

Character witness

Acclaimed novelist Rachel Crowther was a doctor for 20 years and has five children aged 11 to 26. After fitting in her writing between babies and medical exams, she did an MA in creative writing and published her first novel in 2011. The family spends term-time in Surrey, where Rachel's husband Richard Pleming teaches, and school holidays at their house in the Eden Valley. Rachel's latest novel, *Every Secret Thing*, is set in Patterdale

WORDS SUE ALLAN PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL RIGBY

I describe my style as grown-up women's fiction – a cross between literary and commercial fiction, very much character-led. Characters appear and have lives of their own seemingly independent of me.



getting your first novel published, seeing it as a real book. A highlight of promoting my second novel, *The Things You Do For Love*, was a reading in the library at Bourne End, my home village in Buckinghamshire, which was great fun.

There's a lot more to writing than people think. The creative bit is fun but there's also editing, proofreading, emailing and so on and with two children still at home I continue to juggle family life and work. I do more writing in Cumbria because I feel so much at home, having holidayed in Patterdale since I was a child.

My first novel, *The Partridge And The Pelican*, was published after I won a competition run by a publisher. Book groups chose the winner and on the strength of that, I got an agent. It was thrilling because I love book groups – all sorts of people enjoying books and picking them apart.

The new book has been two years in the pipeline and now I'm looking forward to giving readings at literature festivals. As my writing is very stop-start, I like having a few things on the go at once and am already stuck into three new novels.

There's nothing more exciting than

Flexibility is key to a work-life balance. Between writing, children, husband, animals, being a school governor and other things, I seem to lurch from crisis to crisis. I don't miss medicine even though working in public health also involved a lot of writing.

Because *Every Secret Thing* is set in a fictionalised Patterdale with choral music a big part of it, there's a Cumbrian launch at Patterdale Church and a concert to follow. Although I'd like to branch out into other genres, I think my next novel will be in a similar vein to *Every Secret Thing* and also set in Cumbria.

www.rachelcrowther.co.uk
Every Secret Thing is out on Thur Jun 29 (Bonnie Zaffré, £7.99). Its Cumbrian launch is at Patterdale Church on Wed July 26, 7pm, followed by a Jubilee Singers' concert at 8pm. Rachel is appearing at Mere Literary Festival and Thame Arts & Literature Festival, both in October.





Rachel Crowther with Barnabas and Bellatrix in Patterdale