Writing For Younger Readers with Steven Camden (Polar Bear)

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**SPEAKERS**

Steven Camden, Nelima Begum

**Nelima Begum**

Welcome to the Being A Writer podcast, Steven, how you doing?

**Steven Camden**

I'm alright thank you very much. Thanks for having me.

**Nelima Begum**

No problem. It's a pleasure. So today we're talking about wrting for younger readers, and you are perfect for this. So let's start right at the beginning. Take me back so when you were a younger reader, what kind of books did you enjoy getting lost in?

**Steven Camden**

Okay, I can't believe how many like disappoint you like right off the bat. I'm not sure that I - ok in primary school, when I was little, I kind of read voraciously, but my mum was a teacher, and she would, there'll be books around from us from school and stuff and I kind of divide everything I'd go to my grandparents' house and it had about four books in my nan's house, and I would just read and read and read, reread those and absolutely loved it. But, um, and in secondary school, it just wasn't the case at all and I'm sure that's kind of true of a lot of people and sounds almost kind of cliche with it but um, it was partly because there weren't that many books at home, but there were a lot of those it was a lot more kind of vocal, and there were lots of stories and people talking all the time and sharing stories but no one was, you know, people weren't sitting around reading, it was very functional, so it was very communal and gorgeous but there weren't it wasn't like there was the inspiration or the means at home and like at school. It just didn't happen, it was, you know, I was convinced I was going to be a footballer. And so it wasn't until, like sixth form with that things really kind of started changing. I mean I remember going on you know when you go on holiday with a friend. Yeah, but when I'm going to Butlins with, with a friend of mine, and that horrible thing happened while I was there with him and his family and on the first day we fell out. And so like he went off to do all the activities on the second day and I'm looking I'm staying there, and I stayed in the room and anyway, in the drawer between the two single beds, I found a copy of Misery, by Stephen King., I was like 13 years old, and I read Misery, and it was awful. It was incredible. It was terrifying, but it was, it was so it fully kind of got me in and that felt like the first quote unquote adult book that I kind of read, you know, and there were there were bits there was like Judy Blume stuff, you know, Hello God, It's Me Margaret. And, yeah, um, and it was, there was a book called, I can't remember the name of the author, I found a book called Diary of a Teenage Health Freak. And it was kind of like it was just a more interesting role to me, it was just a it was a diary of this teenage boy called Pete, and he got passed around between a couple of people I knew, and I remember that being important but, and they were always comics, and they're always kind of graphic novels stuff, you know Frank Milery things and Watchmen or anything, but it wasn't until, it wasn't until sixth form and kind of my, my first proper girlfriend that I really began reading, and that was, you know, as lame as it sounds, it was kind of to make her think that I was cleverer than I was, like she was, she was reading she was reading stuff, and I was like, right, and I saw a book she was reading The Outsiders, S.E. Hinton and so I read that and I was like, hold on, this is incredible and then she started basically feeding me books.

**Nelima Begum**

What a great relationship!

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, I mean it was, it was really kind of seminal, it was just such an important time for everyone. I guess it was a big shift in my life because I, what I realised was up until that point I just hadn't really, I was in groups of friends but I hadn't really felt at ease, you know, anywhere, my friends, or, you know, the people I was kind of running around with they were there, a lot of their kind of families and heritage were very different to mine. Oh, it's always felt like home is a very different place for me to them so I just didn't like boys, if I'm honest, it just wasn't, it didn't, it didn't fit I didn't feel like I was relaxed I didn't like being associated with them and so when I got to sixth form and kind of met this girl, and we started talking and kind of getting out and I realised, hold on. Here's someone who's cool, I couldn't be myself with who's into stuff. I never really went back and it's why to this day. Very, very, very rarely see me in, you know, with more than two males. It just it just doesn't it's not that though, it given a choice, I felt like I'd found something. And I was just I just I am. Yeah, I didn't. So it was it was, in answer to the question sorry rambling but it's um, it was there wasn't there wasn't there weren't many, there was one that we just bumped it was it was sixth form, so you know that still counts as young but it is to me you know, I remember, someone gave me One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest and oh my god, and then read in Jazz by Toni Morrison and oh my god, it's like, it just felt like she was just, yeah, it felt like school, but an amazing kind of school you know and then I find I go off and find books that she hadn't read and kind of and then that just became what we did, you know,

**Nelima Begum**

It was just a really nice exchange between the two of you to go off and talk about different books and get really excited about reading.

**Steven Camden**

Completely, and like just a license from this person who was the coolest person I've ever met at this point going alright this, yeah, this is who you can be. And it being super convenient - I'm being quite grandiose but if genuinely felt like that at the time.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that. And I love how you mentioned that your beginning, so your roots were in, you know like, oral storytelling and just keeping that tradition of stuff like physical storytelling, up and running in your family and in your household. So you are obviously a renowned spoken word artist and poet as well. Do you remember the first poem that you read and the first poem that you wrote?

**Steven Camden**

Right, I don't remember the first time that I read, I don't remember reading many poems. I remember poems being on, short poems being on the walls for a little bit like I remember there was Claude McKay poem is one like, How Do We Live, it's called quite a famous kind of call to arms kind of play from the early 20th century like kind of Harlem renaissance times and like, but what they weren't, they weren't there were no books, books or poetry at home, growing up, but, but music and poetry like you might, you know, things like, I guess - like McQuay Johnson, and then music and poems and I would discuss the lyrics and a member might remember listening to Buffalo Soldier with my Nan and me loving the song, and then one day her explaining what it meant and what it was about. It kind of blew my mind and me changing my perception of what lyrics and music were and then it wasn't. They weren't just instruments to where there could be messages in music I hadn't really considered that point you know like a seven, eight year old so I started listening to music and lyrics and music, and so yeah, it wasn't it, wasn't, it wasn't reed, it wasn't a read thing and not because anyone was anti it, it just you know it was, it just wasn't what was done whereas speaking stuff and songs and that was just all a daily, a daily kind of practice in terms of writing stuff, I remember writing little things that primary school limericks and yeah but but it wasn't until again. It wasn't until that first girlfriend when I first, you know, started trying to write anything really to share. Yeah and writing, you know, writing stories or poems for her. So that's when I kind of started again it was kind of sixth form which, there wasn't my school, bless it, my score was pretty bad in terms of arts provision or anything it was, it was all very much they were kind of like the joke lessons, you know, I mean, there wasn't there wasn't there wasn't any -

**Nelima Begum**

- That's quite common, though...

