



# Through my eyes

By John Lawrence

When was the last time you came across a blind or partially-sighted person in a book or TV drama? Seldom are they seen and, when they do appear on screen, they're often portrayed as a stricken victim or someone with sonic superpowers.

Author Red Széll wanted to redress the balance and so based his first novel *Blind Trust* around a protagonist who cannot see. His hero gets caught up in a violent conspiracy featuring extortion and betrayal in a fast-moving tale set among the wealthy denizens of Hampstead.

### Losses and gains

Red's motivation for writing was very personal. He has been losing his sight since he was 19, when he was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic eye disorder whose effects he describes as "a bit like looking through a misty window into a dark room".

After a successful career in journalism and recruitment, he was proud to become a stay-at-home dad looking after his two daughters while his wife Kate worked as a City lawyer. And he used his time to write fiction.

Red said: "I was determined to write a plausible blind character and put the reader behind his eyes in a first-person narrative. It lets readers experience the world of a blind or partially sighted person, as well as some of the humour and kindness that

nine out of ten people show to someone like me."

### Typing in bold

How much Red, 43, can see of the world around him changes with the amount of light in the room and even the amount of sleep he's had the night before. As a novelist, he clearly needs to be able to write in all conditions.

"On a good day, I'll write 3,000 words, on a bad day 800," he says. "I drop my youngest daughter at school, get home to have a coffee then sit down and start typing. I work in 16pt bold text and when I'm finished for the day there's a voice program on my laptop that reads back what I've written. Whenever I hear something that doesn't sound right, I edit it there and then."

Red, who lives in Hampstead himself and is an accomplished rock climber on the side, is now working on his second novel called *Well Sited*, a sequel of sorts with the same hero but this time set in the cut-throat world of property development. He hopes it will be published in time for the summer. Find out more about Red's work at www.blindtrust.co.uk



Red Széll is writing his second novel with a blind hero. Photo by John Lawrence.



Piano queen: Yllka Istrefi.

# A pianist born to play

By Ami Patel

Kosovan-born Yllka Istrefi came to London in 2001 from Israel, where she began her prolific career as a piano teacher and performer. With almost 30 years' experience in playing classical piano, Yllka is practised in the works of Mozart, Debussy, Grieg and Liszt.

When asked what inspired her to be a pianist she answered, "I just wanted to play." Yllka, who lives in Aylmer Road, confesses that her first love was the Turkish March and after hearing it played by her father she was determined to learn it.

The passion to play and share music has continued through her adult life. In 2008, Yllka completed a Master's Degree in Piano Performance at the Royal College of Music following which she had various jobs in the music industry. She is now a full time teacher and concert pianist.

Alongside her interest in traditional composers, Yllka performs contemporary pieces and recently played Toccata by Ash Madni, an Oxford-based composer, at St Anne's College,

Oxford University.

Currently working on new pieces including Rachmaninov's Second Piano Sonata, Yllka is preparing for concerts here and in Italy. Her next per-

formance in London will be in October at the Fairfield Halls in Croydon.

For details of Yllka's upcoming concerts and private lessons, see www.yllka.com.

# Runners come out for lighter evenings

Spring is in the air for the East Finchley Flyers running group. The group has been going out on Tuesday evenings since November last year despite some poor weather conditions.

However, now that the weather is getting finer and the evenings lighter they expect the numbers of runners joining them to swell. The group has been doing runs between 5km and 10km with routes up to Alexandra Palace

and Highgate Village. With lighter evenings on the way, more runs will incorporate the parks and woodlands in and around East Finchley. They will also be going out on Sunday mornings doing longer runs up to 15km incorporating Hampstead Heath. For more information contact Nick on 07593 367134 or just turn up at East Finchley tube station on Tuesdays at 7pm and Sundays at 11am.

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