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opening extract from

My Dad's got an Alligator

written by

Jeremy Strong

published by

Penguin Books Ltd

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Ask Jeremy

Of all the books you have written, which one is your favourite?

I loved writing both **KRAZY KOW SAVES THE WORLD – WELL, ALMOST** and **STUFF**, my first book for teenagers. Both these made me laugh out loud while I was writing and I was pleased with the overall result in each case. I also love writing the stories about Nicholas and his daft family – **MY DAD**, **MY MUM**, **MY BROTHER** and so on.

If you couldn't be a writer what would you be?

Well, I'd be pretty fed up for a start, because writing was the one thing I knew I wanted to do from the age of nine onward. But if I DID have to do something else, I would love to be either an accomplished pianist or an artist of some sort. Music and art have played a big part in my whole life and I would love to be involved in them in some way.

What's the best thing about writing stories?

Oh dear – so many things to say here! Getting paid for making things up is pretty high on the list! It's also something you do on your own, inside your own head – nobody can interfere with that. The only boss you have is yourself. And you are creating something that nobody else has made before you. I also love making my readers laugh and want to read more and more.

Did you ever have a nightmare teacher? (And who was your best ever?)

My nightmare at primary school was Mrs Chappell, long since dead. I knew her secret – she was not actually human. She was a Tyrannosaurus rex in disguise. She taught me for two years when I was in Y5 and Y6, and we didn't like each other at all. My best ever was when I was in Y3 and Y4. Her name was Miss Cox, and she was the one who first encouraged me to write stories. She was brilliant. Sadly, she is long dead too.

When you were a kid you used to play kiss-chase. Did you always do the chasing or did anyone ever chase you?!

I usually did the chasing, but when I got chased, I didn't bother to run very fast! Maybe I shouldn't admit to that! We didn't play kiss-chase at school – it was usually played during holidays. If we had tried playing it at school we would have been in serious trouble. Mind you, I seemed to spend most of my time in trouble of one sort or another, so maybe it wouldn't have mattered that much.

14½ Things You Didn't Know About

Jeremy Strong

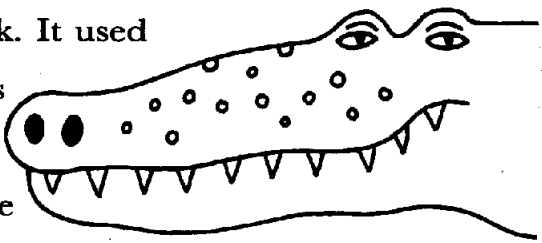
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

1. He loves eating liquorice.
2. He used to like diving. He once dived from the high board and his trunks came off!
3. He used to play electric violin in a rock band called THE INEDIBLE CHEESE SANDWICH.
4. He got a 100-metre swimming certificate when he couldn't even swim.
5. When he was five, he sat on a heater and burnt his bottom.
6. Jeremy used to look after a dog that kept eating his underpants. (No – NOT while he was wearing them!)
7. When he was five, he left a basin tap running with the plug in and flooded the bathroom.
8. He can make his ears waggle.
9. He has visited over a thousand schools.
10. He once scored minus ten in an exam! That's ten less than nothing!
11. His hair has gone grey, but his mind hasn't.
12. He'd like to have a pet tiger.
13. He'd like to learn the piano.
14. He has dreadful handwriting.

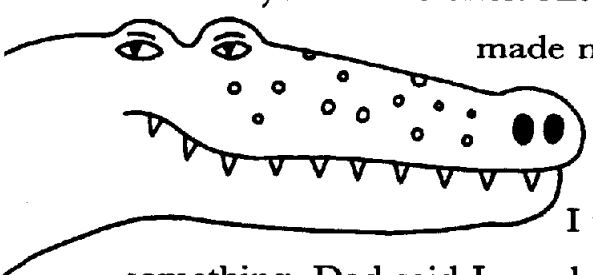
And a half . . . His favourite hobby is sleeping. He's very good at it.

1 Introducing a Vegetarian Alligator

My dad's got an alligator! He brought it home from work. It used to belong to this man at the paper-mill where Dad works, but he couldn't look after it any longer, so Dad said he would. He's always doing crazy things like that. He's great.

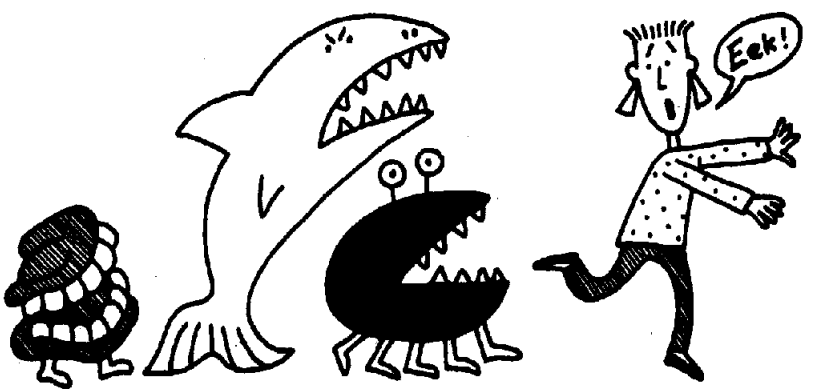


The alligator is almost as long as our sofa. Its eyes are black and yellow and they stare at you all the time. After a while it made me feel quite uncomfortable, as if it thought I was dinner or something. Dad said I was being silly. The alligator couldn't possibly be hungry



because it had just eaten six small children and the crossing patrol man outside the school. I suppose he thought that was funny.

