

Shelf Healing Interview with Gyles Brandreth. Transcribed by Luke Montgomery.

Rebecca: (00:13)

Before we start officially. if you could say your first and last name to make sure I pronounce it right and give your pronouns as well. That would be great.

Gyles Brandreth: (00:22)

Well, you can call me anything you like. I'm totally relaxed about pronouns, but my name is Gyles Brandreth. It's a ridiculous name, really, but we won't go into that. I'm lumbered with it. It's not easy, it's not easy on. I made life worse for my children. I have three children. They're called Benet, Saethryd and Aphra.

Rebecca: (00:43)

Beautiful.

Gyles Brandreth: (00:45)

They're lovely names. Aphra is a particularly interesting name in terms of bibliotherapy, because she's named after Aphra Behn, who was a distinguished writer, playwright, novelist, probably the first woman to earn her living as an author in this country. But Saethryd, to be called Saethryd Brandreth

Rebecca: (01:04)

It's a good name.

Gyles Brandreth: (01:05)

Particularly when you've got a speech impediment is really quite challenging. She doesn't have a speech impediment, though you might think she does with that ridiculous name, but she's got used to it. She's every day of her life. She has to spell her name, it's a curious thing. Anyway, it's lovely to be with you, Rebecca taking part in bibliotherapy.

Rebecca: (01:27)

Hello and welcome to Shelf Healing, UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host, Rebecca Markwick. Our guest today is Gyles Brandreth. Gyles is a writer, broadcaster, actor and former MP. Gyles has written books across age and genre, fiction, and nonfiction. He is chancellor of the University of Chester, is a frequent guest on just a minute and is a co-host of the award-winning lexicological podcast "Something Rhymes with Purple". Gyles is a well-known lover of words and poetry, having delighted us all with readings of poems regularly throughout lockdown. First question to get us started is nice and easy. Do you feel that reading is therapeutic?

Gyles Brandreth: (02:09)

Yes, it's therapeutic. It's essential. It's fundamental. I read in some way, shape or form all the time everyday. In fact, I never stop reading. I'm one of those people who, you know in the bathroom is reading the side of the shampoo. I'm reading what it says on the back of the toothpaste tube. I have to be reading at all times. Always, I'm always- if there's nothing to be read at breakfast, I find the cornflakes packet and read the back of that. Reading is- I've always loved reading. I was very lucky in that, as a little boy my parents- I come from a family where there were lots of books in the home. Books were fundamental to us and not only reading but reading out loud. My parents read a lot to me out loud. You know, the famous poem by Philip Larkin. I do a version off it, which begins: "they tuck you up, your mom and dad" because that's what my mom and dad did for me. They took me up in bed on they read me stories. They fed my love of words from a very, very early age. And my mother was a pioneer in teaching people who have dyslexia and this is, way, years ago. I mean, more than half a century ago, the 1950s, when dyslexia really was barely heard off. She worked with small children on their reading difficulties and was brilliant. She was a genius teacher, and they really believed in the power of language. I mean, language is power. It's come home to me this year how much that is true because we haven't been able to hug, you know, we have been able to shake hands haven't often have been able to just smile at one another in person. How can we communicate? It has to be through words, Bertrand Russell said famously: "no matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor, but honest. Only words could do that." So, language is what defines us. What makes us unique. What differentiates us from the animals. And I don't believe there has yet been a better way off communicating than through the printed word. I love a book on and I can't go to- I never go to bed without reading. And I, during lockdown, got fed up with reading the newspapers because, you know, we cope with so much bad news. Didn't worry about politics there being a politician that didn't interest me. Didn't want to read about yet more lockdown audacity I as I began reading books at meals. So, I do read books at meals. If I'm eating alone, I've always got a book with me. I have a book everywhere. I'm not very good at doing two things at once, being male and therefore, I can't really sustain more than one book at a time and I'm a very slow reader and I'm a finisher. I complete a book, a completist and it takes me about two minutes the page. So it's really annoying if I start on something that isn't terribly new because I feel obliged to go to the end of it. So I've been reading a vast amount this year. I've been reading a lot of nonfiction. I'm currently reading Rupert Everett's latest book about him making his film about Oscar Wilde. I'm the president of the Oscar Wilde society, I'm a bit of an Oscar Wilde groupie. I know you only asked a simple question. You don't expect me to talk for about three quarters of an hour, but that's because we're meeting at the end of the day, so all the words of tumbling out because I've been writing a book today. I won't come on to them. So forgive me for answering so- such a length Rebecca, but the answer is yes. And I tell you, yes, reading is fundamental. It is a therapy. It's a stimulus and a therapy. That's what's odd about it. Reading can excite you, can move you, could amuse you, can annoy you, can frustrate you. But also it is, it is a therapy. It's a way off- it's an important thing, actually. Say something important here. Years ago I had a very fascinating time with a great psychiatrist called Professor Anthony Clare who for people of a certain generation, was famous in this country because he did a radio program called 'In the Psychiatrist's Chair' and he's no longer alive, but he was a wonderful man. And he and I worked on a book together, which I published called 'The 7 Secrets of Happiness'. We talked about happiness, but one of the rules of being happy was to break the mirror, to stop thinking about yourself. And those seven rules, we're to obey all of them toe to find happiness. And what he meant- he didn't mean ecstasy, he didn't mean a high. He meant that sense of well being, that sense of balance. And he said, break the mirror, stop thinking about yourself. Certainly don't talk about yourself, and the great thing about reading is it can take you out of yourself. You could open a book and you go into another world. Whatever the book may be. So, that is a therapeutic element. There's therapy too, I think, in letting the eyes go across the page. I often read a book later tonight after I've forgotten in the morning what I read and I have to go back. You know, particularly if it's a murder mystery, you've got to go back five pages to find out in case you missed something. But I don't mind that it's like poetry. I often read poetry. I have no idea what the words mean. The idea what the poem means. But I love that, and in fact, I was very reassured- used to feel guilty about it- and then I read the T S. Eliot. The Great T S. Eliot- that he said, don't worry, you know, it's- it's like music, words are

