



This is a transcript of the conversation between hosts Patricia Cumper and Pauline Walker and Hafsa Zayyan.

Patricia Cumper The Amplify Project. Black writers in their own words. I'm Pat Cumper.

Pauline Walker And I'm Pauline Walker. We created the Amplify Project so we could talk to writers for the stage, page, and screen about their lives, work, and artistic practice.

PC We've really enjoyed these conversations. We hope you enjoy listening to them.

PW In earlier episodes, we've spoken to writers with established careers. But in this episode, we'll be speaking to a new writer, whose debut novel "We Are All Birds of Uganda" won the inaugural Merky Books New Writers' Prize. Described by i-D Magazine as "a sprawling and epic jewel narrative woven together with gentle urgency, sensitive, and with a rare perspective on how our mixed-race backgrounds can help form feelings of both internal power and conflict." Published earlier this year, it gained critical acclaim, with Malorie Blackman calling it "a remarkably accomplished, polished debut." It appeared on Book of the Month lists for The Independent, Marie Claire, Refinery29 Reads, and The British Blacklist. It also featured in The Sunday Times, The Guardian, Daily Mail, Cosmopolitan, Elle, Observer, TLS, and Monocle. It was a Book Club Choice on Steve Wright's BBC Radio 2 Book Club and was abridged for BBC Radio 4 by my fellow host, Patricia Cumper. Hafsa Zayyan, welcome to The Amplify Project.

Hafsa Zayyan Thank you for having me.

PW So I'm going to kick off with the first question. Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood and what part did words and stories play?

HZ Sure. I - I kind of grew up all over the world, in a way. I was born in this country, but I - I lived in Saudi, I lived in the States, I lived in East England, I lived in West England so I moved around a lot in my life. And I - I went to 12 different schools before - before I went to university. And I think I, as a

result of that kind of movement, I became very, sort of, a child of the world. I found it very easy to make friends, I found it very easy to say goodbye to friends, and I - I - I found myself kind of empathizing with many - multiple cultures, the different places that I kind of grew up in. And I think a big part of - of that was my love for stories and my love for reading. I read voraciously as a child. I - I kind of followed the Matilda path of reading all of the books in the library, all of the kids' books, and then went ahead and started reading the adult books, and I - I really - I really connected with stories. And I think - I think that was linked to - to the way in which I grew up. My mother is also a huge influence on me. She - She reads very, very widely, and she would always pass books onto me and still does to this day. So writing - I suppose not writing, but reading has always been a really big part of my life and sort of, naturally, writing came out as a result of that.

PW So when did you decide that you wanted to write fiction?

HZ I think I always wanted to write fiction. I probably started writing my first short stories from the age of six or seven. I had, you know, scribbles on - on a piece of paper and then I'd give them to my mother and say, "Can you please type this up on the computer?" Because, obviously, at that time, we only had one family computer and - and I couldn't type, so she would just take the story and I'd sit there and I'd patiently watch her be my scribe. And - And I did that for a long time. I - I remember sort of entering small competitions when I was 10, 11, 12, things for young writers and - and winning a few of them, actually. But then - But then I - I went to university and - and I - I didn't think I could pursue writing as a full-time career. I wanted to do something that would give me, you know, confident financial stability. And so I studied Law, I enjoyed it, and I became a lawyer, and the writing all kind of just stopped. So, yeah, I think I've always wanted to write fiction, but I never - I never really had - after I - I went to university, I never really had the opportunity to do it again.

PC So I'm - I'm jumping in now with my questions, and I'm really interested in - in your creative process. So when you were beginning to write *We Are All Birds of Uganda*, what - what were the first steps? Where did the sort of beginning ideas come from? Why choose postcolonial Uganda? We're just curious.

HZ Sure. I - I think the novel really spawned from the competition, which was the competition that Merky Books launched. It was sort of open submissions and the tagline was "Tell stories that aren't being told." And so I really sat down and kind of thought. And I was sitting with my husband, and he's of South Asian-Ugandan heritage, and we were kind of brainstorming what kind of story ideas might fit into this category. What type of stories do we know that, you know, we would like the wider population to know that we don't feel like have received enough attention? And I said, "Oh, I'd love to write about refugees, but I don't really know enough about refugees." And he said, "Well, you know, my family were refugees and you didn't know the story of the Ugandan-Asian expulsion before you met me." And I said, "Oh, well, that - I think that's a brilliant story, like I could write about that." And so that's - that's actually where it came from, like I was specifically thinking of something that I could write about for this competition. And the - the creative process, which I think was the second part of your question, it began with me sitting down and writing out the themes of

the novel. So I wrote on a piece of paper, kind of, five or six key things that were going to be addressed in the novel and the ways in which I wanted them to be addressed, what I wanted the reader to take away from each of these themes. And that's how - that's - kind of it grew from there.

