



## **'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 Nick Elliott who, after a career in international shipping, working in Hong Kong and Tokyo for twenty years and Piraeus for a further eight, returned to Scotland. Here, in retirement, he has written four Angus McKinnon thrillers, which draw on his experiences in the Far East, the East Med and the Black Sea. Further details can be found on [www.nickelliott.org](http://www.nickelliott.org).

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

We bought an old village house on a Greek island thirty-five years ago. It's become a family home where we all gather when we can. It's a peaceful place (most of the time): swimming from deserted beaches, long walks interspersed with gardening, getting to know the flora and fauna as well as the locals, and spells of productive writing. It's conducive to contemplation too and I've been drawn towards the philosophies of Stoicism and Buddhism which I try to follow the basic tenets of, try being the operative word. Enlightenment is some way off!

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

Kipling's *Kim*, I guess. I yearned for adventure in far-off places and *Kim* fuelled that urge. It also triggered my interest in the world of espionage, a genre I've never tired of and eventually led to the stories I conjured up in my Angus McKinnon thrillers.

### **3. What is your favourite film, and why?**

There are many but I'll choose *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* – the 2011 version with Gary Oldman as Smiley. It's moody, subtle, beautifully filmed, evokes the seventies, but above all is a great spy story.

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

Running. I'm running my second Ilkley Half soon but mostly I run because it makes me feel good, particularly afterwards! I've read this is due to the release of endocannabinoids and not endorphins as I'd always believed.

And travelling when I can. I've done a lot over the years but if anything my thirst has grown rather than diminished. I think I have the nomad gene.

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

A boat to fish from, explore the surrounding waters and as a potential means of escape; an endless supply of ice-cold beer: an effervescent Pilsner to refresh and cheer me up at the end of the day after the efforts of finding food and shelter; and a dog for company – who wouldn't?

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

My eclectic mix of fiction and non-fiction would reveal my love of spy thrillers, travel, history and biographies of people who interest me.



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

Len Deighton, a good raconteur who has inspired and motivated me to write; the irascible explorer, Ranulph Fiennes; and as the wild card, the outspoken Guardian journalist, Marina Hyde. They're all alive but the Duke of Edinburgh would be looking down, desperate to add his own views to the conversation and he'd be welcome to.

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

Again, an eclectic mix, so from Pink Floyd, Steve Winwood, Fleetwood Mac, Dylan, Tom Petty, Neil Young, The Eagles ... through to a limited dose of the classical composers – Mozart's Jupiter, Beethoven's Emperor, Elgar's Enigma Variations, Verdi, Rossini, Puccini and a smattering of Choral music from time to time. We listen to World music most evenings over dinner. A favourite movie soundtrack would be The English Patient, or The Big Lebowski.

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

Marie Curie, for the great work they do in palliative care; Save the Children because it gets to where it's most needed; and likewise, Mercy Ships: their hospital ships bring life-changing surgery to children around the developing world. At my old firm, Inchcape Shipping Services, we were (and hopefully still are) their agents.

**10. Who is the person who has influenced you most/you most admire?**

I admire David Attenborough. We need more like him, people who see the big picture and act upon the world's biggest problem with such commitment.

As a boy, I was influenced by Reg, my much-loved uncle and godfather. He bought me my first pint (aged 14). He could effortlessly recite hilarious doggerel. He was a great walker and would always engage with locals wherever he encountered them – often in a pub! Above all he was a kind and considerate man.

**11. What is your connection to Evesham?**

I lived in Owlett's End in the late fifties and early sixties, when I wasn't away at school. I was young so remember the house more than the town: a big garden with a tree house, several "dens" and an unfortunate incident involving the accidental ingestion of deadly nightshade berries. Our neighbour, Doctor Molly Bartholomew, came to the rescue with a glass of very salty water which did the trick.

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

One that sticks in my mind goes back to 1979 when the cargo ship, SIBONGA, rescued two boatloads of Vietnamese from the heavy swells of the South China Sea and headed for an uncertain reception in Hong Kong. As agents, we were appointed to handle the vessel and its cargo of 1,002 "boat people" when she arrived in international waters outside port limits. Some, including infants, children and elderly, had died during the perilous transfer from their leaking craft to the ship.

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We organised a water barge, provisions, medical supplies and Red Cross doctors and nurses to attend along with myself and two of our boarding clerks. The scene that greeted us on boarding shortly after her arrival was grim, but it was clear that the captain, officers and particularly the captain and second mate's wives, both qualified nurses and on board as passengers, had done a remarkable job in bringing some relief and order. But with the sun beating down on the steel deck, temperatures of 30C plus, little or no sanitary facilities for such numbers and very limited food and water, the situation was critical.

Over the coming days and weeks we got things under control with regular convoys of supplies and medical staff out to the ship. Some cases were hospitalised, others treated on board. Back in London, the shipowner, Lord Inverforth, used his influence to persuade Margaret Thatcher to side-step her own government's policy and accept the refugees into Britain. I heard quite recently from one of the rescued here in the UK who'd been a small child at the time. She thanked us for what we'd done.