

# A Seismic Shift in Thinking – Shriek an absurd novel – In Conversation With Davide A. Cottone

Davide A. Cottone introduced me to the Absurd genre. Frankly, before I read his book [Shriek: an absurd novel](#) I didn't even know what the Absurd genre was. The cover enticed, the exemplary writing held me.

Davide wrote the book to join the discussion/debate on how the world could change for a better future. 'When the dominoes fall, it will be the lateral thinkers not the reactionaries who will triumph,' he says. In the past, writers have written fables and parables to make social commentary. Davide has used the Absurd genre, and in so doing the parallels with current world events surrounding the rise of Donald Trump, Kim Jong Un, Bitcoin, the demise of conservative religious values, people's social response to broken government promises, and new technologies are so compelling, it's ludicrous.

"The world can be a mad place and sometimes we need to proffer absurd solutions to confront or at least contain situations that are spiralling out of control," Davide says.

He argues that technology, and the social implications of the populist mindset, has necessitated a seismic shift in thinking and the corresponding changes to the structure and organisation of society are inevitable. He says we need to 'take the wisdom of the ages and reapply to the problems of today's world.'

*Shriek: an absurd novel* is a fictional work about Aleph, an 'idiot savant' confronting a maelstrom of social, political, economic, technological and religious upheaval. The content

and the genre mean that this book is for the lateral thinkers. Conspiracy Theorists, philosophers, academics, and those with an interest in social commentary are likely to enjoy the book.

I'm keen to hear from people who've read *Shriek*. One could put hundreds of interpretations to this book. It's one I can envisage as a catalyst for debate in universities, especially in sociology or political courses.

### **THE MAN BEHIND THE TAPESTRY THAT IS SHRIEK:**

**What is it about writing that draws you to the craft?**



It's an opportunity to do some genetic engineering by mingling my thoughts (DNA) with those of my audience. Especially when I write in the absurd genre, the end product can very well be something one never intended. That's very exciting. Try reading *Shriek: an absurd novel* and you'll know what I mean.

**You've had published or performed 5 novels, several musicals and plays, and two volumes of poetry. Tell us two of your most outstanding experiences/memories.**

The musicals and plays which I have written have been performed in Australia and overseas and they comprise my most outstanding experiences and memories by far. With a live audience, the interaction and feedback is immediate. You know if you have achieved your goal of getting your message across

without having to wait for faceless reviewers to determine your success or otherwise.

My latest novel, *Shriek: an absurd novel* where I wrestle with the statement by Salvador Dali is my most challenging. He claims, *Madmen think they are sane, I know I am mad*. As a result, I don't know where I stand. Hence the novel. It could be a trap to tie you to the same dilemma!

**Is your greatest love plays, poems or novels?**

Poetry is my first great love; it's really heart-to-heart stuff. Plays and especially musicals are my other great love. It's the in-the-raw, face-to-face interaction with a live audience that consumes you whether you are writing it or seeing it performed. My third and greatest love is fiction based on fact. It allows me to create super humans out of mere mortals. Can I have three great loves please?

**Your writing career has spanned over fifty years. Summarise for us what you've learned during that time?**

I have learned that it often doesn't matter how well you write, it's the chatter that matters. You have to have a pathway for getting your work out there. You have to get people talking about your work and wanting to own it.

**What do you see as the characteristics that a writer needs to be successful?**

The writer needs to be true to the genre as well as add something different, something new.

**How do you choose what you're going to write about?**

I listen to the buzz. What people are talking about at any particular time gives me the opportunity to put my views forward. I try to give them a picture of how I think it is, rather than pander to them with what they want to hear. Not always a good strategy and that's why you have to wait a

generation sometimes before the audience is far enough removed to grasp the point which is so often in their face, yet they don't want to acknowledge it.

**Give us your take on traditional versus Indie publishing in 2017.**

Traditional publishing is dead. Indie publishing is the new reality. It is augmented reality personified.

**What is your background and how did you become a writer?**

I am a farmer's son. He planted seeds in the soil and hoped they would grow. I plant words and ideas into people's minds and hope they will grow.

**One of your novels – [Vietnam: Viet-Bloody-Nam](#) – has been adapted into a play. What was that experience like?**

Brilliant and it was so easy. It is a good book with a strong and everlasting message that was easy for the playwright to get across and easy for the audience to grasp.

