

2 becomes 1

As the Spice Girls sang and so we put it into practice.

We are regularly asked how two people - very different people it has to be said - can write books together. We often ask the same question of ourselves, along with why, and what for?

It was a painful process to get to the fluent process we have now. Our early individual stories were all a learning curve of course, as they for most writers. What I don't think we realised at the time was that we were both not only learning to write – and all writers develop at different speeds – but we were also learning to write with another person. Those two things combined certainly made for a combustible mix.

An early way it would work was one of us would start a story, stop for a variety of reasons, hand it over to the other for them to finish. We then had a jointly written story. We decided very early on that each story should have one author voice – by which I mean more than just a style, although a cohesive style was important. Another way we did it was for one of us to completely write a story and then hand it to the other to edit, revise, as needed.

That was when a lot of rows began. How dare he suggest changes to my precious story? We had a meeting place by the river, near the pub, and after a row, sometimes hours after, we would meet up there as if by pre-arrangement and come to an agreement about the story. Pregnant pauses were our speciality, with silence as a weapon.

We wrote as individuals for a while then realised that we would be competing for the same markets, so the sensible thing seemed to be to pool our resources. And we've been writing together ever since. Forty years and counting. Initially we would finish each others stories and argue about which version was better. We'd spend hours discussing a single word if we felt passionately enough about it.

Over the years we have smoothed it all out. We are open and honest with each other, and no offence is taken when change is suggested. The knowledge that each must bring their strongest work to the table helps spur us on.

Taking it right up to the present day, when we write more novels than stories, we each write the complete book/story and then hand it over to the other for revision, which includes proofing, copy editing, as well as revising if we feel it needs it. With each book we spend days at the end reading it through, page by page, for grammar, continuity, repetition and other flaws we find.

With the novels, each completion has been different. We find it is important that a book has a single voice – an author point of view, a narrative drive the reader can connect with.

Luckily our styles have developed over the years into a single M&S style so there is never a case of anyone being able to see the joins. Although one reviewer did say they could – on a book one of us had written alone! No wonder they couldn't reply when I asked them where the joins were. We also got a review along the lines of – did it really take two of them to write this pile of **** - which was one reason behind the change of name to Maynard Sims.

We used to brainstorm, sometimes for weeks on end. I remember one novel we planned early on in our careers which was discussed at length and completely story-boarded - a process that went on for weeks if not months. In fact it took so long to plan we both ran out of steam on it and it was shelved. We refined the process after that. I think we have been writing together for so long now that we respect each other's strengths and recognize each other's weaknesses.

How we write now is without much of an outline at all. We have an idea of the story, some of the plot, and usually the key characters, then it's off and running. If we get stuck we use the other as a sounding board of ideas and that often helps to unblock the mind.

The way it works is for each book to be the work of one of us and the other refines to whatever extent is needed. There are no arguments, no ego tantrums - the mutual goal carries us forwards.

It helps to have someone to encourage us when the initial enthusiasm for a book flags, as they often do at the mid-point. Knowing we have a reader looking over our shoulder is a good way to instil a deadline mentality that helps propel the project to completion.