like music. You don't go to a concert and actually follow all the themes and you may not know anything about music. May be able to read the dots when it's going up on it. Just somehow works for you. We'll poetry can be like that. So I think reading the words is therapeutic. The content can be therapeutic. The act of reading is therapeutic, And I have at the bedside, always, several- have lots of books always at the bedside have little trough of books that are always there. They include an anthology of poetry, we'll come to in a minute. They also include dictionaries of quotations because, you know, deep down I'm shallow and I like a nugget and I think a little quotation is great fun. I love a fun quotation. You know, too much of a good thing is wonderful, said Mae West. I like to fall asleep with a little bit of Mae West or a bit of Dorothy Parker, just a bit of wit. Or if I'm feeling in the mood, I look up Emily Dickinson and just get a line or two. And I read diaries. I've always got diaries on the bedside. Virginia Woolf, who I think whenever I visit anything to do with UCL because of being so Bloomsbury adjacent. Virginia Woolf, great novelist and your- hey, hey, hey, hey, Rebecca. I'm known, I'm known for my name dropping. I'm so sorry we can't shake hands because if you shook hands with me, you'll be shaking the hand that shook the hand that held the hand that wrote *The Waves* and *Mrs Dalloway*.

Rebecca: (09:45)

That is amazing.

Gyles Brandreth: (09:47)

It is amazing. Well, I'm- while I'm playing that game with you. Also, when you shake my hand, you're shaking the hand that shook the hand that wrote *The Importance of Being Earnest*. I knew a man who was a friend of Oscar Wilde.

Rebecca: (10:05)

Oh, my goodness

Gyles Brandreth: (10:07)

Isn't that incredible?

Rebecca: (10:09)

That's fabulous.

Gyles Brandreth: (10:10)

That's because the school I was at, he had founded this school in the 1890s, and Oscar Wilde sent his eldest son to this school. And when I was at the school in the 1960s, this old boy was still alive. He died aged 102.

Rebecca: (10:22)

My goodness!

Gyles Brandreth: (10:23)

I think I knew him in his late nineties. So, uh, I met him, so I've shaken the hand that- anyway, that's neither here nor there. The point is that on the bedside, I have books of quotations, books of poetry and diaries, and I recommend to anybody reading this, particularly people who may find Virginia Woolf difficult. Some people don't like Virginia Woolf as a writer. Some people didn't like her as a person, felt that she was snobbish. There are people who say they're also she had anti-Semitic traits, but she was undoubtedly a prose artist of genius. And- but some people find her novels difficult. What nobody can find difficult are diaries. There is an edition of her diaries called *A Shorter Diary*, Virginia Woolf, edited by I think maybe some sort of kinswoman of hers certainly, a Blooms- a descendant of the Bloomsbury's, Anne Olivier Bell. Yes, it would be a kinswoman of hers Anne Olivier Bell edited this and it's almost my favorite bedside book. You could open it on any page, find the date you're on. Just read a paragraph of Virginia Woolf before going to sleep and you will sleep well. It's fantastic. So you didn't ask me. I do a program called 'Just A Minute'. They ask you to speak for just a minute. You didn't ask me to speak for 15 minutes, but it's such a good question.