**Which has been your most successful commercial product and why do you think it was popular?**

My historical fiction novel [Canecutter](#) has been my most successful commercially. The feedback from the novel made me realise how the power of the phenomenological experience transcends all barriers to understanding, compassion and empathy. There is a social agenda in that book that cuts across all human experiences. The teacher, the lawyer, the doctor, the street-lounger and the bum are all able to walk the walk through the North Queensland sugarcane fields and identify it as their own albeit on another stage.

*Carolyn Martinez is an [author](#), [editor and author's coach](#).*

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# 3 Million Books SOLD ... and Counting – In Conversation with Romantic Storyteller Amy Andrews

*Warning: Swearing and blasphemy ahead, along with bloody good advice for aspiring writers.*

Amy Andrews is an award-winning, USA Today best-selling Brissie and proud Aussie author who has written sixty-five plus contemporary romances. She's been translated into over a dozen languages. In her words, her books bring all the feels from 'sass and quirk and laughter to emotional grit to panty-melting heat'. Yes, her books feature lots of sex and kissing. 'You probably shouldn't try one if you think that stuff belongs behind a closed door,' she says. She loves good books and great booze although she'll take mediocre booze if there's nothing else.



To dip your toe into her style, here's a quote from 'Numbered', the book Amy co-authored with her sister Ros Baxter. 'Numbered' this month (August 2017) won the Romance Writers of Australia, RUBY (Romantic Book of the Year) award in the Romantic Elements Category. The RUBY is the most prestigious award for romance writing in the country. 'I bet if cancer of the penis was more prevalent there'd be a cure for this fucker. I bet if dicks were being amputated or

dropping off left, right and centre there'd have been a cure decades ago. There'd be a whole fucking government dick department dedicated to it.'

Yep, this author is your best friend – the person who tells you as it is, political correctness be damned. If all your friends are straighty one eighties because that's your preference, Amy is not for you. But My God, she's definitely for me. [Amy Andrews](#) is full of energy and charisma – great company for an afternoon interview over a bottle of good wine (I'm super professional); the stories! ...She describes writing a book as 'hard' but having written a book, 'awesome'. Amy has contemporary romance novels in these categories: Sexy, Small Town, Medical, Sport, Urban Family, and Mystery. Her books are in translation all over the world from Russia to South Africa and Iceland, and have even gone into Japanese manga and been turned into graphic novels. Super talented, and happy to share hard-earned knowledge.

**More than 65 books... Share with us two of your most precious experiences.**

That first phone call from London at nine o'clock at night to tell me they were buying my first book – after trying to get published with Harlequin for 12 years! – was very special. It was State of Origin night and everyone I rang to tell was out somewhere or not answering their phones!

Another precious experience was being in the Times Square Marriot in New York for the Romance Writers of America conference a few years back and discovering my book cover was on one of the elevator doors. *My* cover!!! It was ridiculously thrilling!

**When did you decide to leave your job as a Registered Nurse and become a full-time writer, and how big a decision was that?**

I retired three years ago – so I'd been published ten years at

that stage – and it was a very big decision for me. I loved being a nurse – loved it from the moment I first put on my uniform at the age of 17. And I loved the people I worked with. But changes at work were making me rethink my direction and I started to wonder if maybe the universe was telling me I should just write instead of trying to juggle two professions. Financially, though, I knew I'd be cutting my income in half so it was a leap of faith. Luckily it's worked out okay, with my writing income increasing year on year. I haven't made up the short fall yet but I'm getting closer!

**That's a lot of books! How do you find new story lines at this stage in your career?**

I don't. They reckon there's only about 9 original plots in the world and all stories are a fresh twist on them. I mean, a boy wizard was hardly a new idea, right? But, it's how each writer tells that age-old story that sets each book apart. So I guess I try to do that, bearing in mind there's something very comforting to a reader – a *genre* reader anyway – about the familiarity of stories. Writing something to be new and innovative is, for me, the wrong way to approach my job. I don't write to be clever with words or to set the world on fire. I write to entertain. I am Netflix!



**What have you learned about writing, agents and publishers along the way?**

I've learned that all you can really control is the writing side – so much is actually out of your hands unless you self publish but even then, there's no guarantee your book is going to find an audience. I've learned that it takes talent, persistence, agility and a sprinkle of luck (sometimes a shit load of it) to make it as a full-time writer. I've learned



that a good agent and a good publisher /editor is gold but they're all not created equal and they are first and foremost a business.

