



## Questions for: Geoff Duffield

**News - Interviews** Tuesday, 30th June 2020

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*The book marketer and photographer, a judge for this year's Wainwright Prize, contributes to our Q&A series*



### ***Describe your current job***

Reading the 13 longlisted titles for the Wainwright Prize 2020, working on the board of Essex Wildlife Trust, and preparing for the launch of my new photography brand, The National Photographer.

### ***What was your first job in the book industry?***

Forty years ago this month, I began my first permanent job as a bookshop assistant at the Penguin Bookshop in Covent Garden, under the management of Gisela Schwermer.

### ***Who has been the most influential person in your career?***

Kaye Webb, founder of the Puffin Club. I grew up in a house with few books, and no culture of reading. The Puffin Club changed this and fostered in me a lifelong passion for reading and books, and led me into reading Penguin's adult list in my teens. It was no coincidence that my first job in publishing was with Penguin Books, which in turn led me to meet the woman I married. It made me very happy to meet Kaye in the Eighties, to tell her this story. I've also had so many wonderful publishing colleagues over four decades.

### ***How has the industry changed since your first job?***

When I started my first job in 1980, there was no internet, and retail price maintenance was applied to books (the Net Book Agreement), so there was no discounting. Instead of Amazon's dominance, there was WH Smith. Waterstones was still two years away from opening its first branch. The large publishers were more powerful than the retailers. There was little objective measurement of the key data, and book "sales" were those that were invoiced from the warehouse, rather than those sold to readers. It was almost impossible to get hold of colleagues on Friday afternoons. The quality of new starters coming into the industry now is light years ahead of what it once was.

### ***What's the biggest challenge in your job?***

I honestly don't feel like any of it is a challenge... I love it all!



***What's the best piece of book-related advice you've ever been given?***

Read everything, don't specialise. There are ideas everywhere, and these will be your currency throughout your career.

***What are the most interesting things you're seeing at the moment in the industry?***

The generation of which I am part moving on, and the new generation of publishing heads moving into the senior roles. It will be fascinating to see how the younger Generation X, and the older Millennials, re-shape the industry.

***What do you think might be the next big thing?***

I hope that it is giving true momentum to the as-yet unrealised move to true diversity in the industry.

***How are you coping with working from a home environment?***

I miss meeting people in person, and the informality of chatting, and hearing about their lives, but some of the Zoom meetings I've had have been very democratic and productive.

***How do you think the industry will come out of this current Covid-19 crisis?***

With a lower cost base, and a renewed sense of purpose. Costs are going to need to be reduced, because the industry will be smaller for a few years, and the crisis has already enforced savings on areas such as international trips and entertaining. On the other hand, the crisis will generate new ideas, both in terms of books published and ways of working. I'm also hoping that small, specialist publishers will survive, and that more people will seek out their local independent bookshops.

***What do you most like doing when you're not working?***

Sitting around a table with friends or family, eating amazing food, in the garden, after a morning playing tennis.

And being on a tropical beach.

***What is the best book you've read in the last year?***

I came to it very late... *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. It's definitely in my top 10 of all time.

***What are you reading now?***

I'm in the thick of the reading for the Wainwright Prize. I'm reading the longlist randomly, and at the moment I'm enjoying *The Frayed Atlantic Edge* by David Gange. He's an historian and nature writer who kayaked the length of Britain and Ireland along the Atlantic Coast. I'm five books into the 13, and so far they have been consistently excellent.

I'm also reading the entire list of the Inspector Maigret reissues (Penguin), and am on the 52nd of 75.

***How do you like to read?***

I definitely prefer to read the physical object. Even though it is a mass-produced product, the sight, feel and smell of a new book remains one of life's joys.

**Geoff Duffield has held senior marketing positions at companies including HarperCollins, Orion and Pan Macmillan. The shortlist for the Wainwright Prize will be announced on 30 July.**

Source article: <https://www.bookbrunch.co.uk/page/article-detail/questions-for-geoff-duffield>