Rebecca: (11:44)

Thank you

Gyles Brandreth: (11:45)

That I'm burbling away because I haven't thought it through. I'm just giving you my spontaneousness

Rebecca: (11:49)

It's lovely. We like spontaneous. You've actually answered the next two questions in that which makes perfect sense why it lasted so long. You saw what I was coming up with, which is: what kind of books do you reach for? And is there a time or a place that you read? And you have answered both of those.

Gyles Brandreth: (12:06)

I will answer that. If I may answer that more fully.

Rebecca: (12:08)

Yes, of course.

Gyles Brandreth: (12:10)

What type of books do you reach for? Well, during, I do believe in comfort reading. Books do furnish a room. I have thousands of books, tens of thousands of books, probably you can see in the background because you were looking at each other on Zoom. You can see some of the books in this particular room, but I've got room- books in every room in the house and the books in the bathroom pretty damp by now. I've got books everywhere and I've got lots of books I will never read. I know I'll never read them, but I just like having them. I like owning a book. I like smelling a book. The therapy of a book happens the moment you pick it up, the moment you look inside. A book that has end papers. A book that is made with beautiful paper. A book that has a spine that when you open it or book that is properly bound. I love that. A book where sometimes you find a book that's got a little bit

of silk that you could keep a bookmark in or it's printed in two colors. I love that. So, there's therapy in the physical shape, smell and feel of a book. There's therapy for me in the books of childhood. I go back to the books of childhood. I go back to picture books. I go back to Rupert Bear, Rupert Bear, 100 years old this year. Born in 1920. Brilliant woman who created Rupert Bear on She sadly, you know, went blind. She couldn't go on doing it. And the work was taken over by another artist called Alfred Best who people think even better than her. But anyway, I go into the world of nut wood. I love those books. I love Winnie the Pooh. Of course I love Winnie the Pooh. Oh, while I'm dropping names and shaking hands with you, you can shake my hand again. Rebecca, you're now shaking the hand that shook the hand that held the paw of Winnie the Pooh. I was a friend of the real, Christopher Robin Milne.

Rebecca: (14:14)

That is incredible.

Gyles Brandreth: (14:15)

Son of A. A. Milne, who was born again 100 years ago in 1920, and Christopher Robin Milne, a real man grew up to be a real bookseller and actually a real writer himself. He wrote a couple of wonderful memoirs that I- I recommend. He had a difficult time being Christopher Robin. He loved it when he was a small boy, but when he was a teenager, he hated it because he felt, in fact he said, he accused his father of building his reputation by standing on a small boy's shoulders. Really almost fell out with his parents because of the success of Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin the books. But later he was reconciled to it, and he was a lovely human being. Christopher Robin was one of the sweetest, nicest people it's been my privilege to know. Anyway. I love the world of Winnie the Pooh, so I disappear into these childhood worlds that were created- by the way 1904 is my favorite year for books because it's the year that well, I mean, it was just amazing year. The things that happened in 1904 I hope I've got the year right now I'm saying this even that will be- you know, all these serious EngLit students will be listening and saying like, Oh yeah, there was not talking about that to get a word in edge ways. But it's only because I'm pleased to be talking about this because I love books so much. 1904 J. M. Barrie wrote *Peter Pan*. Which is- that's a world to escape into if you want to. But also, I think Chekov wrote *The Cherry Orchard* and, comfort reading, Arnold Bennett wrote *The Old Wives Tale*. Have you read *The Old Wives Tale*?

Rebecca: (15:59)

It's on my shelf. It is one of those books that is just on my shelf that I have not yet read it.