**Steven Camden**

Yeah sure. Yeah, I don't remember any creative writing, I remember in an exam, once in an English exam there been a question about being you've been asked to write a short story or introduction of a story and it blew my mind because we hadn't done it in class, and I got so excited. And it was like, I genuinely enjoyed that you know that they had to pull them a pen out my hand at the end of the exam because I was like, this story just came to me and it was like, oh my god, this is the thing, and that was, that was like in GCSE time so it's like before then. Yeah, it just wasn't really a thing like I say, I'm sure it was in primary school. The secondary school was just, It was such a kind of compartmentalize thing it was. Yeah, it was, it was a very different environment.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, I agree with that just because when I was doing my GCSEs, I remember, we weren't really exposed to poetry until we had to study it for GCSE so until the exam, it was never a thing to sit in class and read poetry.

**Steven Camden**

Completely! And you know, and with the utmost respect to, you know, quote unquote the classics or whatever else, you know, there's all just a million miles away, wasn't it, it's like I'm sure, analysing it now it's just like... And I don't mean to I don't even like being disparaging about stuff and I but it all felt like rich, old white kids who went to the country in during war time or it felt like. And I know that's reductive but I mean, it was true at the time it was, the kind of response was what's like what is this, and, and because maybe if it had been taught in a way where the person teaching it would have been so into it. I always hear people talk, stories about having these those that are made that one amazing teacher or that I never had I never had that. And I'm not sure why that was because I didn't look always into or responsive so no one kind of saw a possibility of me or something but I never had. I never encountered a teacher particularly not in, in English that that was really into something that slid me the Count of Monte Cristo or something you know what I mean so it's like it always felt like it wasn't for from me or somebody from a heritage or background that I was from, or even just a place I was from, you know...

**Nelima Begum**

I agree, and I think we've definitely come a very long way now but back then, as you say, it was quite a common feeling to feel very far removed from the things that were being taught in class.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, did you feel that too, is that something that makes sense? It does.

**Nelima Begum**

I didn't really start reading widely properly until I was in university. So, yeah, for GCSEs and things - it was reading things like the classics.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, yeah, some of these things come you know they can they can they can, they can speak to you in like completely unexpected in really profound ways. But I think, because, at the same time, you're, you're forming or trying to form up who you are. Yeah, I just remember going right, you just been such a big thing for me that was like right. Yeah, people look at me and you know I've got, I've got blue eyes, and kind of kind of fair skinned so people meet me and don't have no idea or or perception of my kind of heritage and what kind of upbringing, kind of where I'm from it so it was always very much. I always felt like I was somebody very different outside and someone very different inside the house. Yeah, so there was that thing of, and I think everything fit into that in terms of choices so I just felt like I was pretending a lot, you know, and like I didn't encounter something that made me think I didn't have to pretend until, like you say, yeah, like sixth form and even uni properly, because then I started becoming aware that not only was there cool stuff, there was cool stuff that spoke to was from, and generated by people that I felt a connection to, you know.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah. Brilliant. So what inspired you to begin writing for a younger audience, because you've done your fair share.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, I guess, to be fair, it was never a plan, and I'm like, spoken word stuff was never a plan, I'd been writing stories and writing letters and trying to write bits, you know, for people and to share, basically to communicate how I felt because speaking always ended up getting becoming rambley as I'm as this is a testament to what it felt like a chance to try and be more kind of concise in some way, but um, it just these things just kind of happened and it just so happened that the stories that were coming out, or for, or kind of was set or based around times or moments or characters that were teenage, because it was and whether that was me kind of taking stock or whether that was me trying to figure out things or just, you know nostalgia bits of all of that, but it just started happening. And so it wasn't like I ever consciously went right, I am now writing for younger people. And so when and maybe very early on in the process I was going into schools and kind of leading sessions or getting trying to get people to kind of make stuff up as well and it was just kind of realized that this just feels right, it feels right because the stories that are coming out are centering around teenage ideas and feelings that I'm that I don't even feel like I'm looking back, it's just the same stuff it's I just feel the same, so it's, it's just what's coming out of my head, because it says that at some point you will just feel wrong, they'll just be like, 'what are you doing, write for grownups now', and I'm like, I don't know what that means really though really. Exactly, Maybe that will, maybe that happens but I'm very fortunate in the sense that I'm, because I wasn't a plan that I wasn't burdened with any of the kind of maybe the pressures of what you should and shouldn't do. And that's kind of basically how I was. Yeah, and I get to, and I'm fortunate enough that I've made, made some stuff that people thought was all right, and gave me an opportunity to make more stuff but I've always kind of lived in a sense of, I don't really pay too much attention, too much beyond, who I'm collaborating with or in dialogue with about generating the story. And what's exciting to me.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, so when you're in the process of drafting, what do you draw on for ideas - like are you informed by anything you read, saw or listened to while you were growing up?

**Steven Camden**

Yeah of course. Yeah definitely, it's all that it's all homage, you know, it's all homage and celebration to what we know what I'm from and who I'm from where I'm from. And yeah tonally definitely, I mean, it's, you know, I've just think about what the answer to the last one, maybe that's a little bit untrue now and since, the more I do it the more aware I am of what I'm doing, you know, so the more consciously I am skewing or thinking about what I'm saying or what I'm imbuing things with in relation to younger people and younger readers or listeners or whatever so it's all kind of fitting in. Tone becomes really important like what I don't always know where I'm going. Yeah and I start a story or something but I always have a sense of a feeling that I want it to feel like, which, and that, that can mean in terms of, I guess, yeah that's that's a, that's a mood, that's sounds, but then a pot of influence starts becoming more and more literal and clear like certain tracks like always make soundtracks, not only for stories or writing processes but for individual characters, films of implements, you knows folders and pots I fill up notebooks I never write in notebooks, these days really, but, but in notebooks, I, I scribble influences and memories and things that are like, not the actual, you know, text or the actual prose it's, it's just little shards of bits or songs or recipes or references. So I end up building these parts and scrapbook areas is where I kind of think about it you just begin building this scrapbook of stuff so it all feeds in and, luckily, the pride I have for kind of where I'm from and who I'm from is like it, it's exponentially growing it has been it has been kind of episode that's useful, and it's so lucky, because I was such a rich also fortunate to rich and kind of mixed kind of upbringing, the source material. I'm pretty sure it will outlive me, in a sense of how much I could possibly, you know mine from it you know I mean so...