PC Did you do research around that? Was that part of the process as well?

HZ Yes, there was a lot of research involved. The - The historical aspect of the story, in particular, and of course because, you know, I had anecdotal evidence, kind of thing, from my in-laws. So I spoke - spoke to them about their experiences living - living in Uganda and - and - and being ousted out of the country in the '70s. But I also needed to read a lot more widely into the subject. So that included kind of academic papers, included other anecdotal, like, stories. I read oral histories. I - I watched YouTube videos of - of the expulsion at the time. I read some fiction by other South Asian-Ugandan expellees. I read - I read quite widely. I went to the British Library. I read - I read the text that you can sort of only really get there. I tried to - tried to cover as much ground as I could. I think, in particular, because I was writing a story that wasn't one that I was, you know, intimately familiar with other than through my - my familial connections. So I wanted to make sure that it was - I was kind of true and representative as possible.

PW How long was that research process?

HZ It was ongoing. It was ongoing, so it carried on all the way through writing. So I think one of the great things about writing something like historical fiction and - and I had quite a short time frame within which to write it. But if there were days where I felt like I couldn't really write because I had writer's block or I was really struggling, I - I never wasted a day because I could just read and do the research. Particularly with the Hasan chapters of - of the novel, a lot of research went into trying to make it as - as true to - true to the time as possible. And so I - I would sit there and - and - and do reading alongside the writing all the way through until the end.

PW So how did you come up with the idea of interweaving the lives of your two main protagonists, Hasan and Sameer? So, for me, they - their narratives are decades apart. Hasan's the grandfather. He's from Uganda. And Sameer, his grandson, he's born and bred in Leicester. So they would be worlds apart, except that Sameer's parents values are close to - to his grandfather's. And Sameer seems to me to represent that push and pull between the family's historical values and the - finding and articulating of this own values, which differ from what he's expected to accept without question. Why did you decide to tell the story that way?

HZ I think, for me, one of the important things to draw out, particularly in the context of racism, is that issues that previous generations have dealt with haven't necessarily gone away or been reduced. They may have changed form and appear in different manners now, but they are still

present and they're still there. And I think it was really important for me to connect the two narratives because I wanted Sameer to question his own behaviour and, you know, be a little bit introspective and look at himself a little bit critically. How has he been treating the Black community? How has he - You know, his relationships with the Black community. His best friend is Black or the woman that he goes on to marry is Black. How - How exactly has he been - been behaving. And I wanted to draw those parallels between that time and this time and see if we could - If Sameer could still try and cross - cross the bridge and - and, you know, join the two together. So that was really important for me.

PW So I mean it's interesting that you were talking about Sameer questioning himself and being introspective, and looking at his own behaviour and questioning that, and that just really leads us very neatly to the extract that I've chosen. So I've chosen an extract and Pat has chosen one, too. So the extract that I've chosen comes sort of towards the end of the book, where Sameer is adjusting to his new life as the immigrant in Uganda. He's just got married to the love of his life and he's starting a new business. He's finally becoming the entrepreneur that his family wants him to be, the employer, not the employee. So this reading is from page 339.

Reading from *We Are All Birds of Uganda*.

PC This scene, you know, it's - it's so visual and so heart-rending, you know. So that was one of the reasons, I think, why Pauline chose it.

HZ Oh, perfect.

PW So you explore universal themes in the novel. Issues of identity, belonging, migration, and immigration. And it comes across really strongly in the novel that people move because of political and economic pressures, you know. It's still going on.

PC Did the story come first or did the themes come first?

HZ Yeah, so I think - I think the - the theme in particular that you were talking about, which is - which is migration and kind of the timelessness of migration, how for - People will be forever doing this, motivated by economic and political factors. That - That was just an inherent part of the story without being kind of specific theme that I focused on and - and elaborated on. It was just - All of the themes that arise as a result of this issue are - are a natural part of this issue, if that makes sense. Because of the movement and the migration, the themes of identity and belonging, etcetera, all come up quite naturally. And I think that's another reason why the story was quite personal to me, as I explained earlier with my - with my background of moving around. You know, all these themes, identity, belonging, where do you call home, they all just became a part of my life and my story. And in the way, I guess, it is quite universal. It - It's a story that - that could hopefully appeal

to anyone because the themes are themes that many, many of us will have experienced if we have any - any part of our family, generations back even, who've migrated.