Gyles Brandreth: (16:04)

You must pull it down off your shelf for this Christmas, Rebecca, read *The Old Wives Tale*. Arnold Bennett was one of the great British novelists. In my book, is up there. I mean, with the greats when I mean the greats we're talking about, You know, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf. I mean this- this is a major literary figure, Arnold Bennett. Now forgotten, he's not on most people shelves. Well done you having him on your shelf. He came from the Potteries in the Midlands, the Pottery Towns, the Midland's lot of his novels. Most of them, in fact, begin in the Potteries, the Five Towns, as he called them. I think there were actually six, and *The Old Wives Tale*, *Anna of the Five Towns* is a popular one, Um, but I think *The Old Wives Tale* is his masterpiece really historical novel. It's a book where you just you will just disappear into that world and you meet- a lot of women writers and critics reckon that Arnold Bennett is the 19th and 20th century British male writer who understands women best. So, I can't be a judge of that. But you could be a judge of that. So, see what you make of Arnold Bennett *The Old Wives Tale* that is a Christmas treat. Give Dickens a miss for one year. I love

Dickens. Of course I do, but Dickens gives us characters. Arnold Bennett gives us people so I go to big novels for comfort reading that you can lose yourself in, and I would recommend *The Old Wives Tale*. What is your comfort reading? What are the comfort novels that you would go to?

Rebecca: (17:46)

I always go for Jeeves and Wooster. Can't be to beat a bit of Jeeves and Wooster to cheer you up if you've had a bad day and you are- the writing is impeccable. The humour is still so relevant and so utterly beautiful. I- I can't. You can't beat PG Wodehouse.

Gyles Brandreth: (18:06)

You certainly can't. I go for your PG tips. They're absolutely PG. Wodehouse is the master, and you know he is the person who's in the Oxford English Dictionary for inventing the most words in the first half of the 20th century. He came up with all sorts of funny words and phrases that we now know, you know, cherrio, pip pip, angling down to the club and all that. I love Jeeves and Wooster.

Rebecca: (18:28)

I've got one right here. Actually,

Gyles Brandreth: (18:29)

What are you reading at the moment?

Rebecca: (18:30)

I'm- I'm very bad and I have beautiful copies.

Gyles Brandreth: (18:34)

You're not very bad. It's very good to have. It's a beautiful copy, and when you've run through all your Jeeves and Wooster the great originals, you know Ben Schott, contemporary novelists writer, he started doing some sequels authorize and their very good. They're fun, they're fun. So

Rebecca: (18:52)

They're going on my Christmas list

Gyles Brandreth: (18:53)

They're going on- I'm hoping it's going to be a long Christmas list, isn't it? So that was so you like. Jeeves and Wooster. I like comic writers. My favorite contemporary, 20th century comic writer, probably is Evelyn Waugh. The wit of the novels of Evelyn Waugh. What, but you can't go- can't go wrong with a PG Wodehouse. There was a famous writer called Frank Richards. Have you heard of him?

Rebecca: (19:15)

I have.

Gyles Brandreth: (19:17)

Now why have you heard of him? Do you know?

Rebecca: (19:18)

I don't know. But you said the name and light bulbs started.

Gyles Brandreth: (19:20)

So you may know him because he's in the Guinness Book of Records as the most prolific writer of the 20th century, he created Billy Bunter, and he created Gray Friars School, which is a kind of precursor to the school created by J. K. Rowling. The whole Hogwarts. It's kind of Hogwarts world 100 years earlier. But instead of the feature of, you know Hogwarts magic is the feature at Gray Friars is beating. They're all being beaten constantly by the teachers. And there's greed, Billy Bunter's a fat boy. And we don't mind that we make fun of him. They're comic novels and, you know, if you take them, is that they are- they're fun. So did you have- were there schoolgirl novels that people read? I mean, obviously not having being a schoolgirl-

Rebecca: (20:10)

Personally. No, I always went slightly elsewhere. I'm a big science fiction fan, so I was a fan of Terry Pratchett and Iain Banks and all of that. But I believe Malory Towers is the equivalent.

Gyles Brandreth: (20:22)

Yeah, that's Malory Towers is big. Well, I shook, I shook the hand of Terry Pratchett. That's not much because he's a contemporary, but in fact, we were exactly the same age. Science fiction means nothing to me. That's my dead area means absolutely nothing. But you must give. And I know you are in equestrian by day. We are not doing your PhD. You must- you know Jilly Cooper girl.

Rebecca: (20:47)

No, no, no. I again, I know Jilly- I know of Jilly Cooper. I know the books, but I- I do not read them.

Gyles Brandreth: (20:54)

Oh, people find her really therapeutic. I mean, they go to her for comfort reading, You know, they go for riders. Oh, yeah. Raunchy riders, and we like that. I'm not- I mean, I love all kinds of writing. I just think if it's there, it's fun. It's to be had. And that's why I don't mind. I like picture books. I like going back to Tintin.

