

RED-EYE writer

Her books regularly hit the best seller lists. **Laurence Pollock** talked to Cathy Glass about how she combines writing with her day and night job – fostering

IT STARTS AT 4.30am every day. That's when Cathy Glass gets up, sits down and writes 500 words of her current book, in long hand. After 7am the fostering day kicks in and she is sorting breakfasts, school, paperwork, and domestic chores.

Rewriting, editing and proofing can fit around daytime tasks. But in the very early morning the first drafts emerge, eventually becoming true-life memoirs or novels such as *Damaged*, *Cut* and *Mummy Told Me Not to Tell* and practical books such as *Happy Kids*. Fostering links the two parts of her day because the books reflect her 20 years' experience of looking after children. And the fluent, accessible style has produced a unique literary output, which is eagerly read.

She gave a rare face-to-face interview to *Foster Care* and listed the pluses and minuses of her life: 'I have been lucky and privileged. I like looking after children and I have had writing success. My one regret is that my marriage ended.'

Glass was fostering – and writing – for a long time before *Damaged*, her first published book, appeared. 'I didn't know I would be writing another one but readers were asking for more.'

'Cathy Glass' is a pseudonym. Her identity and the children she writes about are heavily anonymised to protect privacy and give her the freedom to tell these remarkable stories.

'People sometimes email to say a story is just like someone they knew – but so many people have suffered and these stories could apply to lots of individuals.'

The distress she records is balanced by the foster carers she knows and who contact her. 'There are so many nice people – it restores your faith in human nature.'

Behind the writing there is passionate concern about a range of fostering issues and some frustration that her clandestine literary persona stops her doing more.

'I would love to advance the case of fostering in person but I have to do it online.'

Some of her biggest concerns are families where three or four generations are known to social services. Her answer is early intervention but she acknowledges that with the current system it is not always early enough. Glass also anguishes about getting the balance right between abused children being believed and the vulnerability of foster carers to casual allegations. She praises the Fostering Network's *Safer Caring* material but is still concerned.

'Children have to be believed but some young people do not understand the seriousness of what they are saying. I know of one young girl after she made the

allegation saying "I want to go home now", thinking that she would go back to the foster carer's home.'

Ultimately her passion is about foster carers being treated professionally and retaining good people.

'We pay lip service to this but there is a long way to go. I take part in meetings for potential foster carers and I know people who have been accepted. Then in the first year they give up because of the system. I have been asked to leave meetings myself because information is being shared.'

And what about the future? 'The service is already creaking and we do not need any more cutbacks. But foster carers just get on and do it. Let's hope fostering goes up rather than down.'

A famous British writer, Alan Sillitoe, once said you either live life or write about it. But Cathy Glass, thanks to a listening ear and fabulous time management, is doing both. As a result, amazing stories see the light of day based on the hard-earned experience of daily fostering. ●

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