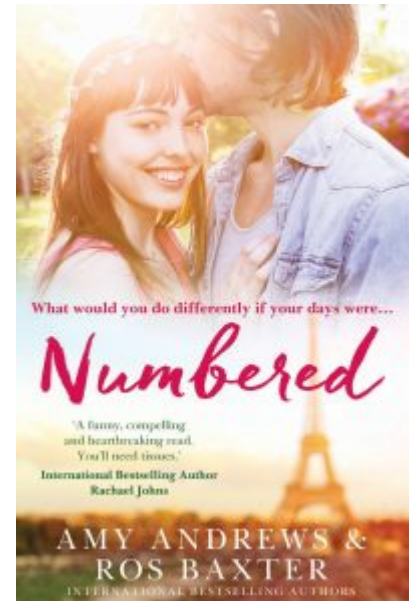
**You wrote the novel *Numbered* with your sister. Can you tell us about that process? At any point did you want to strangle one another?**

At no point did we want to strangle each other. We'd already written 2 books together so we were confident in our process and we have such similar writing styles and personalities, it was actually incredibly easy. And fun! I think the secret to co-writing is to plan/plot as much as possible in advance. Our process was to each own a POV character and tell the story in alternating POV chapters. Then we sent the chapters via email when we were done and the story came together.

I used to love getting Ros's chapter and reading her take on what we'd decided was going to happen. It was always fresh and wonderful and inspired me to go on and write the next chapter. I really think it pushed us to be better writers because I wanted my contribution to be just as good.

**Describe your life as a writer for us. I know you occasionally get whisked to Europe for decadent lunches with publishers. Is that common?**

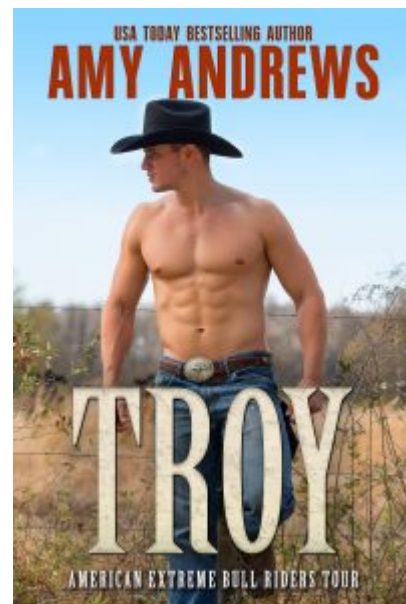
Lol – I do visit my publisher when I'm overseas and they do take me to lunch which is hands down soooo freaking cool! But no one's shouting me business class airfares to swan around the world just yet. I might have to be more like JK or EL before something like that happens! Sadly the everyday reality is me staying in my PJ's for way too long and bleeding all over the keyboard. Writing a book is hard! *Having* written a book is awesome.





I've heard you say that networking is a cornerstone of a successful writing career. Any additional advice for fellow authors who may be earlier in their careers? For instance, how important are competitions and awards, writers conferences, etc?

Comps are great for learning craft as long as you only enter the ones that give you feedback. Awards are lovely but not something you can count on. Conferences are gold. G.O.L.D. Find your tribe – the body that's there to support your particular genre – join them and go to their workshops and conferences and get into their online communities. Not only will you find kinship but you'll improve your craft and get to know industry people as well. This is where your networking really comes into force. You can face-to-face pitch manuscripts at a lot of writer conferences these days to an editor or an agent. That's worth the admission price alone! If I had one piece of advice I'd recommend you invest in attending a writing conference (appropriate to what you're writing) every year. If you're looking at ROI, it's the best bang for buck IMHO. But make sure you work it work it, when you're there – get your money's worth! Learn craft but also go to industry workshops, introduce yourself to people etc. The connections you make at conferences may not be immediately evident but they can be career starting/building.



Intrigued? – [Freebies and loads of new Amy Andrews titles.](#)

Her latest release is [Troy: American Extreme Bull Riders Tour.](#)

*Carolyn Martinez is an [author](#), [editor](#) and [author's coach](#).*

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# In Conversation with 'Baby Farm' Author – Debbie Terranova

Author of the beautifully written 'Baby Farm' and 'The Scarlet Key', Indie Author Debbie has practical advice for editing, which she likens to getting rid of head lice.