Rebecca: (21:18)

I love Tintin! Sorry, I got a bit over excited there.

Gyles Brandreth: (21:19)

Babar. I love Babar the Elephant. I love all that. Great. So, we know we have a central our comfort writing. Where do we like reading? Where do I like reading? I like reading a lot. In normal times I like reading in Starbucks, Cafe Nero. I like going out to places. If I allow my- I mean because I'm a writer I work. Basically, my rule in life. You know, if you want to write a book, what did Mark Twain say? What- if you had my addiction of quotations on your bedside you'd know, he said, if you want to write a book, what you need is application, apply the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair. So that's what, if you want to write a book that you have to do. And I do, you know, like most writers, I get up and I said to the desk at eight in the morning. I'm there until I've done my 1000 words. Whatever the number of words I've set myself. But if I get to the end of a section, or if I get to the end of a book and I want to reward myself, I will take a book, somebody else's book, and I will go to Starbucks at the end of my road or Cafe Nero Or indeed, even, you know, a beautiful individual coffee shop. Even better. I will find a corner, and I will just read the book. So I love that. I love if I'm in a hotel, you know, and I mean recently doing some filming on all the hotels I was staying, though advertised by Lenny Henry was never in any of them. So I was alone and I couldn't teach in the dining room because of Covid so I sat in my room, and I made it a rule not to watch the television, not to watch the television and I thought, I'm going to read a book. So with my supper, I like to read a book with a meal, so that is quite good and I've got certain armchairs that I like to read in and I like to read certain books in certain rooms. There are some chairs for nonfiction, they're slightly harder. You've got to sit up more. There are other books for sort of nestling and- other chairs and sofas for nestling back in for fiction. So it depends what the book is. I don't read books in the bath.

Rebecca: (23:30)

No, I'm always worried I'll drop them and they'll get wet.

Gyles Brandreth: (23:34)

Exactly that. Actually, that has happened to me over the years. And they're quite fun. You then keep them and you dry them on the radiator

Rebecca: (23:40)

And they get all wrinkly

Gyles Brandreth: (23:41)

And they swell up. You'll find when you get to my age that that happens to you as a person. When you get into the bath and you're young bath and a shower, they're risk free. When you get to my age, you get in and you find after 20 minutes you wrinkled and swell- swell up, but with a book for it falls in the bath gets all soaked. Then you're in, you know- and then the spine breaks. Goodness knows what happens. So I read magazines or newspapers in the bath or I read as I said, the side of the soap packet it because I have to read in the bath as well. So those are my favorite places for reading.

Rebecca: (24:18)

Lovely. Now you have been reading poems aloud throughout both lockdowns, and I believe they're all learned by heart. Do you find that this memorizing improves your mental wellbeing and having access to such a large selection of poetry wherever you go? Do you find that comforting?

Gyles Brandreth: (24:35)

Yes, I'm a believer in learning poetry by heart. I think it's important for a variety of reasons. I've done some research into this. I went to Cambridge University and met a marvelous woman. They were called Professor Goswami, who was doing work on babies and their brains and their reception of language. And she discovered through measuring brain waves literally, that babies before they're born, if you speak rhythmical poetry to them, these babies will learn themselves to speak sooner and better than if you didn't. They'll learn to read sooner on, even to write sooner and better. Speaking poetry, rhythmical poetry to unborn babies improves their facility with language, their language skills. On the other end of the spectrum. I also learned from this remarkable Professor Goswami that for older people, learning poetry by heart keeps your synapses all juiced up. You know the brain well, what is it? It's nothing but a muscle, and if you don't use it, you lose it. Part of the brain that looks after memory is called the hippocampus. And in your seventies you have as many new cells growing in your hippocampus- in your seventies when you do when you're 17, so it's not a function of age being able to memorize things. So it's good. It's good for you. It's good for babies. It's good for old people. It's good for you. Also, it's good for you because it engages the brain. This is why- I love watching TV. I love watching movies, particularly. I love going to the cinema. I love listening to the radio, but reading is different. You have to engage the eye and the mind, and learning by heart is different still, you really are making things work inside your head, and so it's both therapeutic, and it's good and it's soothing and it's easy to do. Learning poetry by heart is easier, I illustrated. I would do it now with you. Anybody can learn. Anybody in the world could learn two lines of poetry a day. We will now do it. There once was a man from Peru. Please repeat after me. There once was a man from Peru.