PW So where do you call home now?

HZ I think over time I've - I've come to realise that I don't identify a specific place as being somewhere I call home. I mean London I've lived in for the longest period of my life. Seven years I've been here now. And it's probably - If I had to say there's a place that I'd call home, I'd say London. But I think, for me, home is really about people, the people that I'm with. I - I - I see my home as the place where I'm with the people that I love and the people that love me. So home for me is not - not really tied to a specific place any more.

PC I'm up next. I - I got to choose a reading as well, and I was really interested in the letters. Your - You know, every writer has a lot of information to convey, and - and you'd really don't want to say, "Oh, that's a lot of exposition." And I think you've handled it really well in that you have put the information into the emotions, Hasan's emotions. And so the reading that I chose actually explores his disillusionment as it happens with the, I mean, government, and his - his - I suppose his shock at how the contribution of the Asians to Uganda has been perceived.

Reading from *We Are All Birds of Uganda*

PC So I'm going to ask you really practical questions now. How long did it take you to write? How many drafts did you have to go through?

HZ So I actually had quite a tight timeline because I won - I won the competition. I didn't have the story at that point that I'd won it in June 2019, and they asked for a first draft by - by the end of the year. So I had about six months to write it, and - and I was working a full-time job, so it became a very kind of - I had to put myself on quite a strict schedule. I wrote the - the novel in my evenings and on my weekends. I took some annual leave. I'd write then. So I - It was - It was kind of pushed out, you know. It was quite raw in it - in its form. And I suppose, in some ways, that is a reflection of the urgency of the - the story that I - that I wanted to get out there. It had a few revisions, a few rounds of editing. But I wouldn't say that - that it was a particularly long process. Actually, ironically enough, because of COVID and kind of, you know, in its unprecedented form in the publishing industry at the time, they did delay the publication of the novel. So while it was originally supposed to be published in July 2020, that was pushed back to January 2021. So I did end up having a good, sort of, nine months more. But on rereading it several times, I didn't make that many changes to it in the additional time I had. There's quite a fine balance that you have to draw. When you - When you produce a draft, you want to retain some of the original text because it's the rawest form of - of your, kind of, creative output. But then of course you want it to be, you know, refined in some ways to make it come together as a whole, a bit better, which is the role of the editor. And so there's - there's a fine line there and you need to just make sure that you - you stay - stay true to what you originally wanted to convey.

PC Yeah, so I think a lot of writers discover that. The voice is important. Advice, notes, they're all lovely, but they're not necessarily the original creative process, are they?

HZ Absolutely.

PW I'm curious about the two voices, the two main protagonists. Did you enjoy writing one more than the other? Did one come more easily than the other?

HZ I'm not sure I enjoyed writing either of them particularly. They're both very flawed characters, of course, in their - in their own ways. And - And in some ways differently, and in some ways quite similar. But I did grow to have quite - quite an empathy for them. I think both - both characters because, you know, they - You write the story. You have this plan. You have this idea of these characters who you're going to draw up. And you don't realise that as you are writing, the story kind of takes over. It's - It's really interesting. I think you - you begin writing the book. You're the kind of creator and, and then, sort of, at some point during the writing process, you become more like the vessel through which the story's being told and the characters begin to write themselves a little bit more. And I think when I got to that point with both Sameer and Hasan, I - I felt more like they were real people and, you know, I - I could empathize with them, and I felt for them, and I - I suddenly, you know, understood Hasan better than the character that I had initially drawn up in my head. I felt sorry for him. And so I - You know, it was a very strange kind of experience, I have to say. Learning my characters and growing with them, and by the end of the novel, really feeling like I knew them and - and they were real people. It's quite odd.

PC I think that's, in fact, the lovely part of writing, is that you do disappear into a world. And sometimes you resent coming back to the one that you're living in because that one's so nice. I just wanted to suggest to you on this, maybe my over-interpreting, but it did seem to me that Uganda itself was another character. The way that you describe it, the smells, the - the views, the - the people. It - It felt as though Uganda and, sort of, Maryam is a personification of that. Was - Yeah, was almost a character in its own right in the book.

