



Diana Gabaldon in conversation

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SPEAKER: In advance of the opening of our major exhibition, *Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites*, writer Diana Gabaldon visited the National Museum of Scotland to talk about her work. Hear her in conversation with fellow writer Lin Anderson as she discusses the origins of the best-selling series, *Outlander*, which revolves around the Jacobite challenges. Discover how she combines history and fiction in her novels, even bringing Bonnie Prince Charlie himself to life.

[APPLAUSE]

LIN ANDERSON: Well, your reaction when Diana came into the room was much the same as my own. When I got the email asking me to do this, I couldn't believe I could be as lucky. In 1998, my husband and I were in Venice, and at that time Marco Polo Airport was quite a small affair. It's got much bigger since then. And we were on their way back from a week, and my book was finished, and I thought, I wonder if they've got a book in the airport.

It was a tiny little, almost a cupboard of a book shop, and I looked for the English language books, and there were six in a shelf. And there was this one called *Cross Stitch*, and actually what drew my eye first of all it was nice and thick. I thought, it will last me. And I pulled it down and I read the back of the book, and I thought somebody's written about Scotland. Wow! And I took the book with me, and I loved it. I completely loved it.

My home village is Carrbridge in the Highlands, and when I got home-- those were the early days of emailing, and we had email. We were still trying it out, and I thought, this woman's written about Inverness and she's got it right. I'm going to try and tell her. So I found a contact for Diana, and I emailed her.

Now, that was before I became a writer myself, and the fact that she'd got Inverness right was wonderful, but she answered me. I was gobsmacked a writer would answer me by email, and you said you were so glad that it worked for me and that Inverness was right. But in fact, at that moment in time, you hadn't visited Scotland, which impressed me even more.

So we're going to talk a bit about Diana's-- well, she's going to do most of the talking. We've had a lovely talk already upstairs about the areas. But of course, it's linked to the Jacobite event that's happening here. So I think my first question is going to be, we writers believe it's all about character, and I think you readers will agree with that too. We fall in love with the character, and as a writer, don't mess with reader's characters. They don't forgive you if you do that.

And I was fascinated with the story initially because we had two different time eras. We had a collision of time eras between a woman, who is a Sassenach, a Lowlander, and a

Highlander. And my first question reading it was, how did you end up there? Where did these characters come from, and how did they end up in Jacobite Scotland? What drew you to that?

DIANA GABALDON: Ah well, it was actually an accident. I had decided to write a novel for practice, having turned 35, and I said Mozart was dead at 36, maybe you'd better get started here. So I said all right, I'm going to write a novel for practice, just to learn how to write a novel. And so I said, what's the easiest possible kind of book I could write for practice. No sense making it hard. And so I thought a bit and said, well, for me perhaps historical fiction.

I was a research professor. I knew my way around the library. I had access to the international library loan system. This was long before the internet happened, and I said, so it seems easier to look things up than to make them up. And if I turn out to have no imagination, I can steal things from the historical record, which actually works pretty well.

So I said, OK, historical fiction, what era should I set this in? Because I've got no background in history, just six hours of Western civilization they make you take as an undergraduate. So one time would do as well as another. I'd have to look at all of it anyway. So I was casting around thinking, what sounds good, 15th century Venice, American Civil War.

In this malleable frame of mind, I happened to watch a really old *Doctor Who* rerun on public television, and this is maybe one audience where I don't have to stop and explain what *Doctor Who* is. Anyway, it was one of the really early Patrick Troughton ones, the second doctor, and in this he had picked up a young companion from Scotland in 1745. So there was a young man who appeared in his kilt, and I said, well, that's kind of fetching.

I found myself still thinking about this the next day in church, and I said to myself, you want to write a book. It doesn't really matter where you set it. The important thing is pick a point, get started. So I said, fine, Scotland, 18th century, and so that's where I began, knowing nothing about Scotland or the 18th century. Having no plot, no outline, and no characters, nothing but the rather vague images conjured up by the notion of a man in a kilt, which is of course a very powerful and compelling image.

In fact, if I may digress for a moment, my sixth book was a very lucky book for me. It won several awards, including the Corine International prize for fiction, which is awarded in Germany. So I got to go to Germany to receive it, and while there, I was interviewed by everybody in the entire German press, every half hour for a whole week. At the end of this, I was just going like this.

