

An Interview With Oliver Gray

Meet Oliver Gray, 27, author of *Literature and Libation*, and a *Libra* which works out great because he loves alliteration. He dreams, brews beer, loves the written word. He is a reader, writer, archeologist of the invisible, a loving husband and son. He says he has no secrets but he still won't tell me who his wizard is.

Here's your chance to introduce yourself. Who are you anyway?

Oliver John Gray – 27; 28 on October 21. I was born in 1985, the same year that *Careless Whisper* by Wham! was a #1 hit. I'm a technical writer by vocational default. By that I mean my dad worked in IT, taught me IT, I got an undergraduate degree in English from Salisbury University, and when I went to find a job, I applied for one as a technical writer. I've been doing it for nearly six years, and it's as perfectly perfunctory as you can imagine a job to be. It does however pay the bills and keep my line-editing skills sharp. I decided to get my Masters at Hopkins in 2011. My official degree will be a Masters of Nonfiction Writing, and it's a full MA degree. Going back to school was the best decision (other than marrying my wife) I made it a long time.

I'm married to the wonderfully wonderful Tiffany Welch Gray. I fixed her computer in 2007, we dated for 5 years, and were married on April 14, 2012. She's my biggest supporter and is amazingly tolerant of what I can only call "inborn eccentricity." I've never been shy about doing whatever odd things I find enjoyable, and not only does she put up with it, but she encourages me to do what makes me happy. She's perfection to me, wrapped in beautiful thick brown hair, and deep brown eyes. Van Morrison wrote *Brown Eyed Girl* about Tiffany, I'm sure of it.

I was born in Manchester, England, to Denise and John Gray. I have an older sister, named Becca. We lived in England, Holland, Dallas TX, Georgetown DC, and finally in Gaithersburg MD. We're the only branch of my family to move over to the States, and as a result, we're very, very close.

But you don't sound British!

Culturally, I'm an American. I grew up here. I was naturalized in 2008. That said, my grammar still has English inflections and I still put the "u's" in words where Americans don't. My wife often catches me using the wrong tense. My family in England would say, "I was stood waiting for the bus" when here it is, "I was waiting for the bus."

If you had to describe this time in your life, how would you describe it? Is it where you expected to be about now? Where did you expect to be? What surprises you most about where you find yourself today?

I've never been much for planning. I live my life, quite literally, one day at a time. That makes long-term relationships and life planning a little tricky. I'd say I'm at a precipice: I'm finally devoting a good amount of time to what I love (writing) and feel much more like an adult than I did a few years ago. I'm a step away from falling off the cliff of boyhood and plummeting down into the valley of adult. At least now, with a better focus, my masters studies, and my amazing wife, I feel like I at least have a parachute.

What is the single most important or valuable lesson you've learned so far?

I spent my childhood running. Through the woods, towards girls, away from trouble, after a soccer ball. Throughout my developmental years, I associated speed and movement with success and happiness. As I've gotten older (and broken a few choice bones) I've realized that it's impossible to keep up a sprint for very long. It's important to still have that speed, still be ready to burst into action when necessary, but overall, life isn't a race. I'm not competing against anyone, and no one is keeping stopwatch time-trials at the end of each lap. It's made things a lot calmer, and a lot simpler.

What people/events/books/authors in your life have had the most profound effect on you?

Mom, Dad, Sister, Wife, Patrick Stewart/Walden, Lord of the Rings, The Stranger/C.S. Lewis, Poe, Donne, Marlowe.

Which do you love more, literature or libation and why?

Literature. I'm a writer and reader by heart and by trade. The chemistry and culture that goes along with libation is infinitely fascinating, but at the end of the day, my real love is language, not liquor.

What would you like people to know about you?

I love to talk. I think that writing, in it's purest form, is a conversation you're having with your reader. I'm fascinated by everyone, even those I strongly disagree with. If someone wants to talk to me, they just have to reach out. And be polite.

I also had a very normal, not-traumatic childhood. My parents were/are great, and nothing really bad (aside from some pretty life-changing injuries) has ever happened to me. I only note this because I think a lot of people equate a boring life with boring writing. I hope, through my work, to dispel that myth, at least a little bit.

Tell me more about those life-changing injuries

In 2010, I was in Arizona where my wife's family lives and I was helping her mother out. I climbed up on a ladder, the ladder broke and I fell about nine feet straight down and completely shattered my left elbow. There were four surgeries. I really can't move it. My hand works fine. I am a very active guy. I was a weight lifter, played soccer, I run. Psychologically it was tough. Until then I thought I was invincible. I'm still pretty young but now I realize I'm mortal and that there can be real, actual consequences from getting hurt.

I try to find meaning in everything. This event colored my whole opinion of how people treat others with disabilities and every day I realize that I am very fortunate. There are people who don't have a left arm at all. I could have hit my back, broken my neck, all those kinds of things.

This year you donated marrow to your dad when he was diagnosed with leukemia. Was that a difficult moment?

We grew up in a bullet-proof family. No bad things had ever happened before. I am very close to my father. When we got the news, and the information about the bone marrow transplant, there was no conscious decision. We would do whatever we had to do. My sister was also a match. I was slightly better because I was a male but before the doctors made that decision, we actually argued about who was going to be the donor!

There was nothing heroic about it. It was my dad. The way I look at it, he gave me my bone marrow in the first place.

What are the books by your bed right now? How did you pick them? What called to you?

Mostly beer books, as I'm researching. Stam Hieronymous's *For the Love of Hops*, Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma* and *Botany of Desire*. I always keep the aforementioned *Walden* around too, as the opening chapter, *Economy*, is a well spring of ideas for some reason. I also like to keep some HP Lovecraft around. Reading it by candlelight is awesomely archaic.

You write both fiction and nonfiction. Is this difficult? Do you think they are at odds or does one feed the other?

I think they can feed each other.

Please tell me more about this wizard you refer to on your blog.

I'd love to, but I really can't. He's very private. I can say that he is teaching me everything he knows, and he's pretty impressive. Some might consider him a muse, which I guess is apt, but he's a lot more reliable when you need his help