

Each month we will focus on an inspiring author based in or writing about Wales! You'll have an introduction to their latest book, what inspires them to write, and any advice they have for young writers!

Get to know

John Sam Jones



After working in ministry, education and public health for more than thirty years, John Sam Jones lives in semi-retirement with his husband and two Welsh Collies in a small German village a stone's throw from the Dutch border. John realised he was gay as a teenager at the beginning of the 1970s and quickly came to understand that his life would be lived always on the edge – between truth and lies, rejection and ridicule, self doubt and a search for acceptance. He ultimately chose to negotiate a route through life where honesty and integrity, in an often toxically homophobic society, were not always appreciated. In 2001 he became the first co-chair of the LGB Forum Cymru (which was later renamed Stonewall Cymru), set up to advise the Welsh Government on LGB issues.

He studied creative writing at Chester. His collection of short stories - *Welsh Boys Too* - was an Honour Book winner in the American Library Association Stonewall Book Awards. His second collection, *Fishboys of Vernazza*, was short-listed for Wales Book of the Year and was followed by the novels *With Angels and Furies* and *Crawling Through Thorns*.



Summary:

In this clear and absorbing memoir John Sam Jones writes of a life lived on the edge. It is a story of journeys and realisation, of acceptance and joy. From a boyhood on the coast of Wales to a scholarship at Berkley in California as the AIDS epidemic began to take hold, before returning to Liverpool and North Wales to work in community engagement. A journey of development began as a writer and chronicler of his experiences, with award-winning books and the desire to become a campaigner for LGBT rights in Wales. The adventure of running a guest house in Barmouth where he eventually became Mayor with his husband, a German academic, who he married after a long partnership. Three weeks after the European Referendum, they put the business on the market and moved to Germany. John is still on that journey.

The *Journey is Home* will be simultaneously published by Parthian in Welsh, *Y Daith Ydi Adra*.

Tell us a little about your memoir 'The Journey is Home' ...

Moving to live in a new country at the age of 62 led me to reflect a great deal on the life that had been lived and my understanding of 'home'. The memoir itself is a journey – along the pathways of 'roots and belonging', 'faith', 'sexuality', 'relationship' – and even 'electricity'! The subtitle of the memoir sums it up, really ... notes/reflections from a life on the edge: as a gay man of my generation I often felt that I lived on the edge of unacceptability and ostracism, the edge of faithfulness, the edge of sanity, the edge of society ...

What do you hope readers will take away from the memoir?

The invitation to see the world through a different tint in the glass of their spectacles ... and perhaps to adopt this tactic in their daily life because there are always so many different ways to experience the life events that wash over us.

What books inspired you as a young reader?

I struggled with reading as a child and a teenager and didn't really discover reading books for pleasure until I went to university, by which time I was grappling with my identity as a gay man. I remember, aged eighteen or nineteen, being totally inspired reading James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and discovering gay-themed literature - the work of people like David Leavitt, Alan Hollinghurst and Michael Cunningham. Later the writing of Elie Wisel, Henri Nouwen, Dorothee Soelle, Viktor Frankl and Carol Christ had a profound influence on me.