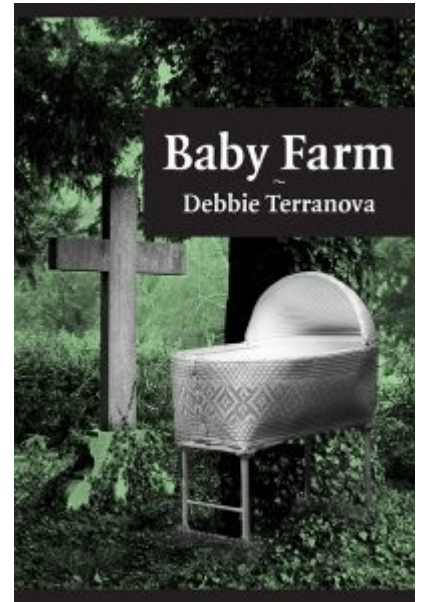
## Head lice you say?

In my experience, ridding your work of cliches, repetition, banal words, limp similes, and typos is as painstaking as zapping head lice ... only a whole lot harder. You need to zap all the words you routinely over-use or are just plain lame out of your manuscript. The words on my personal lame-list are 'very', 'always', 'like', 'really', 'just', 'quite' ... and so on. You get the idea. Everyone will have a different list of feeble or threadbare words.

Your first book [Baby Farm](#) started out as a factual piece about forced adoptions in Australia in the 1970s and ended up as a crime mystery about baby trafficking. How did this happen?

There'd been an [Australian Senate inquiry](#) into the draconian government policies of the 1950s, 60s and 70s that saw newborn babies forcibly removed from their unmarried mothers and put up for adoption. Submissions were requested from mothers and their children, and anyone else who had an interest. Hundreds were received. Some were one-pagers in faltering handwriting, some were long and heart-wrenching, some were professionally written by church and charitable organisations who were the chief providers of 'care' for pregnant teens.

The ABC picked up the story and produced a *4Corners* documentary called [Given or Taken?](#) Do watch it. Be warned though, you'll need a box of tissues.



What struck me most was the anguish the women had suffered over so many years. One said she'd knitted her son a jumper, one every year, from the age of one to the age of twenty-one. She kept them all so that when he eventually turned up – if he was still alive – he would know that she loved him.

The other thing that struck me about the stories was the secrecy and shame.

According to the evidence many women gave to the inquiry, the harder they argued to keep their babies, the more persuasively they were told they'd be hopeless mothers and their child would grow up a criminal.

Those stories formed the inspirational spark. The raw material was harrowing. I didn't want to write a tear-jerker that went from woe to abject misery. I wanted to highlight the effects of the forced adoptions policy on those involved. And I wanted to update the subject matter, because the same thing is still going on today. Now it's called commercial surrogacy, epitomised by the true story of Baby Gammy, the child with Down Syndrome born to a Thai surrogate mother and abandoned by his Australian 'parents'.

In 'Baby Farm' those difficult themes have been transformed into a crime mystery.

## **How do you define success for an author? Are you successful?**

In my opinion, success is when your work is 'out there' and enjoyed by lots of lovely readers, not only in your own country but also in other parts of the world.

Using this rather unwieldy yardstick, I am not yet successful but working on it. As an indie-published author, discoverability falls squarely on my head. The online market is a completely different beast from repositories of physical books. The challenge of how to crack into the former is what keeps me awake at night.

## **How do you research your books?**

I looove Google and Wiki as first ports of call. The *trove* site of the National Library of Australia provides free access to 170 years' worth of digitised newspapers, and the National Archives of Australia with immigration and internment records are pure gold. Beyond those, I call on personal experience – my travels have taken me to countless cities in Europe, Asia, the US, and within Australia – as well as working with people over a long career in recruitment and human resources.

The common refrain for writers is to 'write what you know'. For that reason, my stories are set in places I know best. You may not be able to recognise the actual locations, as I've been known to change names to protect the innocent, but I know those places like the back of my hand.

Everyone has wonderful stories to tell. I often include snippets and anecdotes from people I've encountered on the way.

## **Do you have a favourite/s from the books you've written?**

The story dearest to my heart is the one I'm currently writing. The working title is 'The Enemy Within These Shores'. It's about the internment of 'enemy aliens' – civilians of

Italian, German and Japanese origin – in Australia during World War Two.

