

It's Saturday!



ALL AT SEA James Marinero sails and writes novels.



Fiona Caine answers your problems

Writing novels becomes plain sailing for James

EASING into retirement with plans to pen a novel or two isn't an unusual later-life plan.

But for James Marinero those plans also include sailing the high seas to Brazil and to the West Indies, living for half the year in his bedsit-sized craft, while working on his feisty adventure novels.

The Llanelli-born father of six says he knew even as a lad he wasn't going to settle into a life of the daily commute, the nine-to-five and the G&T to unwind with in front of the telly. But that's not to say he ever had a rigid life plan either.

In his time the 60-year-old has been a chef, a milkman, a oceanographer, an IT specialist and the skipper of his beloved Blue Hound.

And taking things as they comes, adapting to life's peaks and troughs and seizing opportunities as they arise have all stood him in good stead and prepared him for life on the ocean waves too.

Having just moored up in Lymington after a long trip to Sicily, he says the marine life is suiting him just fine.

"I have been working up to this — living for six months on board and writing books — for many years. I was in IT project management for a long time, largely in the city but in 2004 I started writing and

Forget the creative writing courses — nothing gives a novelist richer material than life experience. KATE CLARKE talks to a Llanelli man who has notched up a lot more of that than most, and after several colourful careers he now sails the world, writing novels aboard his prized vessel.



I have just had Gate Of Tears published. It isn't perfect but I am pleased with it."

While most writers might escape to the spare room to tap out a chapter on the laptop, James finds his seclusion in a Mediterranean harbour.

"I can't write with distractions so writing on the boat is perfect for me. I usually work on a book when the boat is in the harbour though I managed to write a few words out at sea from Stromboli to Messina on this last trip."

James suspects growing up in Llanelli planted the seed for his life-long hankering for the sea.

"My recollection is that my mother and father didn't want us to get into trouble and he gave us the option of horses or boats. We chose boats. We became mad about boats, building our own dingy and messing about in Burry Port Harbour. And it went on from there."

Since then his working life

took James to Russia, Kazakhstan and the Middle East and as a frequent traveller, and now a sailor, he says the lessons he learned as a youngster still motivate him to some extent.

"My dad always told me to strike while the iron is hot. And I have kept that attitude, to take up any opportunity that looks like it might be a good one — partly because I really never wanted to die in a grey suit on the train to London."

"The way I live wouldn't suit everyone but it suits me. I like to embrace change. I think if you don't do things that are out of your comfort zone then you atrophy."

James often travels with his partner Rosy, who is also a competent sailor, though she ducks out of the big ocean voyages.

But living a largely self-reliant life has its challenges as well as its rewards.

"You do have to have resources, yes. I was brought

anything about his previous life and work he struggles to come up with much.

"It is an interesting question. I suppose if I miss anything, when I was working in IT and in project management I used to spend a lot of my time with people who were extremely clever, so there was that stimulus there which I used to enjoy. But apart from that I don't miss very much. Though it would be nice to be able to get the rugby coverage more easily."

He doesn't even struggle with the bijou living space, he insists.

"I spend a lot of time sailing the Mediterranean and if you think about the way people in those climates live, they tend to have small apartments with balconies, so they spend a lot of time outside."

"They hop from cafe to cafe and I am living in a similar way on my boat, hopping from harbour to harbour. I do consider myself to be a voyager, in that I love the actual voyage — the sailing itself. Though when I go to new places I love getting under the skin of a culture as well."

"I will never put down roots again. My boat is my roots. It is like a plant in a pot. Wherever I go it goes with me."

●James Marinero's action and intrigue novel *Gate Of Tears* is out now.

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Q We returned from holiday to find our house had been broken into. The police said there wasn't much they could do as it may have occurred any time in the two weeks we were away. It's not the material things, even though we have lost our TV, radios, DVD player and jewellery. But realising that strangers have been through my underwear drawers, may have eaten biscuits out of the tin or drunk out of our mugs is distressing. I've cleaned the place but just can't make it feel like our home. The children have been sleeping in our room because they are afraid to go back into their own beds.

A Have you done all the important things such as making sure your home is now secure and informing the insurance company? If you haven't, make sure you do so as soon as possible. The police will have given you a crime number and you will need this when you talk to your insurance company. I would encourage you to contact your local Victim Support charity. If you go to its website, you will see lots of suggestions on how to overcome the psychological effects of a burglary. One practical thing is to upgrade security. It needn't be expensive; just having a motion sensor light outside your house would be a start, or a more secure lock on external doors.

Q I have fallen head over heels in love with a work colleague but she's been happily married for 25 years. I know I should be past this by now — I'm a single guy and this woman is about seven or eight years older but looks much younger. The last thing I want to do is ruin her marriage or our working relationship. I've not had too much luck in the past and this is absolutely killing me inside, and I'm struggling to concentrate on my work. I know it's the real thing, so do you think I should tell her how I feel?

A No, absolutely not — you think it's the real thing but you can't possibly know it. You don't really know this woman at all. She's not given you any indication that your feelings are reciprocated, indeed you admit she's happily married. So what would telling her achieve? You'd embarrass her, she might feel sorry for you, she might well be angry and uncomfortable with you. Telling her would make the working relationship very difficult for her, even if you'd find it easier. You say you've not had much luck in the past, but you're doing nothing to increase your chances by fantasising over the unobtainable. Get out there and meet new people; single people who are free and interested in developing relationships. Start having fun and you'll realise this was just a than a passing phase.

Q My boyfriend and I have been together for nearly two years. We're 16, love each other very much and spend a lot of time together. But my dad treats me like a 12-year-old and refuses to let us spend any time alone together. Whenever I go out to meet him my dad is always nagging me to be careful. It's so different at my boyfriend's house, his parents are very easy going and let us spend lots of time alone together. We could have had sex dozens of times but haven't because we don't feel ready yet. How can I get dad to trust me?

A I'm afraid there's little chance of your father ever treating you the way your boyfriend's parents treat you and their son. They have different backgrounds, upbringings, values — and all these will affect they way they bring up their children. And most fathers act far more protectively towards their daughters than towards sons. Your father would see his attitude as caring rather than restrictive. You are asking him to treat you like an adult, so start thinking like one and don't make comparisons. Instead, show your dad you understand his worries and his need to make rules, show him you can be trusted.

●Email Fiona Caine if you have a relationship, sexual, marriage or family problem at help@askfiona.net