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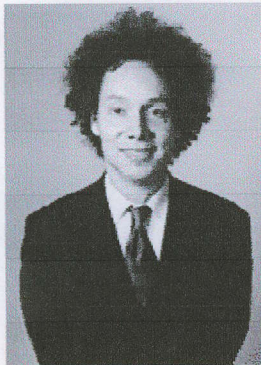
Writers on Reading

Riding with Malcolm Gladwell

by Mim Harrison

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"As soon as I could read, I became a reader," says Malcolm Gladwell. "For me reading is as natural as breathing." Or perhaps... blinking.

The author of two bestsellers, *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, Malcolm recalls a childhood filled with trips to the library every Saturday and Wednesday afternoon with his mother. The family lived in the countryside outside of Toronto, Canada, somewhat isolated but never without plenty to read, which they would do whenever the chance arose (a custom Malcolm still practices). "I just assumed everyone read," he says. "It didn't dawn on me till later that not everyone was an avid reader."

He reads quickly and even faster when he's reading strictly for pleasure rather than for work-related research. (He is also a staff writer for *The New Yorker*.) Although, he says, "all reading is for pleasure." It is not unusual for him to read four books in a week, and "if I put my mind to it, I can read a thriller in an evening. I obsessively read thrillers and car magazines."

Car magazines? He lives in Manhattan, the ultimate walking city.

"I love cars," he says. "I have a five-year-old Saab sedan that I never drive. It has 16,000 miles on it, most of them put on by my friends."

Perhaps it only makes sense that a writer with a gift for linking such disparate topics as Warren Harding, the Aeron chair and a fake sculpture from antiquity, as he does in *Blink*, would nurture such an unexpected interest. And find inspiration in unexpected places. A major influence on the writing of *Blink* was Michael Lewis's *Moneyball*, which deals with the Oakland A's baseball team. "I consider it to be the perfect work of nonfiction," Malcolm says. "I think of him as the role model for writing narrative nonfiction."

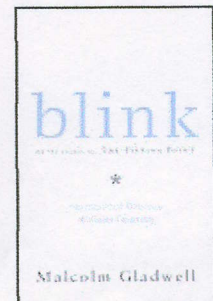
"If I put my mind to it, I can read a thriller in an evening. I obsessively read thrillers and car magazines."

His own power as a writer is his ability to move his readers to think in unexpected ways that they hadn't considered before—to take them down roads where they never thought to venture. But how does someone whose writing

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produces such breakthrough thinking stay focused on the page when he's reading? It's a matter of losing himself in the words but at the same time allowing the thoughts he's developing to interrupt and take hold.

"Those are wonderful intrusions," Malcolm says. Reading becomes the vehicle through which he transports his thinking.



"Every good book, in a certain sense, changes the way I think. That's one of the reasons for reading. It baffles me why you would read something that only affirms." He recently completed a book that put

forth statistically-based arguments against having certain types of cancer screenings. What made the book so compelling, he says, was "the notion that if you look closely at something, a very different and weird kind of truth emerges."

His wish is for readers to come to his books with a sense of adventure. "People have said to me, 'I loved what you wrote but disagreed with everything you said.' That's fine—that makes me happy," he says. "I want readers to take the ride, enjoy it, and then think about it." Whether they agree or not is not what's important. What does matter? "That they were transported."

Mim Harrison is the senior writer for Levenger and the editor of Levenger Press.

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