It is based on the true experiences of my father-in-law, Luigi, and his two brothers. All three were cane farmers, 'captured' in Far North Queensland and transported two thousand miles to the Riverland District of South Australia, where they were imprisoned for the duration of the war.

Currently I'm editing my third 'first draft'. I hope to have it out before the end of this year.

### **What's your writing schedule/habits?**

When I'm writing, I aim for 5000 words per week. Why 5000? I read in Stephen King's wonderful memoir/self-help book called 'On Writing' that he does 2000 words per day. As I write part-time, 1000 words per day is achievable. The most productive times for me are early mornings and early evenings. While I don't call myself a fast writer, when on a roll I can bash out around 500 words in an hour.

### **How do you come up with new ideas that haven't been written before?**

Inspiration is a curious thing: it can come from absolutely anywhere.

The inspiration for '[The Scarlet Key](#)' came from a shopping trip to Bunnings. In the coffee shop, I spotted a woman in her fifties with dozens of fresh tattoos. What would drive a woman her age to get inked all over?

### **What are your tips for aspiring writers in terms of character development?**

Observe people around you. Listen to how they speak, watch what they do and how they react. Project yourself into the shoes of others. What conversations are going on inside your head? What senses – sight, smell, touch, hearing, taste – are

triggered? How would you feel in the same circumstances?

### **What are you working on now?**

Apart from 'The Enemy within these Shores', I'm toying with a series of murder mysteries set in the famous cities of Europe. The investigator is a mature-aged woman who employs quirky techniques to track down the culprits.

*Blog administrator, Carolyn Martinez is an [author](#), [editor and author's coach](#).*

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# **In Conversation with Author of Losing Kate – Kylie Kaden**

by Carolyn Martinez

She's hot, hot, hot on the charts, and best-selling international author [Kylie Kaden](#) is right on our doorstep. Brisbane based Kylie graduated university with Honours in a Psychology degree. Her debut book [Losing Kate](#) was a massive success. Multi-award winning author Helen Young called it a 'stunning debut ... a rich evocative read that kept me riveted right to the end'. Kylie is renowned for her cracking sense of humour and enthralling complex characters and relationships. Not only is this delightful author about to release her third book, she writes a regular column for [My Child](#) magazine where she vents (I mean writes) of the frazzled joys and pains of parenting three boys. Below she shares her insight on character development for aspiring authors, amongst other delightful tidbits including a possible upcoming domestic noir. I had a wonderful time interviewing this extraordinary woman. Since starting this blog I've been seriously impressed

with the wealth of talent percolating in South East Queensland.

### **How many books have you written?**

My first crack at a full-length novel happened by accident while on maternity leave with my third son. The product of my housework-avoidance/sanity saver was *Losing Kate*, which was published by Random House in 2014. Another suspense, [Missing You](#) followed a year later, and my current story *The Day the Lies Began* is about to be submitted. So, two books. Or three. Or even four, if you count the god-awful attempt written on on my brother's Commodore 64 in grade eight.

### **How do you define success for an author? Are you successful?**

I reckon anyone's success in anything they set out to achieve can only be judged by themselves, and pitted against what they hoped to get out of it in the first place.

In my case, I wanted a creative outlet while housebound with a new baby (achieved). I then realised I had something that looked like a book, and wanted someone with cred to validate my need to feel like it was worth printing (achieved). I then wanted to keep feeling good at it, justify the time it takes by being paid, and do it again (achieved). Anything else I may have picked up on the way – nominations, translations, festival appearances, wonderful friendships, were unexpected delights. But in general, when I can write something, and have another person connect with the story in exactly the way I hoped, that is magic. That is success.

Am I a success? I'm sure some of the faces in the crowds, seeing me frolic about at festivals see me as successful, but I still feel like a newbie impersonating a 'real' author most of the time, and have so much more to learn about this amazing craft.

What happens if you stop doing the thing that made you successful. Are you still a success? Life is about joy. If you



enjoy what you do, you achieve your own goals, you're a Rockstar in my eyes.

### **How do you research your books?**

Research? What's that?

Other than the odd Google search for trivial facts like what song was big in 1993, I just write what I know. I'm too lazy and time poor to do much else. But I do have a few mates (a detective, a pathologist, a social worker) who help me keep my plot points believable.

