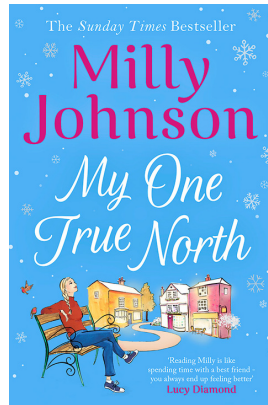


MEET THE AUTHOR

Award-winning author **Milly Johnson** on reading and writing books and what inspires her



If there was one book you would recommend to a friend what would it be and why? Persuasion, by Jane Austen. I think it's lovely to escape into a gentle world of yesteryear and this is the most fabulous love story with a drop dead gorgeous hero and a wonderful heroine.

What was the last book that made you laugh? The Tim Vine Joke Book. I picked it up in 'The Works' for a snip and he really is the master of the one-liner. I used to write jokes for a living and there aren't many joke books out there that I enjoy because I've heard them all – but this one was full of fresh material and it was a smashing cheer-up, especially for these times.

Which was your favourite book as a child? The Enchanted Wood trilogy. I thought it was absolutely magical. I was transported into another world with Enid Blyton – she was my favourite author by far. Never the adventure books, all the ones with the dolls that come to life and fabulous lands that you can fly to.

What book are you reading now? I'm reading a draft copy of the new Debbie Johnson book which is coming out this summer called 'The Moment I Met You'. It's about a woman whose life is changed for ever in a moment that she can't forget, even years later, and I can't put it down. I always know I'm in for a good read with her.

Whose biography would you like to write? I'd like to write a full no-holds-barred biography of Mae West. She was an absolute sauce pot, way ahead of her time and a shrewd businesswoman who inspired such great love and loyalty. One of her boyfriends was an Afro-American boxer and because of his colour was denied entry to the apartments where Mae lived. So she bought the whole block just so she could lift the ban. What a girl!

Which book have you read that surprised you and why? 'Heatstroke' by Hazel Barkworth. It sounded like my sort of book and I really enjoyed the story but I was totally swept away by the beautiful prose which I wasn't expecting. It was exquisite.

What inspired you to want to write? For as long as I can remember, I wanted to write books that made other readers feel the way I felt when I read a good book. I think I was born wanting to write.



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What are your top tips for people wanting to write a book? 1) Be prepared for the fact that it's not as easy as it looks. The first few chapters are a doddle then it starts to feel like work and you must carry on and not give up, even though you feel as if you are wading through wet cement. 2) Don't wait for writing time to land on your doorstep, you have to stop procrastinating and MAKE time. You'd make time if Keanu Reeves landed on your doorstep and asked you if you'd got half an hour to spare to have a coffee with him. 3) There is no right or wrong way to write a book – only your way. You might be a planner or you might just be someone who likes to write and see where it takes you, so if one method doesn't work for you – try another until you find what you are comfortable with.

Do you have a message for our NHS front line staff? I only hope that you know how grateful people are to have you. It must be hard when you see so many instances of people flouting rules and not caring, but there are a legion of people all trying everything they can to ensure the safety of others and keep out of your way for all the best reasons. You're underpaid and overworked and I hope when all this is over and done with, an army comes out and fights for what is overdue to you. Thank you for being there and doing what you do.

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