But I was talking to a man from one of their literary journals, and he said, I've read all of your work. Your imagery is just transcendental. Your characters are so three dimensional. Your narrative drive is tremendous, and I'm thinking yes, yes, go on. He said, there's just this one thing I wonder. What is the appeal of a man in a kilt? I was really tired, or I might not have said it, but I just looked at him for a minute and I said, I suppose it's the idea that you could be up against the wall with him in a minute.

LIN ANDERSON: Which, if I recall, does happen in an odd occasion.

DIANA GABALDON: Yes, once in a while. Anyway, a few weeks later, I got home from this little jaunt, and I was met by a pile of press clippings from all of these people I'd been talking to with that one on top. I recognized it. I can't read German, only very slowly, but the publisher had put a Post-It note on it that said, I don't know what you told this man, but I think he is in love with you. It's very powerful and compelling.

So that's where it started with a man in a kilt and Scotland, 1745. So the first thing I did, of course, was go to the library and start looking up Scotland in 1745. The only thing that I actually knew about novels was that they should have conflict. So I was looking for conflict, and you don't do that in Scotland in the 18th century for very long before you run directly into Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites. I said, well, that looks like lots of conflict, fine.

I started writing immediately because I said, the point is not to learn everything about Scotland in the 18th century, the point is to learn how to write a book. So if I write something, and later I find something in the research that contradicts that, I'll just change it. It's words on the page, what could be easier? So no problem. So I've always done that, do the research along with the writing.

You don't want to be one of these people who has been writing their book for the last 10 years, and they've never put a word on paper because they're too busy finding out everything about the third Byzantine emperor, if there was one. So I didn't do that, and so I was writing along with my man in a kilt, and I was just writing little half-considered scenes. He was talking to his sister who was making a hare pie, I think it was, and she was chopping vegetables, and they were having some kind of argument. I had no idea what was going on. I was just trying out the idea of fiction.

And I got to the part where I was describing what she was putting in her hare pie and how you made a hare pie, and I had a book of Scottish recipes that I had picked up somewhere. And I like the part where she was smashing the bones with the hammer, so the marrow would leak out into the pie, that seemed very authentic. But when I got to the end of this description, I put in, by habit, the square brackets that you use for the bibliographic citation that proves what you said is true. And then I said, wait a minute, this is fiction, you don't have to do that. It's intensely freeing.

So the second day went even better, but around the third day of writing I said, I must have a lot of Scotsmen because of the kilt factor, of course. But because I think I need conflict, I think I should have a female character to play against these guys. Then we'll have sexual tension. That's conflict. That's good.

LIN ANDERSON: Yeah, must have that.

DIANA GABALDON: And on the basis of my three days' research I said, this seems roughly to have been the Scots versus the English. If I make her an Englishwoman, we will have lots of conflict. For some reason, Scottish audiences always laugh at that one. The English ones don't. So on the third day of writing, I introduce this Englishwoman. No idea who she was, what she was doing there, how she got into the plot, but I loosed her into a cottage full of Scotsmen to see what she'd do.

LIN ANDERSON: I love that scene.

DIANA GABALDON: Well, they were all sitting around the fire muttering to each other, and when she came in, they turned around and stared at her. I was thinking, why, does she look odd? What's going on here? Anyway, one of them drew himself up and he said, my name's Dougal MacKenzie, and who might you be. And without my stopping to think, I just typed, my name's Claire Elizabeth Beauchamp, and who the hell are you.

I said, you don't sound at all like an 18th century person. So I fought with her for several pages, trying to beat her into shape and make her talk like an 18th century woman. She wasn't having any. She just kept making smart ass modern remarks, and she also took over and started telling the story herself. And I said, OK, I'm not going to fight with you all the way

through this book. I said, no one is ever going to see this. It doesn't matter what bizarre thing I do. Go ahead and be modern. I'll figure out how you got there later. So it's all her fault.

LIN ANDERSON: So you just dropped to her from the future?

DIANA GABALDON: Yeah, yeah, I said, well, if you're going to talk like you're modern, then you're modern. OK, I'll figure out how it works later.

LIN ANDERSON: There's a lot of serendipity, do you find, in telling stories?

DIANA GABALDON: Yes, lots.