Do you have a favourite/s from the books you've written? Just like your first child makes you a parent, my first book made me an author, so *Losing Kate* will always have a special place in my book-shelf (even though I'm sure my writing has improved in four years, and I would probably cringe if I re-read it now).

### **What's your writing schedule/habits?**

My inspiration is totally dependent on the school bell. I generally write in fits and starts, devoting myself monogamously to a story for a few months, then leave it to ferment.

### **Do you believe in writer's block?**

Creativity isn't like working in accounting. It is a diva. If you can't write, you just have nothing to say in that moment. So find something to say. Read. Walk. Observe. The world is full of beauty and bullshit in equal measures, you just have to tap into it. Even watching an old lady waiting for a bus might inspire a scene. Just get out there and take notice.

### **Do your fans influence future works?**

Once you are published, you never quite go back to that blissful pre-debut anonymity where you write in a vacuum, without that invisible audience lurking in your living room, expecting, waiting. I love hearing from readers, but you can't write to not offend Aunty Marjory, or the reader that didn't

like you swearing. You write what the story needs.

How do you come up with new ideas that haven't been written before?

I start with a premise then fit characters around it who will maximise the conflict. I then work backwards, and invent lives that would have developed the cast you need for your story.

**What are your tips for aspiring authors in terms of character development?**

- Read your dialogue aloud to make sure it sounds authentic.
- If the characters don't sound distinct, they are probably sounding like you.
- Gauge them against real people you've met. If the character is like your second wife, would she say/do that?
- Write the things people are afraid to say. Even nice people think bad thoughts sometimes. Flawed characters are more easily relatable.

**What's your background, how did you become a writer?**

I studied psychology for six years, which I'm sure subconsciously informs my story telling and explains why my characters are all flawed. I worked in people-jobs in the public service for 15 years, had a few kids, then started to make things up...

**What are you working on now?**

Blogs like this for the lovely Carolyn!

Book three is currently being re-read by my agent (I haven't had an agent before now, and I feel posh saying 'agent' so see how I slipped that in there?), so I am actually getting to the mountains of washing that I've ignored, a few articles I've been putting off...before I invite new imaginary friends into my life.

**What does the future look like for Kylie Kaden?**

Darker! My stories have always been about relationships under

strain and focused on some heavy issues, despite having romantic elements. My current book *The Day the Lies Began* (working title) is more of a crime mystery/domestic noir so we'll wait and see what direction I turn to next. Any ideas? I'm all out!

*Carolyn Martinez is an [author](#), [editor and author's coach](#).*

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# **In Conversation with Modern Romance Writer, Maggie Christensen**

*By Carolyn Martinez*

'There's no such thing as Writer's Block when there's a deadline looming' – [Maggie Christensen](#).

I'm part of a group called [Brisbane Book Authors](#) – it's a non-profit social networking group for published authors. The authors I've met there have shared their experiences and skills generously with each other. Writing can be a lonely profession if you allow it. Successful authors I know, however, consider peer contact and ongoing learning experiences to be a vital part of a thriving career. Author Maggie Christensen is one of the inspiring Queensland authors I've met at the monthly get togethers. Her books are impossible to put down once you open one. She writes heartwarming stories of second chances with her lead characters being mature women facing life-changing situations. Maggie is the quintessential author – she lives in Noosa and uses beach walks to fuel her imagination.

Fans of Maggie's love that her heroines are mature, real, raggedy around the edges, funny, quirky, narky. Her characters are soul food for readers who are sick of beautiful humans in their 20s who want to start families. Maggie's characters are more sure of themselves, complex, interesting and facing different priorities and responsibilities. Their matching heroes are equally interesting; men worthy of them.

I loved my 'cuppa' with Maggie Christensen. Below she shares her story, her characters, and valuable tips for aspiring authors.

### **How many books have you written?**

Seven. My first was published in 2014. Three are part of my *Oregon Coast series*, two are set in Sydney and one is set in Noosa and includes characters from the Oregon Coast books. My seventh book, to be published later this year, is set in my native Scotland and features a minor character from one of my Sydney books.

### **How do you define success for an author? Are you successful?**

Initially I defined success by completing a book and seeing it in bookshops. Now I feel successful when strangers either write reviews, email me or tell me how much they enjoy my books and how much they have meant to them.