HZ Yeah, it's funny, some of the reviews that I've read of the novel have said, "This is a love story. It's actually a love story about the country Uganda. I think the author is in love with Uganda." But I - I'd never been to Uganda before I wrote the book. And I - I'd been to other parts of East Africa. I'd been to West Africa. That's where my father's from. But I hadn't been to Uganda. And, obviously, writing - writing a novel, a part of the - a part of the research and the process was to take a trip there. Luckily, this all happened pre-COVID and - and so I went out there and I did kind of fall in love with the - with the country and its people. And I can't wait to go back. But everything that I wrote about Uganda was directly - at least in a modern-day narrative, obviously not in the historical

narrative. In the modern-day narrative, it was really a reflection of my experiences as a - you know, as a visitor there. I just - I really - I just thought it was an incredible country.

PW Has it been published there?

HZ No, no, I - I don't think it has. It's selling there. I'm not sure it's actually being printed and published there.

PW But have you had any feedback from any - any Ugandans?

HZ Yeah, yeah. So I - So the - the novel went through - I don't think any Ugandan actually read the text before it was published, despite the fact that I - I had - I did speak to quite a few Ugandans because that was the - that was - As I was writing the novel, that was obviously the one area in which I felt kind of the - the last kind of personal experience and knowledge. So the research in respect of that, it had to be as thorough as I could possibly make it. And so I - I had some interviews. I interviewed quite a few Ugandans. And, of course, when I was out there, spoke to quite a few Ugandans as well. But, no, the proof copies went to several - several diaspora Ugandans living here. And then, obviously, since - since it's been published, it - it's gone out and about and I think - I understand from reading reviews that Ugandan people who are living in Uganda now have also read it. And so it's been interesting to see that feedback and have some people say this is a really accurate reflection of - of Uganda today. And others say, "I feel like this is not so accurate." So it's - it's been a mix. It's been a mix. But I think largely and luckily, hopefully, I have - I have represented it as best as I can.

PW You're a debut novelist. What was the publishing process like? Working with an editor and the marketing and the PR teams to - to get the novel out there.

HZ I think because my experience was fairly unusual in that sense that I won this competition, everything was kind of lined up. I had kind of all my... Is it ducks in row? I don't know what the phrase is. I think it might be "ducks in a row". I had them all (overlapping conversation) - I had them all lined up. Eggs in a row, I don't know, anyway. But so I - I - I won a publishing contract. I won an agent. I won representation. So it was a very clean and neat process for me. I submitted the draft. I had editorial feedback on it. At the time, my editor was someone who'd been working in William Heinemann for over a decade. He sent - He's actually since left Penguin, but he - you know, he was very experienced and he was very open to hearing about the story and what I was trying to convey, and so we - we were able to have quite an effective dialogue about the novel. And so I had a very positive experience of editing the text. After that, it went to a copy editor, who reviews it for sort of like inherent consistency, logical consistency and all sorts of other - other kind of things, things like is it realistic that there would be snow? This is not my novel specifically, but, you know, a copy editor

will do something like is it realistic that there would be snow at this time of year. I mean they check those kinds of things. And then it goes to a proofreader, who basically checks it for typos. And so there's - there are quite a few stages. After that, it - it's - it's ready to go and it's published. There's quite a long lead time between finishing the - the - the draft and the publication as it needs to be printed, proofs need to be sent out to - to various people, authors, journalists, etcetera, to try and get reviews. And then once it's out in the world, there's a marketing campaign. And there's publicity and you do interviews, and, you know, you hope to get reviews from - from major publications. The Guardian reviewed it. BBC reviewed it. And so these were all helpful steps along the way. And since then, it's been, you know - it's been a really wild ride. Kind of never imagined in my wildest dreams that this could happen to me. But it's been absolutely lovely and I'm just so, so grateful to the Merky team for kind of coming up with this - with this idea of - of having a competition that anyone who's not an author can enter, because you had to be unpublished and unrepresented to enter it. So, you know, my - my experience of this entire process has been, I would say, quite unique.

PW Yeah. I think that's fantastic.

PC Yeah.

PW But you explained it all beautifully. What did it feel like to have the novel serialized on Radio 4? Was it a particular thrill? Did it help you to feel like a writer, like you've made it?

