

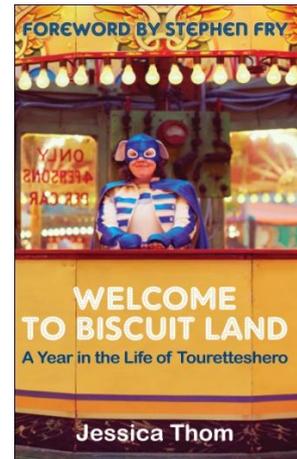
WELCOME TO BISCUIT LAND

A Year in the Life of Touretteshero

By Jessica Thom

Foreword by Stephen Fry

Published 4 October, price £12, pb



‘.. a charming, touching and valuable book.’ STEPHEN FRY

Jess Thom has Tourette’s Syndrome, a neurological condition that manifests itself through multiple vocal and physical tics. She says ‘biscuit’ up to 16 times per minute, (about 6 million times a year), she beats her chest regularly, her walking is in her own words ‘chaotic’ and, in common with only 10% of the 300,000 people in the UK with Tourette’s, she swears involuntarily. When she agreed to talk about the condition for Stephen Fry’s series, *Planet Word*, little did she realise the impact it would have. Her humour, courage and complete lack of self-pity touched the audience and led Fry to declare her ‘a true hero’. Other media followed, including interviews on the *Today* programme and *This Morning*, and now her remarkable story is told in full in **WELCOME TO BISCUIT LAND**.

Based on her entertaining blog, *Touretteshero*, the book follows a year in Jess’s life, and shows that although living with Tourette’s is tough, it can also be funny and inspiring. As her *alter ego*, Jess transforms herself into a superhero to educate children and adults about her condition, and to empower others who have it not to feel downhearted. With wit and considerable frankness, she describes her daily challenges, while celebrating the creativity and humour of her condition. (‘Biscuit’ may be her most common word but others are more poetic with “*The history of iguanas can be written in a tea pot*” and “*The clouds are chasing Helen Mirren*” being two favourites).

Jess introduces Leftwing Idiot, Fat Sister, King Russell, Poppy, and others, who provide friendship and support and enable her to go to work and live in her own flat. She talks of the frustrations of coping with everyday tasks when her body won’t stay still, such as using a cash machine or washing her hair. She reveals how she deals with the inevitable funny looks and nasty comments, and how the simple kindness and understanding of strangers can make a big difference.

Through **WELCOME TO BISCUIT LAND**, and her blog, Jess aims to alter the perceptions of Tourette’s, showing it as the creative, if somewhat surreal, force that it is.

About the author: *Born in London in 1980 Jess Thom noticed her first tics at the age of six, and was diagnosed with Tourette’s in her mid-twenties. She studied drawing at Camberwell College of Art, graduating with first class honours, and went onto complete an MA in photography. She currently works as the Project Coordinator at Oasis Children’s Venture in South London, and continues to write her daily blog, www.touretteshero.com. The book includes many of Jess’s own illustrations.*

To arrange an interview with Jess Thom or for a review copy please contact Jane Beaton at Kew Publicity on 07802 433471, or email janebeaton@tiscali.co.uk.

EXCERPTS FROM WELCOME TO BISCUIT LAND by Jessica Thom:

Shampoo Bowling

Tourettes can make even the simplest things tricky. This morning I was trying to wash my hair but kept throwing the bottle of shampoo. If bathroom bowling was a recognised sport I would've definitely got a strike – all the other bottles at the end of the bath went flying.

Spontaneous Shakespeare

It was just me at the lair this afternoon. I was doing some washing up and generally pottering about, when I suddenly and loudly ticced:

“It is the hippies of outrageous fortune that weigh heavy on the minds of dogs.”

Spontaneous Shakespeare on a Sunday afternoon is one of the joys of Tourettes.

The Same, The Ugly, and The Good

I'm going to share thirty minutes of my day through the reactions I've encountered.

3.00pm: I popped to the shops during my lunch break to pick up some plasters to protect my knuckles from the wear and tear they're currently suffering from all my chest banging. While I was browsing in the chemist, I squawked loudly. There were two young women next to me and one asked the other, “Was that you?” I looked round at her and said, “No it was me, I have Tourettes.” She smiled and said, “So has she,” nodding in the direction of her friend. This wasn't the response I was expecting. We chatted for a minute before getting on.

3.15pm: When I was walking back to work I saw a man coming towards me. I squeaked once as I got near him and when we drew level he shouted a similar noise to the one I'd just made, quite threateningly. I turned and asked, “Why did you do that?” He responded aggressively “I was copying you.” I told him I had Tourettes and that the noise wasn't directed at him. “I don't care, you can fuck off,” he said. He walked off shouting offensive things at me all the way down the street. I got back to work feeling shaken and angry.

3.30pm: After I'd had a chat with my colleagues about what had happened, I spent some time with the children I work with who were playing on the computer. While I was putting the plasters on my knuckles a few of the younger boys asked me what I was doing. I explained that I was protecting the skin on my hand because it was getting sore from where I banged my chest. One of the boys asked, “Why do you bang your chest?” The youngest boy, who I'd met for the first time a couple of days before, answered for me, “Her brain makes her do it, it controls her arm.” He paused briefly, and added, “and her mouth.”

These three accounts are illustrative of the varied reactions my tics provoke. I never know how people will react. There's not one group or type of person that seems to respond more positively or negatively than any other. All I know is when I leave my house in the morning other people *will* react, and their reactions *will* be mixed.

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