Rebecca: (26:50)

There once was a man from Peru,

Gyles Brandreth: (26:51)

Who's limericks stopped at line two.

Rebecca: (26:53)

Who's limericks stopped at line two.

Gyles Brandreth: (26:56)

That's the entire poem. Now, the point is that what it is, we have now learned that poem. It's only two lines long. There once was a man from Peru whose limerick stopped at line two, of course, it's ridiculous. But the point is, you can learn to lines very quickly. Even two difficult lines you would learn in a day. You repeat them to yourself, often enough. Do them in the shower. Do them as you're doing the washing up. You know, do them as you're walking around. Learn two lines today and then another two lines tomorrow and then build up and gradually, within a week, you could have learned a sonnet. The satisfaction of having in the rattle bag of your mind a sonnet by Elizabeth Browning or by William Shakespeare or whoever it may be, there's nothing more satisfying. So, I do try to learn poems by heart and I've loved doing it. In fact, I produced an anthology this year called *Dancing by the Light of*

the Moon. It's called that because, of course, it's a- it's a reference to one of my favorite childhood poems and yours, which is the owl and the pussycat went to sea, isn't it? Yes, yeah, of course.

Rebecca: (28:07)

in a beautiful pea green boat.

Gyles Brandreth: (28:09)

Yeah, they took some

Rebecca: (28:12)

Honey...money.

Gyles Brandreth: (28:09)

And plenty of money wrapped up in a five pound note. Now you're getting it. The point is it's in your head, you learned into the baby and it's still there, and *Dancing by the Light of the Moon* is a phrase in that, and I call the book that, and it's a It's a big fat book. Hundreds of pages, 300 poems. They're all poems to learn by heart, and they're short poems, silly poems, long poems, sad poems, happy poems. There's a poem for every day of the year. What I'd be doing in lockdown. I used to wear these funny jumpers, colorful jumpers on TV in the 1970s and 1980s. I gave them up when I became a member of Parliament, but somebody- I'm on Twitter @GylesB1 and on Instagram. But it's good on that as they ought to be. But anyway, Instagram @Gylesbrandreth, and I put- somebody tweeted me and said, desperate times call for desperate measures, put on a funny jumper. So I put on a funny jumper. I can't just, you know, appear on Twitter like some goon wearing a funny jumper, I've got to do something. So I thought, I will put on a nice jumper and I'll recite a poem. And because I haven't worked out how to change the settings on my Twitter account, I can only do poems that last up to 45 seconds. So when I do a sonnet, people say, oh you did that Shakespeare sonnet so quickly. They said it works brilliantly. When it's done at speed, it's because I've got to get it done in 45 seconds. So there, if you want a quick read because most people are doing a sonnet, you know, you hear great actors like Simon Russell Beale doing so they take two or three minutes over they're looking every word. But, you know, I'm shall I compare thee to a summer's day. So I- but I do you know So I but I do, you know, whether it's Roger McGough, Michael Rosen, Spike Milligan, Insta poets or indeed the greats, whether it's Robert Graves, whether it's Keats, Shelley, Shakespeare, I do a different poem every day and I love doing it. It's therapy for me. And I had a project this year and encouraged you in fact to take part in it. Rebecca, you must choose a 45 second poem. This is the price of me being on your podcast.

Rebecca: (30:28)

I have one. I have a poem I memorized when I was eight years old that has stuck with me forever. It's fantastic.

Gyles Brandreth: (30:36)

Would you recited to us now?

Rebecca: (30:38)

I can do. Sadly, I cannot remember who it is by. It is in one of my many poetry books. But it's called Death of a Fly. Death of a Fly. It goes like this:

(The Death of a Fly by Steve Turner)

Fly see saucer
fly fly down
me see fly fly
fly walk round

fly take big sip
me take spoon
fly look wrong way
spoon go BOOM

cup go wobble
tea go splat
fly get big fright
fly got flat

fly not fly now
fly not sip
fly just flied on final trip

Gyles Brandreth: (31:10)

That is a joy. Would you please type that up and send it to me by email. And I will be doing it on the day the podcast goes out. I will be doing it on if I may, on Twitter.

