

In Conversation With Compulsive Reader's Founder – Maggie Ball

[Compulsive Reader](#) has more than 10,000 subscribers, and over 1 million book loving visitors each year. It consistently ranks in the Top 20 Google and Yahoo searches for book reviews. The driving force behind Compulsive Reader is Maggie Ball – Poet, Book Critic, Podcast Interviewer and Producer, Mother of 3, Wife, and Research Support Lead (the day job). She and her poetry have been described as ‘... polished and brave. Intellect melds with emotion to soar,’

Jan Dean, Author of [Paint Peels Graffiti Sings](#), and ‘... an intelligent poet whose writing is charged with imagery and language drawn from the sciences,’ Linda Ireland. These are just two amongst many, many exceptional accolades.



Maggie interviewed me on her podcast when [Finding Love Again](#) was launched. I found her a generous, intelligent, interesting, engaging host. I was particularly enthused that she read my book before the interview (I've found this to be the exception rather than the rule), and I'm very pleased to learn more about this extraordinary woman to share with you.

Your podcast is littered with great names. Which have been your top 3 most memorable interviewees?

I'll never forget interviewing [Tom Keneally](#) (just after [Bettany's Book](#) in 2003). He was a joy – so interested in absolutely everything, loquacious and easy to talk to, utterly nice – we went way overtime and I wanted to keep going. That

was a transcript though – I wasn't actually recording the shows at that point. It was pretty early on in my interviewing 'career', and I daresay his encouragement was part of why I continued to do it. Another transcribed interview that I loved doing was the great, Late [Dorothy Porter](#) (interviewed just after [Other Worlds](#) in 2007:). She also was incredibly nice, intelligent and insightful – I felt that if I could only talk to her long enough I might absorb some of her greatness. For the recorded ones – I hate choosing because I pretty much love everyone, but a few that have remained with me and come to mind immediately include [Emily Ballou](#), who came on shortly after [The Darwin Poems](#) were published for the second time, and something about her resonated with me – not just because I loved the book, which I did, but because she had a quality – even a bit ditzy – which was very down-to-earth and appealing. I also am partial to the face-to-face interviews as there are nuances you can't get on the phone – the eye contact, the subtleties of body language etc. [Ben Okri](#), who I interviewed at the Sydney Writers Festival in 2016, was rather wonderful in this respect – plus I got a hug (can't get that over the phone): I know that's four. Also [you](#) (Carolyn Martinez), which makes five :-).

Many writers are introverts, but we all must market our books. Can you offer any tips on how writers can ensure they're a good interviewee?

Lol – that's a whole course! But in brief, it helps to do your homework – know your interviewer and their style (listen to their shows for a bit so you can come in with that knowledge). Always bring your book and be prepared to talk about it – so have a log-line or 'elevator speech' overview ready. Once you're in the conversation, treat the interviewer as if they are a good friend – so respond to their questions with warmth (even if you don't like the question), and respond candidly, openly and feel free to meander a bit. The

listeners want to get to know you. The worst interviewee is either hostile or non-communicative. I've never had the former, but I have, once or twice, had an interviewee who basically responded with one word answers. I couldn't use the interview.

How do authors go about having their book reviewed by Compulsive Reader? I imagine you get far more requests than you can manage.

I'm afraid I do get far more review pitches than I can handle – I only have a small, busy volunteer team and our reviews tend to be pretty thorough as you say – I won't publish a review that just skims the surface, so they take time which limits how many we can do. We publish guidelines on the site (under submissions) and basically the process is to send a few paragraphs of synopsis. A few puffs or existing review blurbs doesn't hurt either. The query should be professional – no typos, really clear writing (sometimes I don't even know what a person is asking for), with the right blend of familiar and professional. They shouldn't beg! (it happens a lot).

Nor should they tell me how much work went into the writing of the book, how long it took, that it was self-published (we don't mind at all, but set up a company and treat your book like a publisher would!), or that you are new at this and hoping to get some feedback (there are places that do that). Don't send the book until I ask for it! Do include a nice looking .pdf press sheet with any relevant backstory, a book cover, and the synopsis/blurbs. Most publishers will create this promo sheet for a new book. Don't ask questions that can be easily found by visiting the site. Always visit the site first and know who you're querying.

With your passion being poetry why are you interviewing and reviewing other writers besides poets?

I choose who I want to interview or review based on my reading tastes rather than my own writing. I do actually also write

fiction and nonfiction as well as poetry and I read very widely in a pretty extensive range of genres. Also poetry is a harder sell, so I do get more feels from promoting it than say, from promoting a blockbuster novel that doesn't need help. Compulsive Reader is very much a passion project – it's not a business for me at all – I'm able to please myself creatively without worrying about things like sales, page hits, etc. It is definitely cross-promotional and complementary (and I know I'm a better writer from reading deeply and talking to other writers), and the perks are pretty good, but mostly, it's something I do because I truly love doing it.

