



Tony Parsons writes about 'simple but momentous, epic things that happen in every lifetime'. — DAVID LEVENSON

Tony Parsons' books sell like hotcakes because, he reckons, he is all about communication and connection.

Striking a chord

By SHARIL DEWA

IN 1999, the character Harry Silver was introduced to readers through *Man and Boy*, a novel about a single father coping with the pressures and tribulations of raising a son on his own. The story touched a chord globally, sales shot through the roof, and it won the 2001 British Book of the Year award.

Some 10 years and a sequel – *Man and Wife* – later, Harry Silver makes his third appearance in a new novel, *Men From the Boys*. This one carries on from *Man and Wife* and deals with Harry juggling a career with parenthood and a domestic partnership while trying to cope with the pressures of life and its ever-changing meaning.

Tony Parsons, author of many more best-selling novels than just *Man and Boy* – *Man and Wife*, *My Favourite Wife*, *Stories We Could Tell*, *Starting Over*, and *Bare: The Biography of George Michael*, to name a few – shares insights, via an e-mail interview, about the latest Harry Silver, his own experiences as a single father, and being astounded by the whirl of success for his books.

Why did you decide to continue with Harry's saga of parenthood?

Because it has been 10 years since *Man and Boy*. A lot happens in our lives in 10 years. Children grow from being cute little kids into difficult teenagers. Young lovers turn into old married couples. The world moves on. There is inherent drama in the world moving on.

The 10 full years was a nice gap. I wondered what had happened to these characters.

Did you have an inkling of all this success when you wrote *Man and Boy* in 1999?

I hoped a few people would like *Man and Boy*, but I certainly did not expect it to reach an audience of millions all over the world.

Last year, *Man and Boy* was published in mainland China. Next year, it will be published in Vietnam. It has been published in over 40 countries now. You can never anticipate that kind of success.

It just happens when you write about feelings and experiences that a lot of people can

relate to. It is like striking gold. Dumb luck, really. Truly – there is an awful lot of luck involved in writing a massive best-seller like *Man and Boy*. You just drill for oil and it turns out to be spectacularly the right place.

Of all your novels, it is only *Harry Silver* that has a life beyond one book. Why is that?

Harry Silver is the character in my books that is closest to the real me, so I guess that is why he has a life that endures over several books. Because I relate to him more than any of my other protagonists.

There is an awful lot of me in Harry Silver. But he is an alter ego. Things happen to him that never happened to me, and I have a life that in many ways has no relation to his life. We are like twins more than the same person. Non-identical twins.

Both you and Harry experienced a difficult first marriage that resulted in the two of you being single fathers. How hard was it to be a single father? Were you always on edge, like how Harry was when Pat had a nasty accident in *Man and Boy*?

All single parents have it hard. Every single parent feels like the last line of defence between their child and the world.

I think it is probably easier for single dads than single mums, because lots of people – mostly women – want to help a single dad. Because women have bigger hearts than men. Also, I had two great parents who helped me with my son when he was growing up – my own mum and dad. So I don't feel any self-pity.

Sure, it was hard, but a lot of people have hard lives. I come from a very poor London background. I don't expect life to be easy.

You will be 55 this year. In *Men From the Boys*, Harry is about to turn 40. How scary was it for you to turn 40?

I don't remember turning 40, to be honest with you! Harry Silver has a big crisis at 30, and again at 40 – but I don't really live like that. My life is constant chaos! Nothing to do with birthdays.

Also, I am incredibly fit thanks to my strict boxing regime, so I still look incredibly young



and hot! That helps get over difficult birthdays. In your body of work, most of your protagonists seem to be 30something men, apart from in *The Family Way*, where the central characters are three sisters. Would you consider writing another novel where the central characters are women again? Was it hard for you to step into the mind of three sisters?

It was really hard writing about the three sisters in *The Family Way*. I know how men think. With women, I talk to lots of real women – use their feelings, their experiences, their dialogue. It takes more research because I want to get it right – I have to get it right, because so many of my readers are women.