Rebecca: (31:24)

Of course it's a fabulous poem

Gyles Brandreth: (31:26)

And I'll dedicate it to the Bibliotherapy podcast. So I do recommend to people and I'm going to do it when our time is up. I'm going to end by reading you one of my favorite poems and it's one that I am meaning to learn. I haven't yet learnt- I have learnt a lot of poems this year. The challenge is to keep them in your head. That's the real challenge. Occasionally I've done a poem that's gone a bit viral. I did one that I loved by Emily Dickinson earlier in the year. You know this one, if I can stop one heart from breaking? If can stop one heart from breaking. I shall not live in vain if I can ease one life, the aching or cool, one pain or help one fainting Robin unto his nest again. I shall not live in vain. Emily Dickinson is one of my favorites. Now, that's a lovely short poem. Read that before you go to sleep. And but I mean, I do something every night. My father, bless him, was a man of faith. And he always used to say his prayers every night. He was born a long time ago, 1910. He's been dead a long time, but I can still picture him every night. He would in his pajamas, he'd kneel by his bed with his hands folded and he would say his prayers. And I think of him every night as I get into bed. I don't say my prayers, but I always count my blessings. And I love doing that, and I usually start with people, some days I start with the cat and I often start with a cat and given it's the neighbor's cat I feel I've got to count my blessings in case it decides to go away. And then I sometimes and often include food and things. But I always make a point of including an author of some kind in counting my blessings. And I find that Emily Dickinson is one of the blessings that I count. Do you count your blessings?

Rebecca: (33:20)

Sometimes. Yes, frequently it's that my coat didn't let all the rain in.

Gyles Brandreth: (33:25)

Very good. Just before I go. Have you asked all your questions?

Rebecca: (33:30)

Yes, plenty. You've given me a most wonderful, wonderful-

Gyles Brandreth: (33:33)

Before you go, because listeners, we've heard a lot from me. We haven't heard enough from you. Where's your favorite place for reading a book?

Rebecca: (33:43)

Oh, I, I do enjoy reading a book. I have one of those chairs that shaped like a bowl with a big cushion and that's excellent because you can probably curl up in front of the log fire in that and, and get really cozy to read a book.

Gyles Brandreth: (33:55)

We've discovered your favorite therapy author is P.G. Wodehouse, who is your favorite great novelist?

Rebecca: (34:03)

Tolkien. I read Lord of the Rings, I think when I was five, I was mildly precocious and it stuck with me ever since.

Gyles Brandreth: (34:13)

Goodness okay, that's that's well we have to accept that. And your favorite poet?

Rebecca: (34:18)

Oh, now that's that's a tricky one, Gyles. Oh, I do love my poetry. It would probably have to be John Donne.

Gyles Brandreth: (34:26)

Oh, of course it has to be John Donne. You'll find plenty of John Donne in my *Dancing by the Light of the Moon*. I love John Donne. Also his amusing short poem when his marriage failed, you know, "John Donne, Anne Donne, Undone". I just love that I love all those people of that generation, he's the same sort of errors. Andrew Marvell, isn't he? I love those. The metaphysical poets. What was your degree in?

Rebecca: (34:52)

My first degree was in English Literature and Creative Writing at Royal Holloway.

Gyles Brandreth: (34:56)

At Royal Holloway? My wife did her Shakespeare studies at Royal Holloway. That's out in the countryside somewhere. Isn't that?

Rebecca: (35:05)

It is. It's in Egham.

Gyles Brandreth: (35:07)

The founder has got a statue of his wife in the middle of the courtyard. Quite right, too. I hope people don't pull down the statue thinking he was patronising of him to put it up because he meant well. So keep the statue up there. Whatever they find out about her. Keep that statue up there. It's beautiful. Beautiful. Well, look, it's been lovely being with you.

Rebecca: (35:25)

It's been lovely to have you.

Gyles Brandreth: (35:27)

I'm going to end by with a poem, if I may? And it's a poem by a writer, an Irish poet called Derek Mahon, who was born in 1941, and he died this year. But I read this poem of his on Instagram and Twitter, and it sort of went viral because it clearly spoke to people in 2020. And this is one of the ways that bibliotherapy works. This is a therapeutic poem because it doesn't avoid the truth. It helps us live with the truth.

(Everything is Going to be All Right)

How should I not be glad to contemplate
the clouds clearing beyond the dormer window
and a high tide reflected on the ceiling?

There will be dying, there will be dying,
but there is no need to go into that.
The poems flow from the hand unbidden
and the hidden source is the watchful heart.
The sun rises in spite of everything
and the far cities are beautiful and bright.
I lie here in a riot of sunlight
watching the day break and the clouds flying.
Everything is going to be all right.