**Nelima Begum**

it's brilliant that you kind of start off with the skeletons of characters and stories and then use the scrapbooks just flesh them out and develop them even further, I think it's a fantastic way of doing it.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, completely I very much like it. It doesn't feel like straight lines for me, I'm sure you could break it down to, you know, many many many straight lines and different directions but you feel it, they feel like to me like the explosions which happened in all directions at once. Yeah, and it's like it's, sometimes it feels messy sometimes it feels like kind of scattered on like you don't know what's going on but it all feels like you're it's all beneficial it's all part of the world building. So everything is perfect, you know, if I if I'm struggling with like a passage a description is something where I'm trying to write some action and it's just not going to work in, I write a conversation, or I'll make a, you know, I'll make a playlist in, in, in the mind of a character, I'll just keep, I'll make sure I'm always generating in some direction, sort of, when things do click and dump do kind of start to make sense. Everybody feels real and rich. So it's not, it's not about, you know, kind of creating people to serve a narrative, or at least it doesn't feel like that...

**Nelima Begum**

So not giving each one a purpose specifically.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, and just just just just having that angle, you can look at everyone from different angles and they still don't fall over. As a two dimensional cutout so yeah, so, and also it gives everybody the potential to basically do anything which I think is something I'm really, I'm becoming more and more conscious about enjoying and celebrating communicating through my work is just that potential, good and bad, you know.

**Nelima Begum**

Fantastic! So the market for YA readers is constantly changing. How do you keep up with the current trends as well as what younger audiences might generally want to read, is that something that influences your work in any way?

**Steven Camden**

My gut answer is that no, and also not not only no like, not really, no, like, like it doesn't make me feel good to think about the possibility of doing that for just for just for me, kind of, personally, but I'm sure it's all influences at the end of the day, like I say, we have two teenage boys. I am in schools - well I was - and I am becoming more again in schools and have lots of contact with teenagers. So I'm sure as most as you know it, things kind of bleed in in terms of what things around but in essence, I write about family, and I write about love, and I write about people out who people try to figure out what they want to do. You know and so anything that changes so details or context or technologies or eras, come into play. But, you know even like things like issues, and you know, in that. I understand that people kind of read things and go. It's a book about this, or it's a book about that. But I always think, I don't ever start something, thinking about an issue. Yeah, but you know I think about people in the kind of issue, I hopefully my books are about more than one thing. Do you know what I mean like they're -

**Steven Camden**

They're multifaceted for sure!

**Steven Camden**

Hopefully like and I think that there's something in the fact that, you know a lot of people will notice, you know more, the more I pay attention is that people a lot of people read like they watch TV or film or they go in, wanting a thing. Like I'm reading this because I felt like something thriller-y, I felt like, do you know what I mean later on you peruse Netflix or whatever, you know, I just want to laugh for. And like, I get that completely. But the thing of the difference with a book for me or my relationship towards book is I, the ones that I fall in love with are ones that aren't, what I was, I didn't know what was going to expect it's not like I went in expecting one thing and got another it's like, yeah, we don't, I don't know what this is, or and I get to choose. So somebody else might read it and think it's about grief. Somebody else might read it and think it's about, I don't know discovering a passion, and they're both right. But if it, if it's very tricky because you know things have...

**Nelima Begum**

They're layered and open to interpretation, and they mean something different to everyone.

**Steven Camden**

Hopefully yeah and it's very hard you know because you know we know that these things have to be packaged and they're being sold. So it's like people, people, there are people making decisions about how this book is presented to the world not just being a cover so I just stay out of all that because I didn't I didn't the losing my temper or getting really upset, because it's like, I, I want it I want you to feel like you're reading it and it's kind of up to you. Obviously these, hopefully there are options enough in it where it could be, there are options about what it's about but it's in essence it's about people finding things and other people that they love, so it's all, it's, it's hopefully there's, there is joyous and, and, sorry there's joy and there is potential and there is hope. That's what I want, I want my work to be celebrating of people, and their potential.

**Nelima Begum**

So on the topic of your work, your novels Tape and It's About Love explore some slightly difficult topics from the perspective of the young characters, and we watch them go through a process of almost finding themselves amidst the struggle. Does writing from that point of view have its moments of difficulty and how do you overcome the barriers?

**Steven Camden**

Okay, right, man. I guess yeah, I guess it kind of carries on what we were just saying in the sense that it, of course it has moments of difficulty, but every story does for me, in a sense of I am you, I don't think about it in terms of my burden of responsibility as such. I just like, or not at least I don't in terms of the outside reader or coming in. I think about it in terms of these characters being real and being driven and having, having the potential in them like I was saying so. Yeah, I find it, I find it hard, but I don't find it hard because of the issues as such. I find it hard because the clarity and nuance, can sometimes step on each other's toes. Yeah, when you when you're dancing with trying to communicate something and also, you know, you communicate and things through people. You're creating people that need to be real and need to be interesting. And then, but they also need to have the potential for more than one thing in them so you like. It's hard because you know just being a person is hard. If I'm creating people by extension of course it is, but uh yeah, I think ultimately, I think things. The world is messed up, and, and evil and mean enough, that those things will present themselves so it's not about -

**Nelima Begum**

- shielding as such...

**Steven Camden**

Yeah exactly so it's just like, right, these are real people. I'm meeting them. Well, sometimes, sometimes I start with an idea about what they're dealing with, other times I meet them and then we figure I figure it out as I'm going. But always, it's like, and I hear people hear people say this sounds so pretentious I guess but it genuinely, I feel like I'm not following. I feel like I'm being led. Yeah, so, you know, so like I find, I've I have a sense of where we're going, but I'm not in charge. Once I get them to feel real. It's like because, yeah, if they're real. I don't want to crack a whip and tell people what to do, do you I mean if these people are really interesting. I want to know.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, they're forging their own path and you're just going on the journey with them.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah I think so, You know and like you know certain times, they start lagging and I'm like come on, I have to step to the front and kind of stop pull people but in particularly, I think maybe particularly you're maybe this is not true but maybe particularly thinking about teenage characters. Do you know what I mean, it's so I was thinking this morning, it's just like, I don't, I went last night with our oldest to look at a Sixth Form College. Right. And it was crazy because it's like right. I was walking around thinking like I remember what it's like to be 16 - I was like no, no, I don't, I don't need to remember what it's like being 16, I am 16. Right, and like, that sounds creepy, but it's like it's like, it's not I am not, I am a different person in body I guess or shell, and I obviously have changed and I've grown hopefully over time but in terms of emotional response to a moment into a setting into a place, it's me, still me, so it's like, you know like, I want to. I don't know want to prescribe what somebody is or what somebody is about or what somebody wants more than they do.

