

David Miller – Questions and Answers

1. What inspired you to write Shark Island?

My wife Su'en, my son Joe and I were alone on a small island off the Malaysian coast when an unknown boat arrived in the middle of the night. It was fishermen – but what if it hadn't been? Shark Island grew from that.

2. Describe it in two lines.

Two brave children will stop at nothing to get their kidnapped parents back.

3. How long did it take to write?

About a year in total.

4. What do you think people will say about this book?

My favourite quote comes from Jack (aged 13). He said: 'Forget food, forget drink, sleep and play...just read until the end!'

5. Are you working on something else at the moment?

I've just finished Sea Wolf, full of exciting new adventures for Hanna, Ned and Jik. Coming soon – watch out for it!

6. What is your favourite food?

Pepper Crab served in a bamboo hut overlooking the South China Sea.

7. What makes you laugh out loud?

I asked my daughter Hanna this one. She said, 'Your own jokes'. How sad is that?

8. What is your one luxury item you would take with you to a Desert Island?

Jik and his little outrigger boat. Who wants to sit around on a desert island?

9. What is your most treasured memory?

Holding my son Joe in my arms for the first time. He was born two months early and weighed less than a bag of sugar. (He's a lot bigger now!)

10. What is your weakness?

Getting on a plane and flying off to strange and exciting parts of the world whenever possible.

11. What do you think your children would say about you?

I hope they'd say 'He's the greatest Dad in the world' – but I think they'd be a lot ruder than that!

12. Who is the person you most admire?

Aung San Suu Kyi. For so long she's defied the thugs and dictators who rule Burma.

13. What is your most embarrassing moment?

My Mum and Dad coming to my school concert and insisting on sitting in the front seats reserved for the Mayor and his wife.

14. What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

Starting to write a book is easy – it's finishing it that's hard.

15. What is the best piece of advice you could give someone?

Everybody gets at least one chance to make their dreams come true. When it happens to you, go for it. You might not succeed, but at least you'll have tried.

16. Define beauty.

The exact opposite of the face I see when I look in the mirror every morning.

17. What are you reading at the moment?

'Swallows and Amazons' by Arthur Ransome. I haven't read it since I was a kid. I didn't like it then and I don't like it now – so why am I reading it??!!

18. What would be on the soundtrack of your film – and who would play you?

'When the going gets tough the tough get going' – and of course Russell Crowe would be playing me!

19. Favourite holiday destination?

A little island off the Borneo coast where huge, grunting hawksbill turtles come up the beach to lay their eggs in the middle of the night.

20. Which authors have most inspired you?

Robert Louis Stevenson. I can't believe he was writing a hundred and twenty-five years ago – he sounds so modern; and Michelle Magorian. I love 'Goodnight Mister Tom'.

21. What is your favourite children's book?

'Treasure Island' by a mile: 'I held out my hand and the horrible, soft-spoken, eyeless creature gripped it in a moment like a vice...' It always gives me the shivers.

22. Most treasured possession?

A three metre long blowpipe given to me by a tribesman in the Malaysian jungle – complete with a quiver of deadly poisoned arrows.

23. Where are you happiest?

Sailing in a semi-gale in my Laser dinghy at Burnham Overy Staithe on the North Norfolk coast.

24. Favourite biscuit?

The kind where you can't find the biscuit because there's too much chocolate.

25. Pet hates?

I don't hate pets (ho ho ho that's one of my jokes) – I love them! Especially my ancient, fat, tail-less tabby cat called Henderson.

26. If you could change one thing about the world we live in today what would it be?

I'd put back all the trees that have been illegally cut down in the Borneo rainforest.