LIN ANDERSON: And sometimes, the way you describe that there, from my point of view, you think the character walks in and decides that they're being part of this story.

DIANA GABALDON: They do.

LIN ANDERSON: Just the way you describe that, that Claire, as a character, did not want to be of that time. [INTERPOSING VOICES] You play with the scene, and you do everything to try and mould the character into what you think they should, and then no.

DIANA GABALDON: Nope, not happening.

LIN ANDERSON: Yeah, not going there. So you came to Scotland with the book.

DIANA GABALDON: Yeah.

LIN ANDERSON: Tell us a little bit about that experience and why you came.

DIANA GABALDON: Well, I was very lucky with my first book. I wrote it for practice, as I say, but assorted things happened, and I got a literary agent before I had actually finished the first book. So when I did finish it, I gave it to him, and he said, well, I'm going to send it out today to five editors who I think might like it. He told me who they all were and why he thought they might like it, and I said, well great, how long do you think we might have to wait for an answer? Because I'd been reading things like the *Writer's Market* and so forth that say 18 months to two years before you get a reply from a publisher. And he said, well, I've told them all I want an answer in 30 days, and I'm thinking, boy, you picked the right agent.

So I went home to wait for 30 days. Instead four days later, I got a call on my answering machine-- We still had answering machines at 1989-- And he said, this is Perry. I've just called to update you on your manuscript. Give me a call back. And so I called up expecting to hear that, of the five he'd sent it to, one of them said, here, I'm not reading a 10 pound book. Take it back. But instead he said, well, of the five I sent it to, so far three of them have called back with offers to buy it.

So he negotiated amongst them for two weeks, emerged with a three book contract, and bing, I was a novelist. So just amazingly lucky. But the point is that, suddenly I was a novelist with a three book contract. When I'd given him the book I said, as I've finished writing this, I realized there's more to the story. So if anyone is interested in this book, you can tell them that, and he did. He said, she says there's more, and they said well trilogies are very popular these days. Do you think she could write three? Being a good agent he said, oh, I'm sure she could. So they gave me a three book contract.

Now, I want to pause here and state for the record that I never said it was a trilogy, I just said there is more. As it turns out, there was quite a bit more, but anyway, there we were, and I did have an advance that they paid me for the first book. And so I said to my husband, I think I must really go and see Scotland. Having done the first book entirely from library research, I think I need to see it, and he agreed.

So we left the kids with my father and stepmother, and we all came to Scotland and rented a car, drove up the west coast and all around the Highlands. And collected a much better Gaelic English Dictionary than the small one I'd started with and a few other books and you know smelled things. The only thing you can find out about a place from library research is how it smells, because nobody ever writes about that, except me.

LIN ANDERSON: You write about it a lot.

DIANA GABALDON: As people always say to me, do you have a particularly acute sense of smell? I might. I asked Bruce, one of the museum people who was taking me around to different things to see them yesterday after our regular program was over. I said, you know there's this odd smell hanging around some of these buildings. It's particularly strong here and he said, well, there's a reason for that, opened a room that holds a lot of whale skeletons. I said, yeah, that's it.

Yeah, so anyway, when I sold the book to the UK-- it was six months after we'd sold it to the US-- and I said to them, for God's sake, have a Scot read it. I've never actually been there. And so they gave it to Reay Tannahill to read. She was a very good historical novelist herself, since deceased I'm afraid, but it's very helpful.

She sent me back a page or so of what turned out luckily to be very minor comments, but one of those was about Loch Ness smells. She said, now, you've described it as smelling like sun-warmed stone and raspberry canes, which is what the watercourse I'd been imagining smelled like. And she said, I've actually been there, and it smells like cold mud and dead fish. I said, right, I can fix that. Not a problem.

LIN ANDERSON: One thing, when I read that first book, it's a big adventure, but there's a lot of humour in it, and what really struck me is that she gets Scottish humour. And it's a big give away when people try and write about Scots or write about Scotland, and they just don't get the humour. And so that struck me very forcibly, and it made me laugh a lot. Plus the Gaelic, and you mentioned a little bit about using the dictionary, but we were talking upstairs about how you eventually got to the Gaelic later on.