**Steven Camden**

So Tape moves between two different timelines, what made you think to explore life for a young adult, in two different decades?

**Steven Camden**

I think because I felt like I was in two different decades, I mean, I did, for lots of reasons, I found that I was having conversations, I am at the time we had two young children, and there were lots of conversations with other parents and people about how much had changed and how different was for, you know, a 13 year old now and then when we were 13 and, and I couldn't fully rectify where I, what I agree with and why I didn't agree with that statement, and ended up thinking and kind of thinking that I believe that the world has changed. But in, what, what our emotions, and what our, what confusion is and what love is and what anger is, is, is still the same. You may have more technology and more pressure, or potentially or not, you know, there is the ultimate it's impossible to generalize because swhen we were 13 there were people who had it really hard and people had it easier, and there still are now, but it's fascinating to me to think about what started that book was was less about wanting to represent the two time periods, it was about the idea of influence, and how I found a tape, I found a cassette tape of myself, my teenage self rhyming, not only rhyming but rhyming to my future self, the most egotistical cassette.

**Nelima Begum**

Ahh that's so cool!

**Steven Camden**

And it was like 13 year old me rhyming to the 30 year old me it was a conceptual verse I was ahead of my time.

**Steven Camden**

Right, but it was like I was right. What if the 30 year old me found this tape in a box on the, on the in my mom's house when she was moving and go into a smaller house. What if I could say one thing to 30 year old me what would I say, not the conversation, not like, not like, what's the film it's a film, Frequency, it's called where a man tunes into radio and realizes it's someone in the future and they kind of talk and it's kind of a gorgeous story but I was less interested in the dialogue or more just that in that moment of influence. Those moments where you have a decision to make. And it can go sliding doors things can go either way what if the influence was yourself in the future or you and yourself or someone from the past. And so it became about structuring these two times whereby, here are these two people who are connected. Yeah, and, and a moment of real crisis for, for both of them, they hear something that, that that sets them on a course that helps basically, that influenced them and that helps, and hearing it being sound and not being found that there's something that or audio / auditory just how powerful it was for me. How powerful sound was, you know, radio and music how that was more important than thinking about what we were talking about the very beginning was was more important than text on a page. Yeah, it had more influence and more power. So that was that was the kind of the sparkle the seed or the genesis of of tape the first book, and then it was just about it was then it was just fun about part nostalgically but then thinking about somebody then and now, you know what, what I'm exploring what felt different and what felt the same.

**Nelima Begum**

Clearly!

**Nelima Begum**

So It's About Love for me had so many layers and Luke is a really interesting and complex character to follow throughout the story. So I feel like as a reader, we get to know him in increments and even then we never really know how he's going to react to something. How do you achieve the effects of building a character with a really strong presence but not giving everything away?

**Steven Camden**

Oh man. Thanks for reading it. I guess it's that thing of, I don't know, I mean, he just, he grew right? I mean, the three novels have kind of been published so far, that that is the one that is literally the closest to home in terms of setting, in terms of identify in terms of me as a person. Yeah, well, yeah, exactly. I just remember the two things I remember feeling the most were angry, and in love. And, and I think that what that does to a person amongst the pressures of family and being into something that means finding something that you're into that the people you love the most and closest to don't understand. So you meet people who understand the thing you're into, but they've got no idea about where you're from, or, or who you are, and that, and the wrestle the dance of what that is. It's something I've lived my whole life and I'm still living now and find it fascinating but he, I think it's, thank you as well for saying that about him because that's that's that's a real compliment and I think it's, um, again it comes down to the potential. You know, I think it's I, I'm interested. I genuinely believe that anybody is capable of anything, good and bad. And and that's important to me that my characters feel like that as well. And part of that I think is particularly with him. Is he doesn't know everything, and he's confused. So you give too much, it becomes a we know more than him. Yeah, and it's first person and it's and I'm being him. I want you to be with him. So that can't have that or can't have it you know me because that's condescending to me, and that will feel good so it's, it's about the lens, -

**Nelima Begum**

- You're supposed to be leading...

**Steven Camden**

Yeah if I mean, if I mean this person if I'm, if I'm making a choice to write something first person, particularly something first person in real time. What it does is it's it can limit how layered, other people can feel, potentially, but that's a sacrifice that you make, knowing that the person that you have, you have the license and the means to feel like they've gone an a real journey, and that's so we have, like, in us in a kind of ourselves I think especially to start with. That means that you can't know everything. And not only can you not know anything you kind of keep getting things wrong, I mean like mistakes might be the wrong word but just like go, you're testing, and you're testing things out, and the frustration and the anger of that but also combining that anger with the same, the same mind and heart that's full of that anger is full of the passion, and potential to do things so depending on the circumstances, you can be a monster or you can be, you know, an angel or whatever and like, it was actually called Monsters and Bodyguards. For because partly because that's what I wanted to be called and then, like we said before there's a big, there was a big tug of war about how that would people think that would be some Dungeons and Dragons type fantasy thing, I didn't have a problem with it. I ended up, I was still quite wet behind the ears as well so I didn't really fight much, but it's fine because it is about love. Yeah, It's just, it's not about the same people who are picking up a book going right can't wait for this love story, aren't going to get what they love, you know, which is kind of cool in its own way, I guess...

**Nelima Begum**

Because it adds to the layering of it all.

**Steven Camden**

Hopefully, you know, or you go, this is not a love story. Yeah, but either way, the stubbornness of that or, I really like that in my own kind of way.

**Nelima Begum**

So on the topic of character, right,

**Steven Camden**

Ohh, you're good at this!

**Nelima Begum**

Haha! Thank you, thank you! We're on our second season so I hope I'm good at it. Brilliant. So the way you write your characters and their lives is a very real authentic and honest feel to it. What does the character building-process look like for you, and where do you start with writing a person and their story when you know you're going to want that character to really connect with someone?

**Steven Camden**

Wow. Um. Oh man. Okay. You know what, you know it's really strange like, I can't start a character without a name.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, oh well that's really interesting! I know for a lot of writers, that comes last.

