



How I Became an English Teacher

An interview with Jeremy Harmer by Marjorie Rosenberg

TEA: Had you always wanted to become an English teacher or did you consider another career first?

Harmer: No, teaching came almost by accident. After university I tried studying law, didn't get on with it, and then went for my real love, namely trying to make a living as a singer-songwriter. I played in clubs in London and busked, but unfortunately no one had the same high opinion of my extraordinary talent (!) as I did.

TEA: What made you decide to get into ELT?

Harmer: Someone told me about the course – and how you could get a job almost anywhere in the world if you did OK on it. That sounded pretty good to me and so I went along. I had no idea, at the time, that it would become a permanent profession for me. It was just something 'fun' to try at the time.

TEA: What were the reasons for writing methodology books?

Harmer: I was training teachers in Mexico, and we realised that our trainees were finding some of the input sessions fairly hard-going. In order to try and help them I started writing summary notes to give them at the end of the sessions. After a time I realised I had a lot of material and I sent it off to Longman (who had previously published two advanced books). They really liked it and so I turned the notes into a book – and in the process found something I really enjoy doing (trying to make theory and methodology clear for teacher colleagues).

TEA: Where does your teaching and training take you now?

Harmer: I teach here in Cambridge when I can (both 'straight' EFL and also on MA courses and other TT

courses) – and I write from an office in my house. I am also invited to speak at conferences and for training events. This takes me to many different countries. This year, for example, I have been not only to Austria, but also Mexico, Greece, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Switzerland, Russia and Spain.

TEA: What is the best part for you about being in ELT?

Harmer: I love the sense of pride at the students' emergent language and the thought that I, as the teacher, might have something to do with it. I love (as a presenter) working with teachers, the best crowd of people you can find, in almost any country.

TEA: Have you got any anecdotes you would like to share with our readers?

Harmer: Lots and lots! There's the typical teacher-goof story – e.g. telling my Mexican students once (for some unaccountable reason) that there was no such word as 'sighted' only to have them point out occurrences of it in their book. There are countless presenter stories, mostly horror stories – for example recently when halfway through a multimedia presentation the handouts hadn't arrived and suddenly there was a seriously long power-cut. Tales of funny students, missed planes, terrific teachers etc etc etc.

TEA: Do you have hobbies outside of the ELT world? Can you tell us something about them?

Harmer: My main hobby (= obsession, I think) is music. I listen and listen. I still play guitar and piano a bit, but now I also play viola (not terribly well!) in two or three orchestras in Cambridge where I live. I absolutely love doing that. And I read, of course, as much as I can.

Professional profile: Jeremy Harmer has taught in Mexico and the UK where he is currently an occasional lecturer at Anglia Polytechnic Universi-



ty. He has trained teachers and offered seminars all over the world. Among the course materials he has devised are *Just Right* and the *Just Series*, recently published by Marshall Cavendish ELT. He is the author of methodology titles including *How to Teach English* (1998), *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (3rd edition 2001) and *How to Teach Writing* (2004) - all published by Pearson Education Ltd. He is the General Editor of the Longman methodology list.