DIANA GABALDON: Yeah well, from my research, I could tell that Gaelic had been what people mostly spoke in the Highlands or Urse as they sometimes called it. And I said, you know, to be accurate about it, we want to make sure that that fact is apparent. At the same time, it's all right for Claire to understand everything that's said around her or to her, but she needs to understand a fair amount of what's said around or to her. So we made some of the Mackenzies educated people with multiple languages, so they could talk to her in English and so forth. And she could deduce a lot from the expressions on people's faces while they were talking to each other in Gaelic.

But I said, I need to have at least a few phrases or words in Gaelic to give you the actual flavour of it being spoken. So I looked all over the place for a Gaelic-English Dictionary, which is not an easy thing to find in Phoenix, Arizona in 1988. Even the international library loan didn't have one. So I was calling around various bookstores across the country-- this was before Barnes & Noble even-- and finally, I found Schoenhof's Foreign Books in Boston, and I called them up and said, do you by any chance have a Gaelic-English Dictionary. And

they immediately said, Irish-Gaelic or Scottish-Gaelic? And I said, Scottish-Gaelic please, and so they sent me this thin volume, and that's what I used for *Outlander*. Naturally, all of the Gaelic is somewhat wrong.

But anyway, when I went to Scotland, I got much bigger and more thorough and comprehensive one, which I still do use to some extent. But after *Dragonfly* was published, I got this nice letter from a gentleman named Ian McKinnon Taylor and he said, Dear Ms. Gabaldon, I've been reading your books, and they're wonderful. So great to see my native country and culture depicted so beautifully and so well.

He said, there's just this one thing I hesitate to mention. I think you must be getting your Gaelic from a dictionary. He said, you know, it's not that your words are wrong, per se, but you're not using them grammatically or idiomatically the way that a real native speaker would. He said, I am a native speaker. I was born on the Isle of Harris, though I now work in Connecticut. And he said, could I possibly offer you my services as a translator? I said, where have you been all my life, Mr. McKinnon?

So yes, we did that, and so for the next three books, I think it was, Ian helped me with the Gaelic. Though as we got more complex about it, he would sometimes have to call back to the Isle of Harris and talk to his Auntie Margaret or his twin brother Hamish, who were still speaking Gaelic, to check some fine point of grammar. But he was very helpful. Then after that, there were health problems, and he was not able to help me anymore. But at that point, I luckily acquired the services of Cathy-Ann MacPhee, who is a very well-known Scottish television presenter and singer, and is good friends with a good friend of mine in Canada, which is where I met her.

Anyway, so now Cathy-Ann does my Gaelic translations, but being Cathy-Ann, she is very thorough about it. So I can't just send her a line and say, how would I say this in Gaelic, like I did with Mr. McKinnon. I send her a line, then she says, well now, tell me who is speaking here, and is this man older than this man, or is this man younger than this man. What is the biological relationship between them? And I'm saying, how about I just send you the whole scene. So I did that, and she sends back this beautifully nuanced translation that takes into account their social standing and their relationship with each other and all that. Though I'm told that the Gaelic in my later books has a strong Barra accent.

LIN ANDERSON: OK, that's quite far away from the Highlands. I remember when I first read the book, this business of the way that the Highlanders and the Lowlander, a Sassenach, interact, I was reminded of *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson. We were talking about that. *Kidnapped*, if you haven't read it, is a fabulous book. Robert Louis Stevenson is a fabulous writer, much like yourself, but it takes place just after the '45 rebellion, in '52.

It really deals with this whole business of trying to understand what was going on in that time in history, between the Highlands and effectively the Lowlands, not necessarily England. But it also has in it real people, Alan Breck, in *Kidnapped* is a real person. And I wanted to talk to you a little bit about marrying fiction and fact and taking a real character. And obviously from the point of view of the Jacobite exhibition, that big mammoth iconic character in the Jacobite story in Scotland is Bonnie Prince Charlie, who is himself in your book. Do you want to talk a bit about that?

DIANA GABALDON: Yeah well, you always have an ethical problem when you deal with real historical people in a fictional setting and so forth. What kind of duty do you owe to people like that? And there's no real answer to that. Most writers decide where their own personal lines of tolerance lies. Some people treat them just as they would any fictional character, and make them behave and say anything that suits their plot. Other people are very, very picky

and will not quote a historical person as having said something that isn't written down as having been said by them.