**Steven Camden**

And I've met people and it's just like, and like I'm like wicked, that's, you know what, you know, different strokes and all that, but I like without a name... names of really really really important to me I've kind of discovered or whatever, but I do want to do fine is it takes me a long time to choose a name, but I'm going to need to choose a name, a character develops quite quickly.

**Nelima Begum**

Okay, so the person becomes their name.

**Steven Camden**

I guess so. And like without... I don't know how conceptual I'm being or how much it's just, just something about, they become, somebody becomes real with a name for me. And it's about how, just getting to know them as opposed to kind of creating and that's a simplification obviously because I am creating them but it's like, I, I feel that there is someone to create when I have a name. You know, when someone is just a character, the character who does this, or is the mum or whatever. I just can't bring myself to kind of fully get invested yet. And that might be because you know I've not studied or trained academically in like, you know, narrative or whatever. Do List the things that you can kind of invest in as such but it's so I have a name names have changed. If not for me they have changed, or they have, you know who I thought was a main character ends up not being the main character, and so I need a new name for it for the main character, but it's also names in relation to each other names is really important to me as well, like if a family always families in the heart of my story so everyone's name as a family has to work as well as just an individual name, you know what I mean. So, absolutely. And yeah and the shape of the dynamics, even phonetically, how a name sounds next to if my dad might you know if my dad might, you know, Luke and Mark together. Yeah, how even just how that sounds. And what that does to my brain together Yeah, gives me a sense of a dynamic, which, you know, it just just so and so that's kind of, again, it's all, it's a lot to do with sound, I think, just thinking about it now out loud I have not really realized that before, to be honest but it's um, and then I tend to it becomes about questions mostly revolving around what somebody wants or thinks that they want, and then and then a bonus place, place becomes massively important very very quickly. And that ranges from like someone's bedroom, through to their house through to their street through to their area. And because all of my characters are all more than my main characters are characters who are from mixed heritage backgrounds. It's just, I just get really excited because it's like, like I said before that the pride I have in that and how much how rich that feels to me, it's about like our how what am I going to play with this time what facet of it, am I going to make more prominent this time or how subtle of are these going to be what my references are they're going to be for people who, who share my heritage predominant and then and then are they going to be more blatant are going to be more generous is it going to be, and I like to have a bits of all of that in there so it becomes. Yeah people's houses, become really important. So it's not like, you know I won't like build someone and then the house. Yeah, like what someone's the posters someone has on their wall comes as quickly as you know how big, how tall they are. Or like, or how many friends they have.

**Steven Camden**

So it all comes out and like I say that in all directions all at once. So it's, and I just don't stop it until it feels real. And then my what I've learned to do over time is, I mean I could do that for months, literally months just kind of scrapbooking these people and their world is what it is really fun, but it can also kind of hinder you because you can get bogged down in it and then you forget that, that you want to tell a story to the drive have a story, you also it's also important to have some discovery along the way for me with who these people are so they can surprise me. Yeah, so weirdly now, I mean I've done an experiment really recently but the thing that I've just written recently written where I didn't hardly did any of it. Again, I gave this boy a name and a family scenario. And then I just started writing scenes with him in. And I got to know him through that it took a long time. Yeah, and I would like reverse engineer bits afterwards and add things and thing but it really really worked because it meant that it felt like, I don't know what it felt like he just felt really good. It felt really good and it was really interesting to see because it's like, I think it just depends on the story. I don't think I have any hard and fast rules.

**Nelima Begum**

So it's quite fluid. It just varies from story to story, character to character...

**Steven Camden**

And it also varies in terms of what I feel like I've already done, so I don't want to do exactly the same thing again, I want it. I want to feel like I'm, I'm learning and pushing what it, what it is that my version of what writing is particularly when I'm going to hand it over, it's going to be a tangible thing that just lives longer than I do. I don't feel like the books that I've written in the realm that they're in. I like the other books in that realm. Yeah, you know, I hope that doesn't sound to kind of boast your grandiose but I'm sure everyone has to think that they should think that, And probably is true but. Yeah, so I, I like the idea of a kind of marmite thing where you either love it or hate it. Yeah, I do. And that's that's that's my own. I've no chip on the shoulder, I don't know what it is what those issues are my deep seeded is I've just really liked that. So it's part and parcel of that is kind of going slowly - I can't even lie. Early on I remember thinking about Tape sorry I'm rambling again but like with Tape... Tape came on the back of... basically I'd got the opportunity to write Tape because of all the spoken word stuff, like you know, so I kind of call this kind of persona or this kind of voice, and people have liked that and these publishers, different publishers, offered me to write something and I've really got excited about writing for my teenage self interview. And then as I started to write I was really really conscious that it wasn't, it didn't feel like the spoken word things are spoken where things are these neat little nuggets that move quickly, and I really wanted to write the book version of like if he did give him 13 year old me a camera, and told me to give me not just enough funding to make like a low budget, independent love story.

**Steven Camden**

That's what I wanted it to be and so it starts slow, and it starts slow on purpose. It's a build whereby I wanted you to choose whether you were going to commit to come to it and that sounds, maybe it sounds manipulative, but it is manipulative, I guess, but I wanted to be like. So, there are plenty people I know you have kind of started reading it and stopped because it because it's a slow build, and you know people, bless them, HarperCollins at the time, they were really cool about it because everyone was saying like, you have to whack people in the face in the first few pages and you have to do all this stuff because teenagers got no attention span and I was like I don't care. I want, I want it I want to I want you to build and if you choose to come with me hopefully ultimately, there is a way and the love that you kind of have for these people, and like, luckily it's happened enough that I felt like I've, it's kind of spoken, so it made its mark. And like I just put, I guess my point is that, so when It's About Love came, I wanted it to feel rougher and more more spiky and older and then nobody real with that one it was about me playing with this idea of how fantasy could be fantasy but fantasy in relation to the real world. So it's a completely fantastical story from one side, but it's grounded in now in a person making the decision, and it felt like I hadn't, it's the three of them feel very different and I'm really kind of proud of that. And so the future things and things I've been working on now. They all have to feel different to me. Hopefully with a sense within it that there is...

**Nelima Begum**

- with an essence of you still...

**Steven Camden**

Hopefully yeah! That's a much betterway of putting it - I was gonna say something that probably took about seven minutes to say so thank you. You helped me out there. What do you write, Nelima, if you don't mind me asking - do you write? What's your thing, at the moment?

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, of course you can! I do...

**Steven Camden**

What have you been writing like more lately then to make it less broad maybe?