HZ I'm not sure if I'll ever feel like I've made it. I - I just can't get away from the impostor syndrome that I just can't - I think comes with - with the territory a little bit. But I - I was just really surprised and amazed that - that - that they wanted to do that. And I felt very, yeah, excited. I was really excited. And it just spread the novel, you know, even more widely. People would listen to the serialization, contact me, and say, "Oh, my gosh, your book is on, you know, Radio 4. This is so cool." You know, totally random people and also people who have kind of, you know, been involved in my life in the past, and they'd say, "Oh, I just heard you on Radio 4. Heard your story on Radio 4." But it also encouraged people to buy the novel. So people listened to it and then were like, "Oh, this is abridged, so I want to read the whole thing or I want to listen to the whole thing, buy the audio book." And so I just think - I just think that getting it on radio basically spread it far and wide and - and - and gave it a whole new kind of audience, not just with the serialization, but also - also with the book. So I was incredibly grateful and just really kind of overwhelmed that - that it was selected for that. I'm really happy.

PC It was a lovely project to work on, I have to say. But the - the -

HZ Thank you.

PC The pain - The pain of the abridger, I will tell you.

HZ Oh, yes.

PC It's what we have to leave out. Because it's kind of like, "So much of it is lovely. How - What do I do?" So I think, basically, what we do is follow the main characters through and the emotional through lines and try and keep as much anecdote as we - as we possibly can. But, no, it was a joy. It was an absolute joy to work on, which is why I contacted you to ask you to come on Amplify.

HZ Thank you so much. So kind.

PC But there's a question that we ask all the writers that we talk to, and it's interesting - we get some very interesting responses. The first part of the question is when did you call - first call yourself a writer? And the second part is how do you respond to the description of being called a Black writer?

HZ So the first part, when did I call myself - I'm not sure I do call myself a writer yet. I guess - I guess I have kind of forced myself to do it, prompted largely by my husband, who keeps nudging me into producing the next book and saying, you know, "You can do it" kind of thing, and - and, you know, encouraging me to say, you know, "Introduced yourself as a lawyer and a writer, which Google also now does for me, so that's pretty cool. So I'm - I'm not sure. I - I probably still struggle with the idea that I am, in inverted commas, a writer. I would love to be able to freely take that title, and I suppose I should more. But at the same time, a massive part of me thinks I need to just start writing another book, because until I do that, how am I a writer? So, I don't know, that's just my - I don't know if this is me being funny.

PC No, it's not. Do you know that the majority of people who have that same hesitation are female?

HZ Why does that not surprise me? Why does that not surprise me? Being called a Black writer, I mean I - I am obviously Black. I - I'm half-South Asian, half-West African. And I - It's interesting, I - I - I'm grateful and I - I recognise that we deserve recognition separately to the rest of the population, and that's why I think things like Merky Books and the initiative are really great, like I'm really happy that they are looking to publish more diverse stories. We need initiatives like that because we can't ignore the fact that there is an issue in the publishing industry and that there is an issue with - with representation. So it makes me happy to know that that tag is attached to me. At the same time, it makes me a little sad because I want to be a writer. As a writer, I don't want to be pigeonholed into

the category of, oh, Black fiction, oh, you know, South Asian. I want to be something that everyone can read. And so it - it's a strange kind of conflict because, on the one hand, you recognise that it's important to say who you are and it's important to show who you are, but at the same time, you want to be - you don't want to be just known for - for that. So I don't know. It's a difficult one.

PC One of my favourite quotes is from Ben Okri where he says, "We are half-human, half-stories. We learn other people's lives through the stories that we consume." So I think my next question is what do you think the role of the writer is? And what responsibilities go with that role?