I fall somewhere in between, in that, I always look for the most primary information on that character. I do look for things that they wrote or said, and you can find a sense of their personality in doing that. And I try to approach them in settings where I know they were and doing something that's at least reasonable for them to have done at that point. But my bottom line is that I won't depict a historical person as having done anything worse than what I know him to have done. So might depict them at a slightly better light than they really were, but not worse.

As for Bonnie Prince Charlie, I went looking, and there was a lot of stuff written about him. But I realized that quite a bit of it was propaganda, written quite a long time after the fact, and so I went looking for more primary sources. And luckily enough, I came across a book called *Bonnie Prince Charlie* by Susan Maclean Kybett, and Susan is a fellow of the Royal Scottish Historical Society and had spent six years with the private Stuart Papers decoding everything. And she had what seemed to be a very accurate take on him. So her book was what I used as my basic material for depicting him.

LIN ANDERSON: And the settings in France, did you visit France, or did you operate the same way with your research as you did originally in Scotland?

DIANA GABALDON: Mostly. I had been to France a couple of times, just as a tourist, before I began writing the books. So I had a general sense of how that smelled. Yeah, you don't want to know how it smells. I tell you, one of these days-- and I'm going to put it in my will-- I'm going to leave a million dollars the city of Rome on the condition that they install public toilets every 300 yards. Yeah, anyway.

LIN ANDERSON: When you were talking earlier about getting the deal for your book quite swiftly and wanted to just remind everybody that it took JK Rowling a lot longer than that.

DIANA GABALDON: Yes, it did.

LIN ANDERSON: But at the same time, JK Rowling says that she planned the entire series, and we're on book ten, here at the movement. [INTERPOSING VOICES] Book ten is on its way. Had you a grand plan for those?

DIANA GABALDON: No, I didn't have a plan for the first book. I just make it up.

LIN ANDERSON: I like this woman. I never have a plan either.

DIANA GABALDON: No, I mean to me, it's not fun if you know what's going to happen, and I don't see how you could possibly plan something like that. It's a very big, complex story. It depends on a lot of historical things that I don't know yet. So how do I know what's going to happen? So I actually don't write with an outline, and I don't plan books out ahead of time, and I don't write in a straight line.

I write in little bits and pieces where I can see things happening, and then gradually, as I think and work and do research, things start to grow little feet and stick together. So I'll write something, and I don't know what happens next. I'll go write something over here and something over here. Then, I write something and I think, oh, this explains why that happened, and I put it in front of that. And reading through the whole thing, I can see what has to have happened next, and I can write that. And then I don't know what happens, so I

go off and write some more, and eventually I get another piece that's shaped like this, and it fits in. It's like playing Tetris in my head, but really slowly. But I mean, that's how I work.

Some people, some writers, many writers are linear thinkers, and all the books that I've ever read about-- well, I have never actually read a book about how to write, because I didn't want to listen to their opinions. But all of the books that I've heard about that tell you how to write, and also everything I was told at school about how to write, goes in a strictly linear fashion. You must have a topic sentence. You must have a topic paragraph. You must write a rough draft. You must edit your rough draft. You must publish your rough draft. Then, you must turn in the final paper.

So when I go to elementary schools to talk to them about career days and writing and publishing, I'll get halfway through, and then I'll ask the teacher to turn his or her back. And I'll say, OK, they can't see you, so tell me the truth here. When you get one of these assignments, write an essay, an outline, and all this jazz, how many of you just write the final paper, and then fake up the rest to turn in? And about a third of them will raise their hands. Those are the people who think like I do. There are a lot of us.

LIN ANDERSON: That way of writing, I think I heard Ann Cleeves-- well, I was doing an event with Ann Cleeves, and she says she approaches a book like a reader. So it's always a surprise, and that seems to be a very nice way of going about it. So no grand plan?

DIANA GABALDON: Nope.

LIN ANDERSON: No grand plan, and I think we'll move on to the whole film thing now. Can I just ask the audience, how many of you knew nothing about this series of books before you saw the television series? That's very interesting. That's about two thirds, two thirds, which shows you for a wonderful medium is well-shot television can open up. How many of those people have now read the books?

DIANA GABALDON: That's good. Well after all, you are here tonight.