**Nelima Begum**

I journal quite a lot and I feel like that's something that I've gotten into. So, I am consistent and I usually doodle alongside while I'm writing as well to try and illustrate what I'm writing. Yeah, I mean they're not great drawings but it's about getting something down on paper!

**Steven Camden**

Wow! But they're time capsules of like particular...

**Nelima Begum**

- They definitely capture moments of my life and moments of what I'm feeling so I'll read, well, a couple of years ago used to journal, not as much as I do now, or, I'd do it but it would be less frequent. And now when I read the things that I wrote two or three years ago, I'd be like, oh my goodness, like my mindset and everything was just in a totally different place. But I agree with you on the whole time capsule thing and that it's about capturing those moments of impact at any given time in your life, and it's really interesting to look...

**Steven Camden**

That's the beauty of it right, that's what's gorgeous about it, and what can be slightly confusing and unnerving slightly is this story right, this moment this journal entry. Whatever this is, this poem this represented a moment that is never happening again. And yet, will represent you forever.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, it's a piece of you that's yeah, to say, because you've written it down it's always like it's, it's a physical part of you that is there in history now. So yeah, I imagine you must feel like that with your published works because you like they're out in the world, that's my legacy, that's a piece of me that's there.

**Steven Camden**

It's crazy. It's crazy and it's like I don't know whether it's purposely or that I think about it like momentarily, but not for really a longer period of time, maybe, maybe on purpose I guess because it's like, it'd kind of blow your mind really wouldn't it I mean like a tangible thing and just, I mean, you know, I didn't meet any writers, I didn't know any writers.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, it was very organic journey for you.

**Steven Camden**

I guess. Yeah, and it is magic, every single one of them is just magic. I mean, who was saying something the other day, I can't remember. Somebody was posting something about how you can get, what can get lost is the fact that every book is literally a piece of magic. Yeah, and so you can get bogged down with everything else, I think, I completely agree with that and I think that it's um, it's not very hard to get excited and inspired again, when you think about...

**Nelima Begum**

You've created magic once, you can do it again, sort of thing...

**Steven Camden**

I have a few emails, and there's one in particular, the first one that I got, remember getting an email. It was a four in the morning and it was just it was just from a girl, she just said, look, I go, I go library because I can't, I can't get let into home I can't, I can't. I've got no key, mom doesn't get home to seven so I've got a library, and I just I've you know, I just browse and peruse and I just by chance, I picked up this book and holy, holy shit like this is you ruin my life. And you go right. I don't know what to do that information on one level, on another level that's, that's the biggest, that's the most exciting thing anyone's ever said to me. Yeah, but it's like it's one of those things where you're like right, that's the moment but that's the excitement of a book to me, it's not it doesn't beg anything, it's just there. And if you choose to pick it up. Brilliant. If you choose to pick it up and it's the right time for you specifically, you might connect, if you choose to pick it up, but it's the right time, and you connect and you enjoy it, and then you feel to reach out to the person that created that. That's genuinely mind blowing, isn't it. Yeah, it's absolutely crazy so um, I want to know I'm jealous of your journalling now I want to go back. How do you like...? That must be a man, they're gonna if you keep them. Are they like a they shared, are they private?

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, so I'm proper hoard like notebooks and stuff like I keep them all. I keep them all under my bed like in a little box.

**Steven Camden**

So, look that's the best place you know I get really there's no argument.

**Nelima Begum**

I take Polaroid pictures now that can accompany the entries. Yeah, so then you can see how you used to dress, how you did makeup or just what the vibe was of that time...

**Steven Camden**

You're curating your own memories, man. Yeah, yeah, that's amazing!

**Nelima Begum**

I highly recommend like even getting younger people to do it I think it's a great way of thinking about, you know what their future might look like or something they would have said all those years ago.

**Steven Camden**

I love those exercises, I love those exercises.

**Nelima Begum**

So we talked a lot about place and you've mentioned pride of place quite a few times. So how has growing up in your hometown of Birmingham inspired you're writing.

**Steven Camden**

Right, how to not be too gushing...

**Nelima Begum**

You can gush!

**Steven Camden**

It's all celebration. It's all thought it's all pride, it's all homage, it's all it's all a nod to my, my nan and uncles and cousins, extended family, telling stories while they cook to me sitting on the floor in the kitchen is like use I'm very, very, very, very, very lucky boy. Yeah, I couldn't be prouder, you know, and I think what's what's and also in my version of Birmingham is one that isn't you know not necessarily unique, but in terms of who I grew up around. There was a small band of us who had family from elsewhere. Who so it felt so special, even then, you know, it felt like you know at times it felt quite elitist, we felt quite I felt quite smart we get to be like in a kind of like pride gone wrong kind of way, but then over time it's just been more of a general kind of celebrated thing. And so, it's all, it's in everything, and it's hopefully, it's in everything where, and it's, it's clear, where I wanted to be clear and it's more subtle where I wanted it to be subtle, you know, because I'm, you know, since being published I've become more and more aware of the commodification of a lot of these things, and marketing things and it's like right, you could, I can, you can understand something and not like it, you know, and then and then, then there is a definite navigation that you have to do. And like everybody like I'm sure anyone who writes from perspectives that aren't. I don't know, whatever the given the, I don't know what the what even the right kind of phrases but there are certain conversations that I've had that many writers will have had that can leave you wanting to shower by the end of it. But, so you kind of It's a strange thing isn't it's a strange thing because you don't want to represent anything other than your own story. And you may you shouldn't have to, but you end up having to sometimes or...

**Nelima Begum**

Because we're connected to so many people in so many different ways, without even knowing it sometimes...

**Steven Camden**

Exactly and that's the way it should be, I think, and so I think it's like that's why. And also, is that you know, things get branded and so that people, they'll talk about you and not your story.

**Nelima Begum**

A big emphasis on labels and things and just assigning things to one particular box...

**Steven Camden**

But also we I think we also have our, our, I think we have a very slightly poisonous relationship with our idea of artistry and artists and pedestals and the genius artists in I can only speak for this country, I guess, but I think maybe in the West in general there's like this... Anybody can potentially do it, anybody is filled with these things we have chosen to do it and we, some people do brilliantly, other people do okay, but like, it's not, you are not above and beyond anything or anyone. And yet, part of the machine is almost buying into a prescribing to the notion that some people are, and you...

**Steven Camden**

You're excluded if you can't do it because you can still enjoy these things without exactly including yourself.

