you the most, or you most admire?

Most definitely all 4 of my children – they're all wonderful and a shining example of hard work, living dreams, and enduring compassion and empathy to others.

11. What is your connection to Evesham?



Apart from living nearby in Worcester and loving days out in Evesham and the surrounding countryside, a few years ago I took part in the AsparaFest.

12. What would you list as your greatest achievement to date?

I would say becoming Worcestershire Poet Laureate and being able to use my poetry to support schools and charities, and showing people how poetry can be part of their everyday life.