LIN ANDERSON: Yeah, I remember when I first met the books and started to work my way through them. I was seized by they're very visual. You really feel you're right in that scene, in the midst of these characters, which is what I love about them, but it struck me how powerful that would be on screen. But I think it's only now really with the advent of these wonderful long series, rather than trying to encapsulate something in a film, which you have to strip out so much, really. Tell us a little bit about the whole, how did they end up finally on the screen?

DIANA GABALDON: Well, it's a long tale, long in time not particularly long in the telling, I hope. People have been trying to make a two hour movie out of *Outlander* ever since I wrote it. We would get three or four requests a month. Probably many of you know how an option works, but just in case.

What happens, if someone wants to make a movie out of your book or a television series, they come and approach you or your agent, and they offer you a modest amount of money, usually, for what's called an option. An option is just an exclusive right for them to try to put together the package that's needed to actually produce a large motion picture or TV series, which is a lot of money. And so with that option in hand, they know nobody else can do this, and so they can then go around and try to raise money, 60 million dollars or so. And they can approach different directors. They'll try to get an A-list director who says, yes, I want to do that project, and perhaps they attach, as they call it, a couple of stars whose names people recognize. And if they can put all that together, then they have a reasonable chance of actually making the movie.

At that point, they will pay you a somewhat larger amount of money, which is the actual purchase price for the film, and that price was laid down in the option. That means the option has been exercised. At that point, they own this property. You'll never get it back, and you don't know what they'll do with it. If they don't succeed in making the movie, they still own it. And that may mean that the movie never gets made, if they won't to sell it back to you, and maybe you don't have the money to buy it back. Or they may sell it to someone else who does something horrible with it. They may do something horrible with it. You don't know.

So you want to be real careful who you do options with, and we were. We only did options four times since I wrote the books. The first three lapsed without incident. They paid me the option and couldn't make a movie, and luckily, and then that went away. And I just kept the rights until the next person showed up. For the record, Sir Anthony Burgess lived on the option payments for his book, *A Clockwork Orange*, for 35 years before they finally made a movie of it. [INTERPOSING VOICES] And finally, they made quite a good movie of it, so he was lucky.

But the fourth option, this was a gentleman named Jim Kohlberg who was an investment banker, who made a lot of money. But he hit his 50s and said, I want to make something besides money. I think I want to make movies, and so he had actually made three small movies, which were quite good, critically acclaimed and so forth, but not big, big release movies. So we saw that and said, OK, he knows what he's doing, and he's got a good feel, et cetera. He'd fallen madly in love with a story. He'd read the book four times before coming to talk to me, and on one phone call he said he thought he was channeling Murtaugh.

LIN ANDERSON: Did he mean that seriously?

DIANA GABALDON: Yes, he did. He said, I've just been having one of those horrible days where everything's going wrong, and then suddenly I heard Murtaugh's voice in my head, as he was saying to Claire about Jamie, well, most of us don't get what we want in life, why should he be any different. So anyway, I said OK. He's got an attachment to the book. He's more likely to do a good job with it. So we went ahead and gave him an option.

Well, he tried very seriously for about two years to do this. His option kept expiring every six months or so, and he would pay us more money. He tried. He approached a lot of directors, couldn't quite get anyone interested. He hired two very well-known screenwriters, but I won't tell you their names, because when I read Ron Moore's first pilot script I said, this is the first thing I've ever read, based on my work, that didn't make me turn white or burst into flame. So anyway, those didn't work either for good and sufficient reason.

So anyway, he kept trying, but meanwhile, Ron Moore had finished filming *Battlestar Galactica*. It had to come to the end, and he was looking for another project. And so he said he was having dinner with his wife and his production partner in Vancouver and talking about what he might do next, and his production partner Maril said, have you ever read *Outlander*. She said, I think it might appeal to you. It's got a strong female character, a lot of adventure, and interesting stuff going on. And his wife perked up and said, *Outlander*? You've read *Outlander*?

And so they started doing what people who've read *Outlander* do when they meet each other, and he said, I was just sitting there sipping my martini and looking back and forth. Finally I said, well, does one of you have a copy of this book, and Maril pulled one out of her bag, gave it to him. So he said, I took it home and read it that night, and I realized I hadn't ever read this story before. Because I read a lot of stories, and they have patterns generally. I had never run into a truly original story before, and this is one. He said, we would come to a

certain point in the plot, and I'd think, oh, now it's going to develop like this, and it didn't. It went that way.

