

An interview

with **Gordon Reynolds** and **Catherine Dubois**

authors of the novel - learning tool '**I hume you**'.

WTEAF: Gordon, my first question is for you. What on earth does the verb 'hume' mean?

Gordon: That is an excellent question and, by now, I am quite used to answering it. To cut a long story short, it is a verb we invented in an effort to describe the relationship between the main characters of our story. And in spite of the fact that there are well over a million words in the English language, we felt that there wasn't a single word capable of expressing the feelings our main characters have for each other.

WTEAF: Is it similar to the word *love*?

Gordon: I suppose there is a similarity between *hume* and *love*, but that would be too easy. There has been a radical change in society and in our values - for example, relationships between men and women have evolved over the past two generations and, unfortunately, the language hasn't followed. The word does create its own little context on page 47 of the story.

WTEAF: A question aimed at both of you: you are English teachers and two years ago you decided to give up teaching and to publish books; that is quite a radical change in itself, what brought that on?

Catherine: Well, you are quite right, we did decide to publish our own books but we haven't given up teaching; we both still teach thirty hours a week and wouldn't dream of stopping.

WTEAF: Even if you sell a million copies of '**I hume you**'?

Catherine: (after a long pause) We intend to write seven books, all of which will target intermediate and advanced students of English; we need our students because thanks to them we have the opportunity to test the materials we write. Running our own school in Switzerland allows us to get feedback from the people our books target; otherwise, it would be almost impossible for us to know if we are right or wrong before going through the costly adventure of publishing and launching new ESL material on the market.

WTEAF: Do your students mind being used as guinea pigs?

Gordon: No, not at all. In fact, it is one of the factors students take into consideration when they choose which school they would like to go to. It is a win-win situation and everyone is over the moon about it.

WTEAF: Why did you publish your work yourselves? I mean, there are so many ELT publishers out there, why one more?

Catherine: Well, in a nutshell, we wanted to keep as much editorial freedom as possible.

WTEAF: Wouldn't you have been able to do that with a large publisher?

Gordon: I have been working with textbooks and easy -readers for over twenty years and, although most of them are excellent, I have always had the feeling that they are too neutral. By *neutral* I mean that they are so 'correct', there are seldom any real-life situations that are real -life. They have been toned down to suit what the censors think students should learn; this system is excellent until the student reaches a level where he or she wants to know the words and expressions native speakers really use. So, by editorial freedom Catherine means that we want to be able to use modern or casual expressions, and even slang if necessary.

WTEAF: And, two years down the road, what are your conclusions?

Gordon: We have sold over 20'000 books so far and we get a lot of feedback from readers. And , although the feedback is very positive, it is far too early to draw conclusions. The targets we set ourselves two years ago have been reached; however, the targets we have set ourselves for the next five years will not be as easy to reach.

WTEAF: May I ask what your five-year target is?

Catherine: Yes, of course you may. When we first had the 'I hume you' idea we approached a bank in Switzerland and submitted our project. They looked into the project, decided the book had great potential and granted us a loan. Our objective is to not only pay off the loan, but to also have enough financial freedom to publish without the help of bankers.

WTEAF: Have any schools decided to use your books in their classrooms?

Gordon: Well, to our knowledge about fifty schools are using our books, but not necessarily in their classrooms. As the name of our company suggests (ndlr. 'Self Study Books') our books are designed as a sort of homework book, where the student reads and does the exercises at home; there is a key section in both books where the answers are explained in detail. The role of the teacher is to check that the vocabulary and grammatical structures in a particular chapter were understood. To help the teacher do this we have started to build web pages for teachers.

WTEAF: Web pages for teachers? That sounds interesting, what is on them?

Gordon: There is quite a lot actually, but as this is an online interview, if you put a link to the teachers' pages readers would be able to see for themselves, which would avoid repeating certain things.

WTEAF: That's a good idea. http://www.selfstudybooks.com/resource_teachers.shtml I read that every chapter treats a separate grammatical point. How does that work?

Catherine: The way our books are structured allows readers to learn or revise grammar as they go along, while it is true that each chapter treats a different grammatical point, previous chapters are revised throughout the books
<http://www.selfstudybooks.com/products.shtml>

WTEAF: On a different note... you are a husband -and-wife team, how does that work?

Gordon and Catherine: Great!

WTEAF: Well, I really meant, who does what?

Gordon: Concerning the books, I write the stories and Catherine writes the exercises. The other thousand jobs involved in publishing are shared equally between us. Catherine generally does all the things I do not want to do.

WTEAF: Such as?

Gordon: Such as accountancy, secretarial work, co -ordination between our proof-readers, copy editors, printers, distributors and generally making the business a business.

WTEAF: Is there anything left for you to do?

Gordon: Well, although the word 'marketing' has only three syllables, that's what I do and I can assure you that I would need a million syllables to explain all the things I have to do.

WTEAF: Where can readers get hold of your books in Argentina?

Catherine: Well, although our books are available in twenty -three countries, unfortunately, Argentina is not one of them. We plan on touring schools in Argentina at the end of 2002 and hopefully, we shall find a distributor when we are there.

Gordon: Don't forget to say that they are available on our web site, and we pay shipping costs for all orders of five books or more.

WTEAF: When you come over to Argentina, will you be carrying thousands of books with you?

Catherine: Hundreds yes, thousands no, thank goodness! We will probably do the same as we did in Australia and Singapore, that is we would do a print run in Argentina. This cuts costs by about a third and enables us to sell the books at an extremely competitive price.

WTEAF: So, Gordon and Catherine, I thank you very much for your time and wish you all the best in your publishing adventure and we look forward to seeing you in Argentina at the end of 2002.

Gordon: Many thanks to you, too.

Catherine: We have never been to South America and are looking forward to the experience.