

## **Q & A with McNaughton Books about *The English American*, a novel**

### **Did you know your entire life that you were adopted?**

My mother told me I was adopted as soon as I was old enough to ask where babies came from. I was about five and thought it was marvelous news. I knew my parents really wanted me because I had been chosen. I felt special. Unlike my poor non-adopted friends, who just *came*.

### **Were you hesitant to meet your birth parents? Why did you wait until you were 28?**

As my heroine Pippa says at the start of the novel, “I think everyone should be adopted. That way you can meet your birth parents when you’re old enough to cope with them” It’s a joke, but there’s truth in the second line. In other words, I couldn’t have done it any younger. I wasn’t ready. I needed to focus on the pesky task of growing up.

### **Do you have any regrets either way?**

I certainly don’t regret finding my birth parents any more than Pippa does. However, I do regret the fact that, at the time there weren’t the support groups and counselors available to people embarking on this momentous journey that are available to help people now. I feel so strongly about this, I’ve put an adoption support referral list on my website, to help any adopted people, birth parents or adoptive parents who may be affected by the adoption/reunion experience.

### **We get the sense that your adoption story had a happy ending, which is every birth parents hope for the child they give up. What can you tell us about your childhood and your educational background?**

I had a very happy, childhood. Because of my father’s work in international aid, we lived all around the world in Washington DC, the South of England, Abidjan in West Africa and Kenya in East Africa. It’s not every girl who gets to travel extensively and see giraffes and warthogs on her way to school!

### **How does one turn something so personal into a one woman comedy show?**

Soon after I met my birth mother I stood up on stage at a comedy club in New York City and, in my very British accent, said “Hallo. My name is Alison Larkin and I come from Bald Mountain, Tennessee.” I’d been a playwright and an actress in England and stand-up came naturally to me as it felt like writing and performing a very short, funny play. I loved the fact that, in stand-up, you could change what you were saying every night. I loved being free to improvise with the audience and say whatever came into my head while I’m on stage - (something you’d better not do if you’re acting in someone else’s

play) - and I loved the fact that in stand-up you can say *anything* – as long as you can find a way to make it funny.

When people found out that I was actually telling the truth about what brought me to America, they'd ask 'what was it like meeting your 'real' parents?' And "Why would someone from a happy adoptive family want to *do* something like that?" My one woman show, which combines stand-up comedy and theatre, was my answer to both these questions – as well as an excuse to crack lots of jokes about England and America. That's how – and why – I wrote my one woman show.

**How has your sense of humor helped you through all the revelations of being adopted and then with meeting your birth parents?**

I rely on my sense of humor as much as I rely on my right arm and my eyesight. When you can laugh in the midst of even the most painful of situations, it releases something. It helps you through.

**We know that you graduated from London University. What was your major and what degree did you obtain? At what age did you recognize that you had talents as a writer/comedian/actor?**

I gained a BA Hons in England and Drama from Royal Holloway College, London University. Then I trained as a classical actress at the Webber-Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. I was there at the same time as Julia Ormond and Hugh Bonneville. Angela Lansbury also went there, so did Prunella Scales (who played Sybil in *Fawlty Towers*.)

I've written and performed ever since I can remember. When I was seven I performed *My Fair Lady* in a drafty bathroom in Yorkshire one wet summer holiday afternoon for my parents and their friends. (We were in the bathroom because the farmhouse didn't have central heating and it was the warmest room in the house.) This memory – altered to make it fit the story – made it into the book.

**Do you have an ongoing relationship with your birth parents? Do you have siblings? Did you seek out your birth parents or did they find you?**

I sought out my birth parents because I wanted to reassure them that I'd had a happy life and because I had questions about myself and my origins that only they could answer. Thankfully they were open to contact and 100% available when I needed them to be.

While I remain in occasional contact with my birth parents, I'm on the phone to Mum and Dad in England all the time, and continue to think of my sprawling adoptive family as my family. We just got back from a lovely month in France with them actually. As soon as I'm done answering your questions I've got to call Mum. She makes the best stew known to man and I need her recipe.

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**What life lessons does your protagonist, Pippa, share through this book?**

As her dying Southern Grandfather in the book says “Welcome the difficulties, ‘cos it’s them you learn from.”

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**What’s next for Alison Larkin? Another book? Another play?**

Pippa has more to say. I feel a sequel to *The English American* coming on.

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