So he was fascinated, and so he came looking for the rights. Well, Jim was the option holder. So he approached him about it. Jim was going, no, I want to make a two hour movie of it. Ron, being a very laid back guy said, OK, I'll check back with you. So every six months, he or Maril would call Jim and say, how's that two hour movie working out for you, and Jim would say, well, I think we're getting somewhere. And then finally he said, I think you might be right. It might be a TV show.

So at that point, they got into serious negotiations, and the negotiations from that point took two years. TV contracts are awful, but it ended up with a very odd five-sided arrangement between Jim and me and Ron and Sony, who held Ron's production contract. Because they'd made *Battlestar Galactica* part of his agreement there was that they would finance his next three pilot projects. He'd made two, which were failed pilots. They didn't develop into a series. So *Outlander* was his third throw. So Sony was part of it, and then finally Starz was the distributor, and so it became a Starz production. So that was how we got to this point.

LIN ANDERSON: And of course, I can remember waiting to watch this first episode, and I'm sure you were all in the same situation if you'd read the books. Sitting, waiting for it to appear, and the nerves as to if the characters were right, because right back to the beginning, when we said it's about the characters. We must talk about Jamie now. I've held off.

In our house, occasionally John will say to me, would Jamie have done that? That shows the power of the character. But I think they're a wonderful match. That was my biggest fear, because things can go horribly wrong. The first series he made of *Rebus* with John Hannah, he's a good actor, but he wasn't Rebus, and it's it totally turns you off. I thought the chemistry I thought it worked really well. Were you involved in those choices, or did you see them before?

DIANA GABALDON: I did see them before, yeah. I have nothing actually to say about casting. I have nothing legally to say about anything, but my contract does specify that I am a consultant on the show, and I asked my agent, what does that mean exactly. And he said, well usually, it means nothing. It's just a way of getting around their accounting department and making them pay you more money, but they decided to pay a consultancy fee for each episode.

He said, usually a production doesn't really want you to be involved, just keep you at arm's length, and you collect your money, and that's it. He said, but on occasion, sometimes they will like you or think that you have something valuable to offer, in which case they'll make it clear what they would like you to do. Well luckily, Ron and Maril and I met for two days before this deal was made, and we were all very much on the same wavelength with regard to character and storytelling and so forth. And I told them a lot about what I knew about the future of the story and more than they knew about the back story and so forth. So they were disposed to listen to me.

And it was a very gradual thing that by the fourth episode they were, in fact, sending the scripts to read, and the revisions of the scripts. And they were sending me the daily footage that they shot for the show, which is fascinating to watch. And what's most fascinating about it is how much of it is left out of the final cut of the episode, because they only have 55 minutes, and they shoot much more than that. So there's always this really great stuff that they can't cram in. So I always feel slightly bad when I watch the episodes, but then

sometimes it's so good that you just think, well, this is perfect as it stands. There is all this other good stuff, but this is really great.

Other times, I'm thinking, now you made the wrong call there. You should've put that in. But Ron is the editor, and-- well, he's not the editor, but he's the final voice who approves whatever is done, and it's his show. But we get along well together is the basic point.

LIN ANDERSON: It was interesting when I saw Jamie because-- does everybody remember a wonderful advert many years ago for a beer? You remember that fabulous ad playing Caledonia, and it was a guy in London that jumps on the train, decides to give it all up. Does that ring a bell? I think that's Jamie.

DIANA GABALDON: It is, that's him. One of his early jobs.

LIN ANDERSON: Go back and find it on YouTube. He's not wearing a kilt. [INTERPOSING VOICES]

DIANA GABALDON: No, I did see Sam's audition tapes, and also the ones he did with Catrina when they found her. They'd called me, Maril and Ron, while I was driving with my husband towards Santa Fe. They caught up with me in Flagstaff, and they said, oh, we're so excited. We found Jamie. Well, this was four days after they'd started looking for casting, and I said, are you kidding.

