A novel written by an Aberystwyth lecturer made it on to the shortlist for the 2004 Whitbread Book Awards. Richard Collins says he wrote most of 'The Land as viewed from the Sea' in his garden shed.

By Richard Collins from Aberystwyth

"I started writing back in 1993. I was off work after a small operation and had to sit around for a few weeks so I tried to write. I found it very fulfilling and very rewarding - but it was too hard. I wrote for about a year but I never finished the book. It was badly written and badly thought through and it ended up in the compost bin.

I've always enjoyed reading but if you do a bit of writing yourself, then everything you read, you read with different eyes. You take notice of the way it's been written, the way sentences have been put together. It's like an apprenticeship.

I returned to writing in 2001, to work on 'The Land as Viewed from the Sea'. By then, I felt as if I had a good first chapter. The idea came from a sailing trip in 1996 with friends along the coast of Wales, from Aberystwyth and up past Bardsey Island in North Wales. (Yes, it was a long gestation period!)

I began writing the novel in Easter 2001 and the first draft took about a year. Most of the writing was done in a leaky shed at the bottom of my garden.

To begin with, I wouldn't let anyone read the book. I couldn't tell how good or how bad it was. It could have been excruciating! Gradually though, I let a few people read it.

I did some more work on the novel during the summer of 2002. I then sent it to various literary agents as well as to Seren Books. I thought if I sent it off about ten times, I could then forget about it.

A couple of the refusals I received were quite positive even though they didn't want to take me on. Then on 12 April 2003, I got a very charming letter from Seren saying that they would like to publish my book.

As far as I understand it, publishing is a bit like being on a conveyor belt so it was quite a long time before I began working with an editor. 'The Land as Viewed from the Sea' was finally published in May 2004.

I didn't have a launch party. I'm too shy for that. It was a low-key launch and it got only one review - in the Sunday Independent. It wasn't a brilliant review. In fact, it was rather a bad review.
By the beginning of November, I assumed the book was taking a bit of a nose-dive and that it would quietly fade away. By then, it had sold about 500-600 copies.

It was around that time I got a phone call to say the book had been shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel prize! I had to keep quiet about it for two weeks before the news came out on Front Row on Radio Four (a programme I always listen to).

Since then, life has been rather frantic. I've done a series of interview - for BBC Radio Wales and for various newspapers, including the Telegraph, the Times and the London Evening Standard.

The category winners of the Whitbread prize will be announced on 6 January 2005 and the overall winner at an awards ceremony on the 25th.

I've since written a second novel which I hope to get published and I'm not working on a third."

By Richard Collins who's a lecturer in estate skills at the Institute of Rural Studies in Llanbadarn, Aberystwyth.

The eventual winner of the 2004 Whitbread First Novel award was 'Eve Green' by Susan Fletcher, a novel which is also set in Mid Wales. The other two novels on the shortlist were 'Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell' by Susanna Clark and 'The Maze' by Panos Karnezis.

In 2006, Richard published his second novel - 'Overland'.

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**your comments**

**Peter Riva from New York**
As the agents who represent Seren, I can assure you we are thrilled to be representing Richard Collins. That is no guaranteee American editors and publishing houses will wake up and take him on, but we are, at least, getting the top 20 to read his wonderful words.

Thu Dec 11 10:22:17 2008

**Adeola Fagbolagun**
FAO: Jane Smithi am very grateful for your advice in relation to the New York Literary Agent. Once again, I appreciate your advice.Thank you so much.


**Mathew Bridle, Stalybridge**
Good on you mate, I've written 6 novels, lost a couple of manuscripts but kept on plugging away. You did brilliant to get published, I gave up with all that when things got sent back unopened with a refusal letter that had nothing do with what I had sent. Now I just write for fun and put my stuff up on my own website. www.badlywritennovels.com if anyone's interested. Congratulations once again you are 1 in 1000 that got published.

Tue Mar 20 09:39:07 2007

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Jane Smith
I'm a writer and editor in the UK, and I write this message specifically for Adeola Fagbolagun: I suspect that the New York Literary Agegncy is a scam agency, do not sign up with them! Check out www.absolutewrite.com, go to the forums there and look in "bewares and background checks" for more information.

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Fri Aug 4 09:10:09 2006

Adeola Fagbolagun
I did not go for any writing course. I started writing during one of the most boring years I ever experienced. I had just been informed that I failed some of my exams. That meant I had to stay at home for a year to re-take. Then I decided to do a bit of writing, just for the fun of it. It was 1987 and I was nineteen. I actually threw one or two in the bin, because at the time, I never thought anything of it. However, I held on to one to keep my self busy. Bones of Contention was completed in the beginning of January 2001. Just left it somewhere in the house. Had no idea what to do with it or whether something could be done with it. I sent it to two Literary agents. To my surprise, they all requested sample copies and later decided to take it on. My advice, don't give up. Even if it is just a couple of scribbles, develop and update it on a regular basis and one day may be your lucky day.

Fri Jun 2 16:23:36 2006

Sylvia M Parker. Cardiff, formally the Black Mount
Reading this made me smile. How well I understand the underlying don't-know-where-I'm-going-but-I'm-going modesty Richard conveys. I've been writing for many years. Keep nibbling round the edges of publication, a story here, an article there. Love it; writing, I mean. I have two novels for children, both set in Wales. One has been to one publisher who liked it nearly enough. The other one is with a publisher now. Wish me luck, someone. And all best wishes to you Richard. Sylvia.

Fri May 5 09:59:33 2006

Alex from London (in Hampshire)
I'm dragging my lazy arse through my first manuscript. Nothing is inspiring. Every word is agony!

Tue Jul 12 12:28:11 2005

Ed, Cardigan
Thanks for sharing that Richard, really inspiring! Always wanted to write, perhaps I'll have another go.

Thu Jun 9 10:52:53 2005

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