Which of your books of poetry is your favourite?



I'm so humbled and moved by reviews I've received – they keep me writing. I think, poetry is such a hard sell, why do it – and then I think of those reviews and think – well, someone (intelligent and wonderful) has been moved. That's enough.

I'm not entirely sure I have a favourite. In terms of sole-authored, full-length collections, there are actually only two books – [Repulsion Thrust](#) and [Unmaking Atoms](#). There are quite a few chapbooks including about 8 collaborations but those are my two big books. Both cover a lot of ground, and explore different ground (though perhaps there are some similarities – the science inspiration, the ecological focus, the mingling of

dark and light), so it's hard to choose one, but If I have to I'll say *Unmaking Atoms* just because it's more recent and as an author you're always trying to go a little further with each book.

Would you care to share with us the proudest moment you've experienced so far in your career?

Maybe, because it was recent, winning the Hunter Writers Centre's Member's Award in the Newcastle Poetry Prize. I know it's not a massive award, but the Newcastle Poetry Prize means a lot to me – I've been entering it for a long time, and I've been a member of the Hunter Writers Centre for a long time too – about 25 years!

What's next for Maggie Ball?

I've got another full-length poetry book ready to go which I'm going to be sending out very soon, and then I'm thinking it's time to go back to the world of fiction for a bit. I have finally decided to move on from my abandoned third novel, and start over.

[Carolyn Martinez](#) *is an author, editor and speaker.*

**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](#).

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.

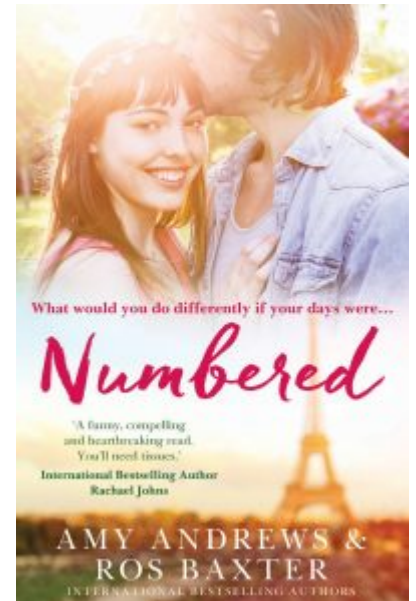
You wrote the novel *Numbered* with your sister. Can you tell us about that process? At any point did you want to strangle one another?

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.

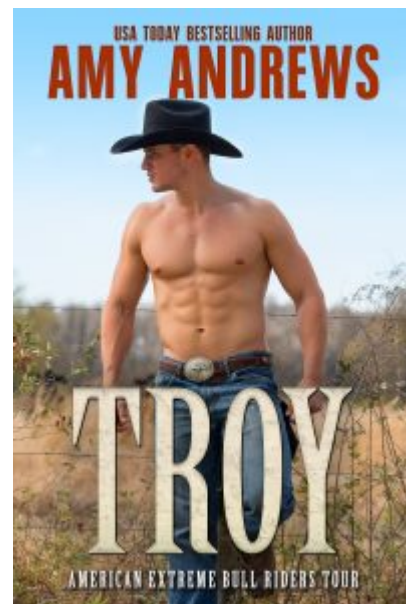
Describe your life as a writer for us. I know you occasionally get whisked to Europe for decadent lunches with publishers. Is that common?

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](#).

Writing in Deep Point of View

Deep Point of View (Deep POV) is a term being discussed by those in the know – agents, publishers, authors – so it's worth taking a moment to understand what it is. Blogs and author posts confused me at first. One said – it's to write 'leaner, meaner, cleaner and faster' but then every example given was longer than the original sentence!

I'm going to share with you what I've come to understand about Deep Point of View. I believe that Deep Point of View is a form of show not tell that strips the author's voice out of the writing to portray scenes from the character's viewpoint. When done right, it establishes immediate rapport with your reader.

There are three keys to writing in Deep POV:

1. Remove unnecessary words.
2. Minimise speech tags.
3. The most important – describing what your character sees/does/feels – through their eyes, not the author's.

REMOVE UNNECESSARY WORDS

Redundant words get in the way of your prose and slow the reader down. Because they don't contribute any forward movement or essential information, you are better off removing them whenever you can.

Some commonly used unnecessary words are: but, then, to the, and, almost, instead, continued, began, back, considered, regarded, wondered, saw, heard, hoped, realised, smelled, watched, touched, felt, knew, decided, just, really, to be, reaching, suddenly, that, you know, up, down, in, out, anyway,

even, quite, rather. (Okay to use in dialogue).

REMOVE SPEECH TAGS

Example

Jim stopped the car in the middle of the road. 'I want to go bungee jumping,' his eyes sparkled with the fervour of knowing.

'Okay, I'll watch but I'm not doing it with you.'

Jim looked into his wife's eyes and smiled, a knowing smile – he would change her mind.

