

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 50th 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](#).