**Steven Camden**

Exactly, exactly, but I think, I think, I think it's, it's hard to hard to talk about without sounding either self effacing, or like, almost like you are compensating for something else it's just genuine, so it's why, as well, almost as almost well I have a trouble with a lot of kind of panel-y type stuff, because inherent in that is the performative idea that what I am saying is, is no genius or is like is like it's, it's, I know something more like that like every time I do it, it doesn't feel like the first time, which it does. Do you know what I mean so it's like, and then in amongst that is obviously the notion that well experience gives you that status, maybe, maybe it does but I don't think the green witch status is given, based on what you create. I think it's too big. I think it's I think it's detrimental to the very people I'm excited about hearing stories from. Yeah, because it others, others, to the extent where you don't even. You like you saying that everyone wants to and that everyone should or has to, but everyone's allowed, of course. Exactly. And if you put it so far away or so high up. The people who are teetering on the maybe I would like to but I'm not some of those people won't, if not make that up. I find that quite upsetting. So it's, um, it, my mind how I kind of get to sleep is that what I know what I do and I know what I feel my stories with and who I feel my stories with, and they, and they let they speak for themselves so I try and it's interesting, I mean, this is a lovely conversation because I feel like I feel like I'm talking to you I'm just, it's very, very often, these conversations start or they kind of fabricated and it, it doesn't feel right. Yeah, Yeah, so loads is my answer to the question about Birmingham, and particularly my Jamaican Irish Birmingham - much impact!

**Nelima Begum**

So, you wear many hats on the writing scene, as mentioned before you're a renowned spoken word artist, poet, you're also a playwright and screenwriter to these various formats of creativity ever overlap or inform one another?

**Steven Camden**

Yes, all the time, and in the most exciting way, in a sense of, you know this, these jack of all trades, master of none. I'm not having it at all. I can play in different forms, and I want to I want to and I have to say that sometimes the influence can be literally literal like I'm the writing a spoken word piece that was an hour long which was literally a screenplay that I spoke was just characters with description. Short description and dialogue. I wanted to play with that because it was a homage to the idea of making a film or in It's About Love where there's a boy is obsessed with film so the form of this becomes part journal part voiceover part - it's actual scene description, and the same with these elements that come together. Yeah, and sometimes it's literal like that and obvious and over time, it's all every, all this small spoken word pieces that started this whole thing for me, they were short films in my head, they weren't written down anywhere. There were things that I've kind of conceived and used my mouth to write and craft, but I visited them as a short films that I was speaking, and it's like dialogue is my favorite thing to write of all. And so even when I always get told, after first draft. We need more description less dialogue. And every time without fail.

**Nelima Begum**

But that's you, that's your thing!

**Steven Camden**

Completely and it's fine because I like that back and forth. And then, you know, there's always more dialogue, there's always enough dialogue to keep me, keep me happy and you know probably just a little bit more than they actually wanted. So that's how I kind of make peace with it but yeah it's hybrid and mess and mixing is just another. Yeah, and it's just you know, it's who I am. It's who I am and I, so everything I make is a celebration of that so it's like they have to have caught they couldn't not implement each other and also the fun is, how much and how blatant and how you try and serve or play with what is you know, quote unquote traditional in all those forms.

**Nelima Begum**

I love that that it all comes together for you, you also work with a lot of young people in schools and through many other organizations as well. How do you inspire them to be creative and engage with storytelling? Because that's a skill!

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, I guess no but I think it's a skill, but I'm not teaching anybody anything. You know, all I know I'm not telling anybody what to do, like I say, like, not everybody wants to, particularly, exactly and not everyone has to all I do is I go in, and luckily now... The reason I love my job and the reason the most fun I have is when I go and go into schools or work with a youth group or any group of any age. It's like, I genuinely mean, I love what I do, so they're making a poster of all I do is go in and we make some stuff up, and I, every single time without fail get hyped and excited because I love it. And so, worst ways you kind of look at you go bloody hell, he likes his job. And on the other end of the spectrum, it's like, oh I'm gonna have a go. He looked like he was just being himself, and it's like right so I don't I don't tell anybody anything I just show him what I do, and how much I love it, and try and imbue it with a sense of we're all full of these stories, it's up to you. If you want to try and tell them, because nobody else can tell yours better.

**Nelima Begum**

So, just let them take away what they will from it...

**Steven Camden**

Completely. There is genuinely so zero expectations from any session, so you might go to like, go to a school and speak to, like, you know, 400 year eights and nines or something right and you're going in there and it's fun and everyone's enjoying it, and people file out afterwards. And then a teacher comes up and goes, Oh, I'm sorry. No one asked me any kind of questions and I'm like, I don't worry about bunch of a bunch of them might email me later, a couple of people will wait for me outside and chat. Or, nobody will. Nobody will nobody will. And I'm now at a point now where I can feel in a room. Who, who, that people are enjoying it but you can also feel a detect when people are, It's kind of clicked, something's clicked with them, but they don't need they don't want to say they don't need to say either, because that's who I would have been. I still am to this day, if I love something, right, I'll find a way to reach out to you maybe but I might not. Because it's like, um, you know, I don't want to. I don't, it's slightly awkward isn't it as well, so it's like it's, it's, it's fun, because it's fun. And then if that radiates out into people having to go brilliant, if it if it radiates out and people just enjoyed the fact or if it's read it and they're like okay cool, when's lunch, that's fine too.

**Nelima Begum**

Like I like that you just let them sit with it and let them take from it, whatever they feel.

**Steven Camden**

Yeah, too much. Yeah, everything's pressure, everything's pressure and I think that in terms of what we were saying before about how things have changed, I would. I genuinely do think it's harder to be 13 now than it was purely because the ramping up of pressure and, and the access, there's no there. There's nowhere to go. There's nowhere to hide. So there's more pressure, so it's like right, I'm not interested in general any pressure on anybody in any direction at any time. It's like right, you're like, I put pressure on myself to try and get better at what I do. And that's literally it. So it's like I do this, I'm fortunate enough to have the means to, to share these things and get help to facilitate these things going out into the world. Yeah, right. I mean, I have a look, if you think it might be interesting, have a go, if not absolutely cool, it's like, if I school on my on our shelf, there was what there was footballer, rapper, there was drug dealer, there was, I don't know there was teacher, there was the theme of these things it was accountant, there's all these other ones but the writing or telling your own story or using yourself and drawing from yourself to communicate and express in the world, that wasn't on the shelf, not because it didn't exist. It's just because it circumstantially wasn't the culture. There wasn't a culture there wasn't a way they examples or whatever and that's just, you know, down the road and other school there may well have been. It wasn't like you know we grew up in like, you know, the desert. It was, it's not what it was but it's just like fine I'm, I'm not trying to resist somebody rectify that. I just get excited by the idea of somebody, loving what I do and I know how infectious it is because I was lucky enough to grow up around a couple of people who loved what they did. And um, it's powerful. Yeah, I think.