I don't think Mum is very happy about having an alligator in the house. She hates things with lots of teeth. (She can't even bear to look at Granny's falsies when she puts them in cleaning fluid overnight!)



Dad pointed out that people have lots of teeth too. Mum looked at him really sharply and said she could think of some people she

didn't much care for sometimes. (Ouch!)

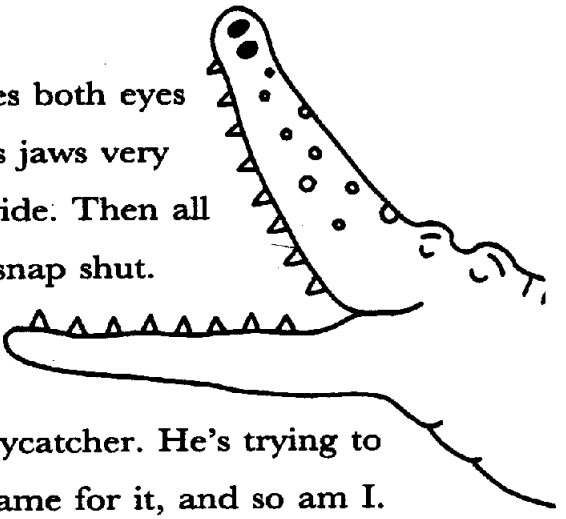
'Well, this alligator is completely harmless,' said Dad. 'In fact, it's a vegetarian.'

'Don't be so stupid, Ronald,' snapped Mum. 'Its teeth are pointed. Sharp, pointed teeth are used for eating meat. What on earth do you think Granny will make of it?'

Dad gave her a tiger-leer. 'What do you think the alligator will make of *Granny*?' he asked. Mum glared back at him. I don't know why, but sometimes my dad just can't see when Mum is actually a bit upset. 'Listen,' Dad went on. 'This alligator has never eaten anyone, never even bitten anyone. Not even a nibble.'

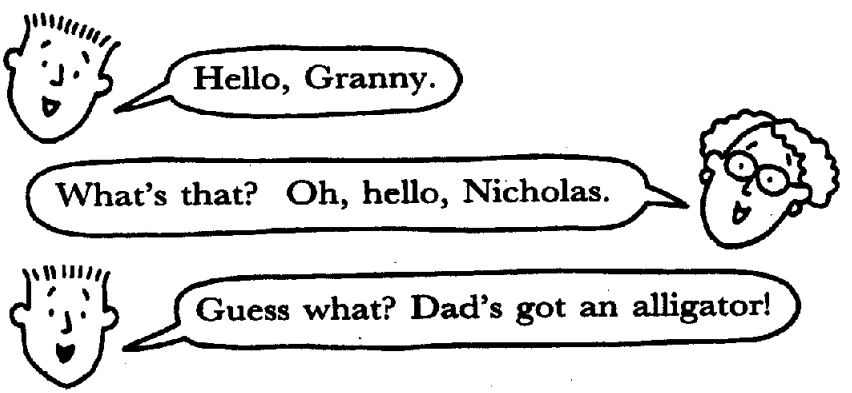
'Oh yes,' Mum retorted. 'And your name is Crocodile Dundee I suppose?' She went straight upstairs to lock herself in the bedroom! I don't know what she's scared of. I think the alligator is adorable. It has this sort of lopsided smile on its face.

Sometimes it closes both eyes and then opens its jaws very slowly and very wide. Then all of a sudden they snap shut. KERLUNK!



Dad said it would make a brilliant flycatcher. He's trying to think of a good name for it, and so am I.

I don't know why we have to worry about Granny. She spends most of the day in her room playing pool on the mini snooker-table Dad gave her last Christmas. She's almost completely deaf. This is what happened when I went to tell her about the alligator:



You want to see Granny later? But you can see me now, dear. I'll just pot the yellow.

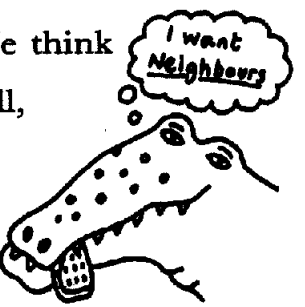
No – I said DAD HAS GOT AN ALLIGATOR!

Your father wants to know if I want potato? Is it teatime already? Tell him yes. I always like a bit of boiled potato. Thank you for asking. Oh fiddlesticks, missed!

See what I mean? It's hardly worth the bother. Even so, I hope the alligator doesn't eat her!

2 How to Redecorate Your Kitchen!

Problems. Dad's alligator has eaten two cushions from the sofa. The TV remote control has vanished too. We think that's been swallowed as well, because each time the alligator snaps his jaws shut the TV changes channels.



Mum shouted at Dad because he had told her the alligator was harmless. 'It *is* harmless,' insisted Dad. 'It eats cushions. Where's the harm in that? It was only making itself at home.'

'So what's it going to nibble next? The whole sofa? I suppose it ate the TV control so it could watch its favourite TV programme. It's no good, Ron. I am not having it in the house any longer. Have you seen the state of the kitchen?'