

The kindest cuts



Editing is key, says Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon



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He may have won a slew of prestigious awards, but Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon is not in the least bit precious about his work. In fact, he wants to be edited.

The American writer, 48, tells *Life!*: "I feel very uneasy when something of mine is going out without having been edited very heavily."

"A lot of times when you finish something, it kind of has a protective layer of plastic around it, and you turn it in and you feel like it's this perfect thing, and it can be painful to have somebody rip the plastic off and get it all grubby and dirty again - but it's actually a very necessary part of the process."

Chabon will be in town for the Singapore Writers Festival, which starts today and ends Oct 30, as one of its headlining writers. The festival, which starts today, is sponsored by Singapore Press Holdings and SPH Foundation.

He will be giving a lecture, speaking on a panel about balancing creativity and economic viability, and taking part in a screenwriter event based on his book, *Wonder Boys* (1995).

His wife Ayelet Waldman, who is also a writer, will be joining him on this trip. He jests: "To be totally honest, almost the entirety of our plans in Singapore consist of eating. But I'm sure we will find other important cultural activities to do."

Incidentally, it is nearly dinnertime in the Chabon household in California, and clinking plates and children's voices form a cozy aural backdrop to his telephone conversation with *Life!*.

The father of four children aged eight to 17 is very much a family man, and his first children's book, *The Astonishing Secret Of Awesome Man* (2011) was written for his youngest son, Abe who is eight years old.



The writer is a firm believer in bedtime stories. He says: "It's not just the story or the pictures or the lines that's pleasurable, it's the experience of cuddling up with your child - and probably a lot of it has to do with if you haven't had the chance to spend much time with them."

His oldest daughter has read his first novel, *The Mysteries Of Pittsburgh* (1988), but Chabon does not think she enjoyed the experience of reading his coming-of-age novel about a young man exploring his identity and sexuality, which contains some explicit scenes.

But Chabon's fans have something else to look forward to: He has just turned in the manuscript for a new novel, one that has been nearly five years in the making since his last, which was a serial novel

titled *Gentlemen Of The Road* (2007). In between, he churned out two essay collections and his first children's book.

He expects that the new book will be published within the next two years. It has been picked up by major publisher Harper Collins. The novel is about the intertwined lives of two families, one black and one white, set in California.

He says of the substantial wait between novels: "The ideas are the easy part. The hard part of it is the writing. There were a lot of times when I really did not feel like working on it any more."

He keeps a strict writing schedule, from Sunday night to Thursday night. His writing day starts at 10pm and ends at about three in the morning, and sometimes even close to daybreak when he is hurrying to meet a deadline. He and his wife write at back-to-back desks in the same room.

Chabon's relationship with Waldman, who is his second wife, goes beyond the romantic: Their marriage has bred an incredibly productive working relationship as well. They are collaborating on a musical based on American writer Dave Eggers' *Brooklyn Superhero Supply Company*, a quirky "costume shop" which is a cover for a non-profit creative writing programme for young people. They are also developing a television pilot for cable television network HBO called *Hobgoblin*, about a team of magicians, con artists and the like who are recruited by British intelligence to fight the Nazis during World War II.

Family man: Michael Chabon is a father of four and married to fellow writer Ayelet Waldman. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

WONDER YEARS

1963: Born in Columbia, Maryland, to a doctor-lawyer father and a lawyer mother. He has a younger brother.

1984: Receives his bachelor of arts from the University of Pittsburgh.

1987: Marries Lollie Groth, his fellow student at the University of California, Irvine. They divorce in 1991.

1988: Receives his master of fine arts in creative writing from the University of California, Irvine. His master's thesis, *The Mysteries Of Pittsburgh* (1988), becomes a

bestseller. Chabon gets a US\$155,000 advance for his work.

1993: Marries writer Ayelet Waldman. They met on a blind date the year before.

1995: Publishes his second novel, *Wonder Boys*.

2001: Wins the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000).

2007: His novel, *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), wins two iconic awards for science fiction and fantasy: the Nebula Award for Best Novel in 2007, and the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2008.

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LECTURE: HACKWORK: USING CRAFT TO SELL MADNESS FOR CASH

Where: Drama Theatre, School of the Arts
When: Friday, 8 to 9pm
Admission: \$30 from Sistic (call 6348-5555 or go to www.sistic.com.sg)

SCREENWRITER EVENT: WONDER BOYS

Where: Moving Image Gallery, Singapore Art Museum @ 8Q
When: Oct 29, 5.30 to 8.30pm
Admission: \$15 Festival Pass from Sistic

BALANCING THE BOOKS: CREATIVITY VS THE BOTTOMLINE

Where: Transaction Pavilion, Campus Green, Singapore Management University
When: Oct 30, 11.30am to 12.30pm
Admission: \$15 Festival Pass from Sistic

For more information, go to www.singaporewritersfestival.com