**Nelima Begum**

I think there's also something to be said about how, now I feel like as you said there's more pressure on young people. I think there's this constant thing of like, you know, show yourself and you have to speak and you have to speak up and if you don't show yourself it's not really you and I like that with literature and writing and storytelling especially with what you're doing and what you do is that you just let them be.

**Steven Camden**

It will happen that these things come out...

**Nelima Begum**

And just let that sit with them. They don't have to share it necessarily they just have it there.

**Steven Camden**

Completely - I didn't get on stage until I was 24 I didn't go into a theater until I was 24 Yeah, no I mean so I did when these things want to show themselves they will. But what was important is when they do show themselves, you have to know that you're allowed, and then everyone is allowed and what, and so that's why it's nice that it feels like the spectrum of who does it is wider, and we can all be more aware that's one powerful thing about the internet and stuff is like, we can be more aware that there are, there are more people that we feel connected to doing it. But also, there is still the performative nature of anything that is kind of like interactive or internet, social media wise where not only do you have to speak up and own your voice and have to do, you have to present a version of yourself that is so strong. And so sure. And it's like, come on. We didn't know, I don't know. I don't know now, there's no scope for development, or change, you have to know and you have to brand and you have to push... It's not healthy, so it's very it's like, like for growth. No there isn't. All you have to break something an undo them rebuild you like that okay, maybe that's what you have to do but that shouldn't be the way, I don't think there isn't, you know, people, people use the word play, or make it naive or they make it underdeveloped to something and it's just like no play is the freedom to do what I want, and to explore. . And you're like, right, the more people feel like that, the better. And, and so on, come on, we've got off on one again sorry i'm blaming you for that one!

**Nelima Begum**

This is such a great conversation! How does working with younger people impact your crease in practice?

**Steven Camden**

It's the best bit isn't it. Yeah, it's the best. It's what you know whether, you know, It's the energy, it's the, it's the honesty of it it's a simple fun to me. I feel I genuinely feel as close to my honest real self. The most like as close to it when I'm in a room with people making up stuff. Most of the time when that happens that these people younger than minute but sometimes they're older, sometimes it doesn't matter to me. But it's like that, it's just it is what it is man that there is potential in in those kinds of rooms people aren't running to the why or what for, because they're trying to make something practical or financial or economical. All right, what's this then it's more about an honest opinion or whether I like something or not. And I find that really kind of inspiring and energizing so it's, you know, I don't do it to pay the bills, alongside my creative export without either one of them. Neither one of them makes full sense.

**Nelima Begum**

Yeah, so they go hand in hand, for sure. And our final big question is, what kind of advice would you give to other writers who are writing for younger readers?

**Steven Camden**

Oh my god!

**Nelima Begum**

It's a big one, init?

**Steven Camden**

I wouldn't give any, and I know that sounds like a cop out. I wouldn't give any, there are there are, there aren't enough versions of what this is for everybody. There is, whether they try and teach you that there isn't, there aren't is nonsense for everyone, there's a, there are as many spaces as there are voices, and it's like right just find, just find what's interesting find what's interesting, don't you know, if you feel, even the things that I avoid doing aren't the wrong things to do, you know what I mean like if you, if you're writing with this particular market or demographic in mind or a particular issue, cool, if that's what you just be true. Just become completely true because what you're doing, people, people can smell a rat. And in my experience, the younger you get the quicker you can smell a rat. And not only that, the quicker you'll say, there's a rat. So it's kind of just don't, and that's not fair to rats either, if you want to be a rat, does not mean they're...

**Nelima Begum**

They're not listening to this podcast... Or, maybe they are!

**Steven Camden**

Wicked (laughs)

**Nelima Begum**

Brilliant so we have some quickfire questions to round off with. With these quickfire questions, don't think, just speak! Okay, first things that comes to your head. All right. Okay, so tell us where the name Polar Bear came from?

**Steven Camden**

Oh my God, that's a really long answer okay quick answer. I mean I needed, I needed, I needed, I wanted a name, I wanted something to use performance wise because I was really nervous and unsure about the idea of performing, and I didn't want it to be, I wanted to have a kind of shield, and, and I just started rhyming and I was, and you needed a persona, if you're going to rap and everything sounded very aggressive and I used to love polar bears when I was little, and then there was the pretentious notion about polar bears not really being white, and then they're loners, I grew up in a place called Bear Wood. There were lots of things, there were lots of things that made certain things, it just felt right. They're incredible is a short answer,

**Nelima Begum**

They are indeed. If you had to sum up the experience of growing up in one word, what would it be?

**Steven Camden**

Oh my gosh, what would yours be?

**Nelima Begum**

Me?" Oh god, it's difficult, that...

**Steven Camden**

I've got one! Check me out - mixed. In every sense of the word.

**Nelima Begum**

That's a good one! Mine was bluured, like I was always just moving between things, it was never really here or there for sure, it was just discovery all the time...

**Steven Camden**

For sure. That's not one word though, you cheated!

**Nelima Begum**

Oh whatever, it's my podcast, I can cheat if I want to. (Laughs). What are you working on at the moment?

**Steven Camden**

A bunch of stuff, some community projects, I am gathering stories I'm really interested in working with people just to gather stories from, from people that I find interesting, exciting and might not necessarily feel like their stories are interesting enough to tell, I have, I have, I'm in the editing stage of to two books at the minute. One for slightly younger readers like kind of a 10 year old in my head. And another story. It's about a teenage boy, which spans the five years of secondary school life, so it goes through from year seven to year eleven and I'm so excited about that. And some other, you know, some other screen-y stuff.

**Nelima Begum**

Lots of stuff in the works! What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever been given?

**Steven Camden**

Read.

**Nelima Begum**

Good. Love that. And finally, what would you tell your teenage self?

**Steven Camden**

I would say to my teenage self, you are allowed.

**Nelima Begum**

Oh I love that. What a beautiful notes finish on. Thank you so much for joining me Steven it's been an absolute pleasure to speak to you. What a delightful conversation.

**Steven Camden**

Wicked.