I guess everyone thought it would take months and months, and Maril confided that she thought it would take months and months, and finally it would turn out to be the UPS man or someone. But no, they'd found him, and they said, we're really excited. We hope you like him. I said, I hope so too. I said, what's his name, and what colour is his hair. We're thinking of skin tone, and they said, he's a blonde, and I said, that's all right. The skin tone will go well with red hair. And so I was driving along towards Santa Fe--

LIN ANDERSON: He's blonde?

DIANA GABALDON: He's blonde. [INTERPOSING VOICES] As he says, I'm a dirty blonde, a dirty, dirty blonde, but he is. He's also extremely curly, which is why film Jamie has curly hair and book Jamie does not. Because rather than try to straighten Sam's hair, which is not happening, they said, we're just going to go with it. So I couldn't watch the film that they were sending me until I got to Santa Fe that night.

So I was Googling on my phone Sam Heughan, and to that point he had just done small things like the lager ads, and he had like a half season in *River City* and things like that, but not much and only two small films. Well, Sam is a chameleon. He looks totally different in every single role and frequently from scene to scene, as you may have noticed. There were only a few still shots of him.

I was looking at these and was typing, this man looks grotesque, what are you thinking? Though as I point out to people who take issue with that, grotesque does not exactly mean ugly. It means unusually striking, and I defy you to say that he's not. But anyway I got to Santa Fe and brought up the audition. I was going like this, because I wasn't sure what I was going to see, but it was perfect. Five seconds in I was thinking, well, he doesn't look at all like his pictures. Another five seconds, he was gone, and it was Jamie Fraser right there.

LIN ANDERSON: We were talking about that earlier when we were chatting about you'd just come back from South Africa. Because we were talking about, most people don't realize,

when you shoot a script, you don't start at the beginning and go to the end. You do it in bits and people have to change. There's the psychology of do one scene and then-- You want to talk a wee bit about the South African experience?

DIANA GABALDON: Well, it was fun. We're shooting in South Africa, because the last part of *Voyager* takes place in the Caribbean, and while Scotland in the north does have white sand beaches, it doesn't have water that you could put actors into. However, Starz did have a series called *Black Sails*, a pirate drama which had ships and sets that were like the insides of ships. And *Black Sails* has now finished its run, but there's still all these ships and things that belong to Starz.

So we came to a conclusion with Starz, and we essentially acquired their ships and sets in South Africa. And it's much easier to ship a few actors and their makeup and costume people to South Africa than to move the entire production. So that's what we did. And so all of that's been the last few episodes that are set in the Caribbean and are being filmed down there. We've altered the ships and the town's appearance, so you won't recognize it from *Black Sails*, but that's where it came from.

Anyway, we went down and were watching the filming for a few days, and then we went up north to see wild animals, came back to say goodbye to people before we went home and watch a little bit more of the filming. We arrived around midday, and as I was going in, I found Sam by himself in this little dusty alcove. He was wearing ratty britches and his dishevelled, stained shirt and his hair was a mess. It looked really dishevelled. And I said, actually we were just going to go later today, but thought we'd stay and watch a bit of filming. What have you been doing?

And he said, I think I'm going to be sick. I said, well, you look it. What's up? And he said, well, I've been doing this particular scene where Jamie is violently seasick all morning, and he said, they give me this glass full of egg white, tinted green, and they put this disgusting vanilla essence. It's just horrible. He says, after every time we do a take, I have to take a mouthful of this stuff and then go, ah. He says, now I really want to throw up.

LIN ANDERSON: When you see that, you can tell, oh, your pals. I know what that's made of, egg white.

DIANA GABALDON: Well, I didn't see those scenes, of, course because they'd already been filmed. But I saw them two days later, when they came in the dailies. Exactly, and here's Samuel sprawled on the floor, throwing up in a bucket, very realistically. And they yell cut, and he sits back for a bit and breathes. And then they say, go again, and he'll take out his glass of egg white from his berth, look at it with loathing, and once again. So they did this four or five times, over the whole scene, and about the sixth time he gets his glass of egg white, and he goes, fuck my life.

LIN ANDERSON: I love that story.

DIANA GABALDON: As my husband said to him when he said what he'd been doing, he said, you wanted to be an actor. Sam looked at him and said, Yeah, I did. What was I thinking?

[APPLAUSE]

SPEAKER: Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Jacobites is on display at the National Museum of Scotland from the 23rd of June to the 12th of November 2017.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

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