Of course, there are female characters in all my books, but I think I bit off more than I could chew with the three main characters all being women in *The Family Way*. But then again, a lot of women liked that book. It was the one that Julia Roberts bought the film rights to, and asked me to write a screenplay for.

You were married to the journalist Julie Burchill in 1979. Could shades of your first marriage be seen in Harry Silver's life?

I didn't use my first wife as the model for Harry's first wife in *Man and Boy*. Gina, Harry's first wife, is based on a real woman but it is a different real woman to my first wife. Gina is based on a Dutch woman I was in love with a few years after my marriage broke up.

All fiction is autobiographical. But you move the furniture around. So all fiction is

Best-sellers

FOR the week ending July 4, 2010:

Non-fiction

1. *Malaysian Maverick: Mahathir Mohamad in Turbulent Times* by Barry Wain
2. *Citizen Singapore: How to Build a Nation (Conversations with Lee Kuan Yew)* by Tom Plate
3. *What the Dog Saw and Other Adventures* by Malcolm Gladwell
4. *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert
5. *Speeches that Changed the World* edited by Emma Beare
6. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray
7. *Torres, El Nino: My Story* by Fernando Torres
8. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell
9. *The Case for God* by Karen Armstrong
10. *The Party: The Secret World of China's Communist Rulers* by Richard McGregor

Fiction

1. *The Last Song* (movie tie-in) by Nicholas Sparks
2. *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* by Stieg Larsson
3. *A Rogue of My Own: When Hatred Turns to Desire* by Johanna Lindsey
4. *The Book of Tomorrow* by Cecelia Ahern
5. *The Girl Who Played with Fire* by Stieg Larsson
6. *Dear John* (movie tie-in) by Nicholas Sparks
7. *Swimsuit* by James Patterson
8. *Pirate Latitudes* by Michael Crichton
9. *Rushed to the Altar* by Jane Feather
10. *The Chosen One* by Sam Bourne

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also invented. Real life shot through with fantasy – that is what novels are.

You are currently married to Yuriko, who is Japanese. Would you consider writing a novel based on an inter-racial relationship?

I don't really think in terms of race, to be honest. I would have been married to Yuriko for 18 years on July 4 – of course she is Japanese but I don't think of her as being a different race to me. I feel a lot closer to her than I do to the 60 million English men and women in my country!

But I certainly see more Asian characters in my future books. My next book will be set in Thailand, and I would like to write books set in many different Asian countries before they finally pull my cold dead hands from the keyboards. I love Asia, it is where I feel most at home, despite being a Londoner to the core of my being.

You were a journalist for the New Musical Express in the 1970s. Your experiences as a music journalist resulted in the brilliant novel, *Stories We Could Tell*. Do you draw from personal experiences to write your novels?

Yes, I poured all of my experiences as a music journalist into *Stories We Could Tell*. The book takes place over one night – the night that Elvis dies (Aug 16, 1977) – but I poured everything in there. I left nothing out.

What is the secret to Tony Parsons' creative success?

I think the key to my success is that I write very simple stories that everyone can relate to: men, women, old and young.

Nationality doesn't matter. We all have families and we all go through more or less the same things – we look for love, we find love, we lose it or keep it. We become fathers and mothers, we watch our own parents get old and die.

Simple but momentous, epic things that happen in every lifetime. That is what I tap into. It is all about striking that chord in another human heart. It is all about communication, it is all about connection. We are all so alone in the universe that we respond to anything – a song, a film, a book – that connects us to the rest of humanity.

25% off

Get a 25% discount on *Men from the Boys* (ISBN: 978-0007327751) by presenting this coupon upon payment at any MPH outlet in Malaysia.

This offer is valid until July 18, 2010, or while stocks last. It is not valid with other promotions and is not exchangeable for cash. One coupon is valid for only one copy of the title and only original coupons will be accepted. Note that cover image published may differ from in-store stock.