HZ I think the role of the writer is probably empathy. I love the, you know, vast kind of - the worlds that storytelling takes you to and the kind of diversity that you can experience sitting in your living room, reading a book. The role of the writer is to introduce you to all of these cultures, and all of these languages, and all of this beauty that's - that's in the world, and be it through fiction or nonfiction. It just opens your mind. Oh, you know, another reason why we need - why we need as diverse stories as possible. You know, obviously, as a child sitting in your bedroom, you're taken to every corner of the world and outside of the world. So I think - I think for me, personally, that - that the role of the writer is really to create empathy so that the readers can empathise with - with all manner of - all manner of worlds and cultures. Responsibilities-wise, I - I don't know. And I don't - I don't - I don't know what responsibilities specifically writers should have. I - I like the idea of novels that put responsibility on the reader. When they read something, they then want to take it further, research, learn about it, ask questions about it, speak to their friends who may have hailed from the background or - or whatever, and, you know, they - they suddenly feel this urge and this responsibility upon themselves to - to - to - to learn more. I guess as a - as a - as a, you know, Black Muslim woman of colour, I - I feel some level of responsibility to write stories that are representative of the communities that I come from. And the only reason I think that I feel that way right now is probably, one, because I'm not an established writer. Perhaps when I am, I can just write whatever I wanted to. But I do feel like there is a gap there and that these stories do need to be told because if we don't tell them, who's going to? I also really like the idea of people picking up my novel and seeing themselves in it. You know, reading a novel where their stories are being told. I think that that's important to me. And so I do feel, at the moment, a sort of mild pressure to make sure that what I write is representative of - of the communities that I've come from.

PW Fantastic. So what do you think the next decade will look like for writers?

HZ Interesting. Interesting question, but I think the next decade will also look interesting. It's a - It's a strange time. It's a strange time for writers, I think. There are questions being raised about what we are writing about and how we are writing, obviously, you know, these - these stories. And there are questions about to what extent can you write stories that aren't directly your own stories. I think that's one of the kind of, you know, movements at the moment. You saw all the controversy with - with *American Dirt*. And - And you see - you know, you see these questions being asked more and more. In - In - In artistic culture, you see questions about can straight men, for example, play gay characters. And so I think all of these questions are probably something that are going to come

to a head and - and we'll be having discussions around - around those types of issues in - in the next, you know - maybe - maybe not decade, but in the next few years. I guess another - another thing that - that - that I had, you know, seen a lot as well is - is - With the advent, I think, of the kind of the internet and social media, and you really get to feel like you personally know authors. You know these writers on a level in which you really didn't before - before we had Twitter and Instagram. You know, you feel personally connected to - to - to people who are - who are sort of in the public eye. And I think there's a real - there's a real interesting question that's going to come out. It's like when writers express their political views or, you know, social views on - on social media, and then, you know, they have these texts that they've written, and it becomes a question of to what extent do you take into account who the writer is as a person that you - you know, you've kind of seen on - on Twitter and Instagram, and how do you factor that into what you read and what you read that they've written. And so I think there is going to be more kind of questioning of how we behave on - on social media and what we say, and it will just be interesting to see, kind of, where that - that goes as well.

PC Maybe some people would take Michaela Coel's advice and just go to silence.

HZ Yeah. Yeah.

PC That might be helpful, too.

HZ She said recently, yeah.

PC Where would you like your career to go? What - What plans do you have?

HZ I would love to write another book. I do have some ideas. None of them have made it onto paper yet, but I would - I would love another book. I mean I - I have a job. I have a - I have a full-time job, and writing another book will, without kind of the pressure and the - the motivation of - of the competition, will be a struggle for me. So I - I will have to see how it goes. I mean I also have a new baby and so I've quite a few things on my plate.

PC Yes.

HZ But I do - I do hope to write, you know, at least one other book. And that then, you know, we'll kind of see what happens after that.

PW So, finally, because we like to end on a note of celebration, what are the best things about being Hafsa Zayyan?

HZ I really don't know if there are that many good things. I guess it - it - it's very, very nice to write something and to have people contact you and say, "This meant a lot to me." And that, for me, is probably, maybe not the best thing about being Hafsa, but the best thing about being a writer. It is having complete strangers reach out to you, be it on Facebook or Instagram or - I had a - I had an old man who'd actually lived through the expulsion and come - come to this country. He wrote a letter to my - to my office because I'm a lawyer and my - where I work is - is available online. He didn't know where to send anything to, and so he wrote - he hand-wrote me sort of a two-, three-page letter and sent it to my office, just basically saying how much he loved the book and sending me some of his kind of old - you know, kind of relics from his time there. He sent me a - a sort of small publication that he had contributed to back - back in the '60s. And receiving messages like that and - and letters like that, for me, is, hands down, the best thing about having written a book, that people feel like, you know, they understand. And it's just - that's just been absolutely lovely.

PC Well, thank you very, very much for taking the time to talk to us. It's been fun.

PW Extracts are read by Stefan Adegbola.

PW Do check with our website, theamplifyproject.co.uk, for other podcasts in this series and for further information about Black British writing.

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