

Author Clare Pooley



Clare Pooley is a British blogger and author of a memoir and two novels. She is the daughter of Peter Pooley CMG, a former Director-General of the European Commission. Pooley earned a degree in economics from Newnham College, Cambridge.

Pooley first pursued a career in advertising at J. Walter Thompson, where she attained the position of managing partner and group head. After 20 years in advertising, she left following the birth of her third child.

In 2015, Pooley began a blog, "Mummy was a Secret Drinker," about her life following a resolution to give up alcohol. She blogged under a pseudonym until the announcement of her first book, which was published in 2017. That book, *The Sober Diaries*, recounted her first year of sobriety, as well as an account of her successful battle with breast cancer. Her debut novel, *The Authenticity Project*, came out in 2020. It was a *New York Times* bestseller, and has been translated into 29 languages. *Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting* is her second novel.

Pooley lives in Fulham, London, with her husband, three children, and two border terriers.

A Conversation with Clare Pooley

Q: What inspired you to write *The Authenticity Project*?

Back in 2015, anyone looking at my life would think I had it all – a happy marriage, three lovely children and a comfortable home. What they wouldn't have seen is that I was struggling badly with an addiction to alcohol and, as a result, I was a terrible insomniac, anxious all the time, thirty pounds overweight, and was often impatient and shouty with my kids.

I finally plucked up the courage to quit drinking, but I was too ashamed to tell anyone what I was going through, so I started an anonymous blog that led, a year later, to a memoir – *The Sober Diaries* - which I published under my real name. Since then, I've had thousands of messages from people all over the world telling me that my decision to tell my authentic truth has transformed their lives.

All this made me think: *Everyone lies about their lives. We all post the most flattering of our pictures on Facebook and Instagram, when the reality is far messier than we let on. Everyone is dealing with something – addiction, grief, bullying, anxiety, feelings of inadequacy. What would happen if, instead of pretending to be perfect, we shared the truth? What magic might happen then?*

And that led to the idea of Julian's little green notebook.

Q: The six main characters are diverse in age, gender, and nationality. Did you have any difficulty writing from so many different perspectives?

I've always used writing as a form of therapy. At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, my blog – *Mummy was a Secret Drinker* – saved my life. In the same way, I found creating and spending time with the characters in *The Authenticity Project* hugely therapeutic, because each of them taught me something about myself.

With the benefit of hindsight, I realized that each of the characters in my novel share something with me. Like Monica, I've struggled with balancing my innate feminism and ambition with the deep yearning for children and family. Hazard is my dark side and my inner addict; Julian shares my love of a good story and creativity – although his is expressed through art and mine through words. Like Alice, I found being a new mum really hard. (The flying Brussel sprout story is mine, although in my case it was a cauliflower.) Lizzie and I share a fascination with other people's lives. The character I found most difficult to write was Riley, because he is so very different from me. He is the naturally happy, easygoing, and uncomplicated person who we all strive to be.

Q: The book shows that every person has hidden complexities and a unique story. Has writing this book affected the way you interact with strangers?

What a great question! I hadn't thought about this before, but yes it has. When you start to realize that everyone has their own hidden struggles, you become much more forgiving and compassionate. Now if someone yells at me for no apparent reason, rather than getting angry, I'll wonder what's really going on in their lives.

Q: Most of your characters seem to struggle, in some way, with feelings of loneliness. Do you think that's a truth of the modern world?

Yes, I do. We live in a world where we are increasingly connected to thousands of strangers through social media, and yet most of these connections are totally superficial and inauthentic. What many of us yearn for is a strong and supportive community, like our grandparents used to have, and like the neighborhood described by the older folks at Julian's Supper Club. We all need a group of friends like Julian, Monica, Hazard, et al, and a hangout like Monica's Café!

Q: Are the places described in the book all real?

Apart from Monica's Café and Mummy's Little Helper, yes. The novel is set in my 'hood, in South West London. In fact, Julian was inspired by my fascination with Chelsea Studios. Like Monica, I used to ride on the top deck of the number 14 bus down the Fulham Road, and I'd look over the wall at the extraordinary time warp of artist's cottages on the other side. I started researching the history of the studios and stalking realtor's details whenever one came up for sale. Then I started to wonder, *imagine if an artist had been living there since the 1960s, staying just the same while the world around him changed. What might he be like?*

The Brompton Cemetery also plays an important role in the novel. I walk my dogs through the cemetery every day. It's an extraordinarily beautiful and peaceful place. Like Monica, I always stop by Emmeline Pankhurst's grave to say a silent "thank you."

Q: Would you ever start your own *Authenticity Project*? What do you think the world be like if we all showed our more authentic selves?

I'm hoping that publishing this novel will be the start of my own *Authenticity Project*. I would love it to encourage other people to think about what truth they might share.

If we all stopped making each other feel sad and inadequate by pretending to be perfect, and instead opened up about our struggles, we would all be much happier, and feel less alone.

C. S. Lewis said that "[f]riendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: *'What! You too? I thought I was the only one.'*" That's what being authentic does – it creates deep connections and makes magic happen.

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