REMOVE THE AUTHOR'S VOICE

Examples –

Deep POV – First Person

I've always been a bad manager of time. It just seems to speed up when I'm not watching, the seconds tick faster than other peoples'. When I skulk in late, I can see it on my team's faces, I can feel it in their stares. I know how they see me; a complete arse, arrogant enough to expect the world to wait, when really, I'm just optimistic with time. (Source [Kylie Kaden](#) author of *Losing Kate* and *Missing You*).

Deep POV – Third Person

She ran to class, and barged through the door. The only thing that mattered was seeing him. Seeing his smile and his amazing face. When she did, she knew; he was her world.

Another example –

This is Not Deep POV:

Cate felt pain shoot up her leg and wondered how long it would take the venom to reach her heart. Onlookers watching the

zookeeper could see she was in trouble. A quick-thinking bystander called an ambulance, while another ran to the park's entry to raise the alarm. (This is the author describing the scene).

This is Deep POV:

Pain shot up her leg. Her hands clamped around her thigh and a groan burst from her mouth. The poison burned an insidious path towards her heart. Her eyes widened, pupils dilated. *She needed an ambulance. Now.*

(This is the character's view. It's what's happening to her body as it happens, and then her thoughts as they go through her mind).

Hope I've inspired you to explore writing in Deep POV because one day your editor might read your manuscript and reply 'love it, but could you re-write your whole book in Deep Point of View please'.

Carolyn Martinez is the author of [Finding Love Again](#), and [Inspiring IVF Stories](#).

Writer's Block

I've heard countless people say, 'I'm going to write a book one day' or 'I can only write when I'm inspired.' I'm one of those people who used to speak in a similar vein. My internal dialogue was, 'I'm going to pay off my house and then give up work and then I'll have time to write books.'



I'm now supporting myself as a full-time writer, but my earlier internal dialogue had nothing to do with me being in this position. In fact, had I stayed on that path, there's no way I'd be a writer now. You see, once I became financially independent, I had kids – time-consuming kids. There is always something in life that'll take you away from your writing if you allow it.

The change for me happened when I read Stephen King's book, 'On Writing'. In it, he says, 'I only write when I'm inspired, and I make sure I'm inspired at 9am every week day.'

If you want to be a writer you have to treat it like a job and give it priority. Otherwise, it'll never happen. I'm not telling you to immediately go out and quit your day job – we all have bills to pay. However, if you're serious about writing a book now, you can set yourself a goal to write 5,000 words a week. That's 1,000 words every week-day, and that's not unrealistic. If you do this, in 17 weeks you'll have written your first draft of an 85,000-word book. Chunk your book down like this into small, achievable goals and before you know it, you'll be there. For most people who haven't had time to write, I say set a goal of 500 words per week, and in two years you'll have a first draft of a book. Some weeks you'll write more. So long as you always write at least 500 words you're moving towards your goal.

Of course, there's more to it. You need to know how to write and if you haven't yet explored your craft and refined your skills, then make sure you do. There are plenty of courses,

writing groups, online forums – immerse yourself in them. Every learning activity you involve yourself in will teach you something new. Act like a writer, live the life of a writer, immerse yourself in the world of writing, and you'll be a writer. I go to a published authors group once a month – Brisbane Book Authors – and also go to writing forums, sessions, and festivals whenever I can. One of the best festivals I've ever been to is [Newcastle Writers Festival](#).

Writing a novel length piece of work is like a home loan – immensely overwhelming if you focus on the end game. Break it down into one step at a time, and it's much more manageable. Find what works for you. In my case, I'm a journalist. For 20 years I kept telling everyone I was going to write a book, but every time I started it turned into a 2,000-word short story. There were some fairly good short stories to come out of it, but it was a recurring pattern for me. 85,000 words is a long time to sit with a character. Eventually, I stopped and considered what I was good at. For me, I was good at 5,000-word feature articles. I wrote them every week for work. So for my first book, '[Inspiring IVF Stories](#)', I interviewed men and women all over Australia and every chapter in the book is, in essence, a 5,000-word feature article. Each chapter is a complete story of someone's IVF experience. I put 12 such feature articles together and turned it into a book.

Once I'd written one 85,000-word book, I knew I could do it. I then started research for my next non-fiction book, '[Finding Love Again](#),' and now I've just finished the first draft of my personal dream goal – to write a fiction novel.

Once I read Stephen King's philosophy and my self-talk changed, it all became quite do-able. Thanks Mr King!

Remember, if 1,000 words, 5 days a week isn't achievable for you right now, don't sweat it. Choose what's do-able for you – every writer no matter how time poor could do at least 500 words a week. Do you think you could do 1,000 words a week consistently? Give it a crack.

Carolyn Martinez is an author and editor. She likes good music, good wine and good company. Her latest pursuit to keep the creative vibes alive is learning Egyptian drumming.