Rebecca: (36:52)

It's wonderful. It's fantastic. I'm going to put all of the poems, the poets, the authors, the books you've mentioned in the show notes along with everywhere people can find you on Twitter. I follow you, I love your poems and your jumpers. And so all our listeners can hopefully listen to the podcast and then go and read everything that has been suggested for their improved wellbeing.

Gyles Brandreth: (37:15)

And I would like you, Rebecca, to email me with that poem, okay?

Rebecca: (37:26)

And I will try to find the book the poem comes from so I can give the author good credit.

I found it, it's a poet called Steve Turner and it's from a collection called 'The Day I fell Down the Toilet'.

Gyles Brandreth: (37:35)

That would be nice, to give credit where it is due. Because that is very important. Particularly those of us authors who are dependent on public lending right, which we value. You say you're going to go into publishing and that you've done creative writing, have you- are you a published poet or novelist yourself?

Rebecca: (37:51)

I am not, I am not.

Gyles Brandreth: (37:57)

But we're working on that are we?

Rebecca: (37:58)

Well I'd like to go in more on the other side. The getting other people's works out there, to speak to people. My own writing, I've done some short stories here and there but nothing-

Gyles Brandreth: (38:13)

You don't need to rush. Many of the best writers- I'm keeping the best till last. I'm not peaking for another ten of fifteen years, so you know, you've just got to keep going. There was a very successful novelist, I think called Mary Wesley who I knew, who published her first novel when she was seventy and it was hugely successful so I wouldn't worry about that. Pace yourself. Meanwhile, thank you if you're going to be a publisher. I know a lot of publishers. It's a hard grind and they don't pay them very much. Now, you don't even get to go to the office, you do it all from home. It's a lonely, thankless life that you've got for yourself so don't give up the day job too soon, keep writing. And discover Jilly Cooper. It's a guilty pleasure, but I can assure you there is pleasure involved. Okay, that's it. That's it from us, over and out. Lovely speaking to you and thank you for this.

Rebecca: (39:09)

Thank you very much. And sadly for us that is the end of a fantastic interview with the lovely Gyles Brandreth. I will be back next week with another Shelf Healing interview. Thanks, as always, to Nicholas Patrick for our music, and to Lukas Montgomery for our transcriptions. And a big shout out to Lisa Dalton who runs the Shelf Healing twitter account. Everyone go follow it, its fabulous. See you next week. Bye.

Books and authors mentioned in the podcast:

Authors:

Aphra Behn

Philip Larkin

Bertrand Russell

Rupert Everett

Oscar Wilde

Professor Anthony Clare

Gyles Brandreth

T S Eliot

Mae West

Dorothy Parker

Emily Dickinson

Virginia Woolf

Anne Olivier Bell

Mary Tourtel

AA Milne

Christopher Robin Milne

JM Barrie

Anton Chekov
Arnold Bennett
Jane Austen
George Eliot
Charles Dickens
PG Wodehouse
Ben Schott
Evelyn Waugh
Frank Richards
Terry Pratchett
Iain Banks
Enid Blyton
Jilly Cooper
Mark Twain
Professor Usha Goswami
Elizabeth Browning
William Shakespeare
Roger McGough
Michael Rosen
Spike Milligan
Robert Graves
John Keats
Percy Bysshe Shelley
Steve Turner
John Donne
Andrew Marvell
Derek Mahon
Mary Wesley

Books:

This Be The Verse by Philip Larkin
To the End of the World: Travels with Oscar by Rupert Everett
The 7 Secrets of Happiness by Gyles Brandreth
The Waves by Virginia Woolf
Mrs Dalloway by Virginia Woolf
The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde
A Moment's Liberty: Shorter Diary of Virginia Woolf by Virginia Woolf, ed Anne Olivier Bell
Rupert Bear by Mary Tourtel
Winnie the Pooh by AA Milne
Peter Pan by JM Barrie
The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekov
The Old Wives Tale by Arnold Bennett
Anna of the Five Towns by Arnold Bennett
Jeeves and Wooster series by PG Wodehouse
Billy Bunter books by Frank Richards
Malory Towers books by Enid Blyton
Riders by Jilly Cooper
Tintin by Georges Remi

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The Death of a Fly by Steve Turner
The Owl and the Pussy-Cat by Edward Lear
If I can stop one heart from breaking by Emily Dickinson
Everything Is Going to Be All Right by Derek Mahon