### **How do you research your books?**

I set my books in locations with which I am familiar. My [Oregon Coast series](#) is set in Florence, a small town on the Oregon Coast to which my mother-in-law moved in her eighties, and which we visited frequently. My Australian books are set in Sydney and Noosa where I have lived. I do use the internet to research more detailed information about the locations, such as buildings, restaurants – and their menus.

For [The Sand Dollar](#), I had to research the Indian tribes of

the Florence region, for [The Dreamcatcher](#), information about the Vietnam War, for [Champagne for Breakfast](#), reporting mechanism for the CCC, for [Madeline House](#), issues relating to domestic violence, for [Broken Threads](#) volunteering at Taronga Zoo, and for my current book, part of which is set in Glasgow during WW2, I had to research what the city was like then.

### **Do you have a favourite/s from the books you've written?**

I love them all, but I think my latest is always my favourite. I fall a little bit in love with all of my heroes.

### **What's your writing schedule/habits?**

I try to get my main writing done in the morning – at least 1000 words. It doesn't always happen, so I'll get back to work in the late afternoon. I aim to write every day and always begin by reading over what I've written the previous day. I like to have the first draft of the next book written before I publish my current book.

### **Do you believe in writer's block?**

Not really. I know that a lot of writers, myself included, can procrastinate. I like to set my daily goal and take breaks. When I find the ideas aren't flowing as well as I'd like, I take a break, do some housework, read, take a drive or walk. I often get my best ideas when ironing, walking or driving – or falling asleep! But I do find it's important to get my daily words down – I can always edit them later if they're not any good.

I always remember hearing Di Morrissey answer this question by saying there was no such thing as writer's block when there was a deadline to meet.

### **Do your fans influence future works?**

When I published my first book, [Band of Gold](#), I didn't intend to write a sequel, but readers asked for one, so [Broken](#)

Threads became the story of Jan, the sister of Anna (*Band of Gold*).

Also, I've often been asked why I didn't set a book in Scotland so, in *Broken Threads*, I gave one of the minor characters an aged aunt in Scotland. At the beginning of my current work, *The Good Sister*, Bel returns to Scotland to visit her terminally ill aunt.

**How do you come up with new ideas that haven't been written before?**

I listen to what people say and often find ideas in things I hear about or read.

For example, *Band of Gold* begins with Anna's husband placing his wedding ring on the kitchen table on Christmas morning and saying he doesn't want to be married any more. I heard of that happening to someone and wondered what would happen next.

*Champagne for Breakfast* came about when my husband and I were walking along the Noosa River one Sunday morning and saw a woman sitting alone with an empty bottle of wine. It made me wonder what her story was and Rosa's story came to life. It begins with her celebrating her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday drinking champagne alone by the Noosa River.

**What are your tips for aspiring authors in terms of character development?**

I can only tell them what I do. I immerse myself in my characters, step into their shoes and see the story through their eyes. I like to write about characters my readers come to know as they will meet them in other books. As I write, I have a clear picture of each character in my mind, although, unlike some authors, I don't search for and pin up pictures of them.

I was thrilled when a reader told me she was in a café in

Noosa and kept expecting the characters from [Champagne for Breakfast](#) to walk in – even though she knew they couldn't

### **What's your background, how did you become a writer?**

In my mid-twenties I was lured from Scotland by the call 'Come and teach in the sun' to Australia, where I worked as a primary school teacher, university lecturer and in educational management.

I'd always been an avid reader and, while enjoying writing fiction in my youth, as my career progressed I became trapped in writing course materials, conference papers and reports. It was only when close to retirement that I began writing contemporary women's fiction portraying mature women facing life-changing situations, mature heroines coming to terms with changes in their lives and the heroes worthy of them.

### **What are you working on now?**

I'm editing *The Good Sister*, my seventh book which is a dual narrative set in Scotland. It's the story of two Isobels – aunt and niece. Bel Davison returns to Glasgow to visit her terminally ill Aunt Isobel. While there she reads her aunt's account of pivotal events in her life beginning with the war years and ending in 1985 and discovers a link between her aunt's life and her own.

### **What does the future look like for Maggie Christensen?**

Very positive. My goal is to publish two books each year. I already have the ideas for my 2018 and 2019 books in mind and have started writing one of them. I also plan to improve my marketing. I envisage a long writing career ahead of me.

*Carolyn Martinez is an [author](#), [editor](#) and [author's coach](#).*