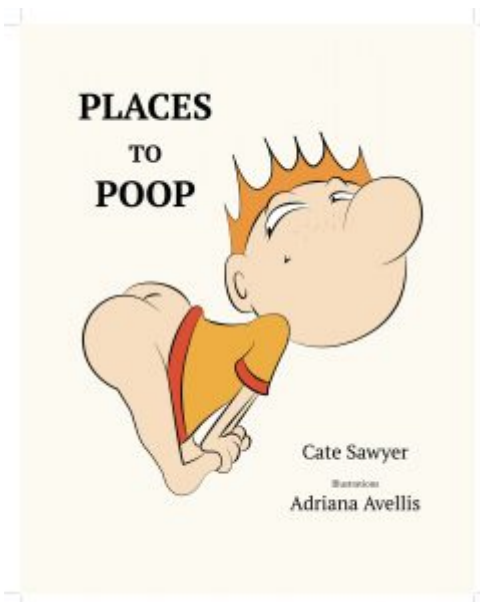


Breaking into the Industry from an Illustrator's Perspective

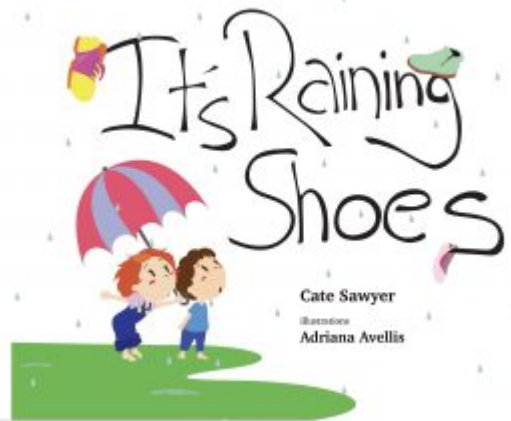
Illustrator Adriana Avellis has partnered with Children's Book Author Cate Sawyer to release *Places to Poop*, *It's Raining Shoes*, *The Umbilical Family*, and *Discombobulated*. As a contemporary, new, vibrant illustrator I thought you'd be interested to hear more about her and how she broke into the exclusive industry.



You studied at Newcastle University in NSW. Did your connection with the university play any part in you getting your breakthrough to publication?

My Bachelor Degree in Visual Communication Design helped me build the foundations of my style and personal confidence about being an illustrator. I had many wonderful tutors who encouraged us to not be afraid to get out there, and that was what motivated me to contact Hawkeye Publishing and brought me to right now. I originally contacted Hawkeye asking if I could do an internship with them. They weren't able to accommodate that, but they did connect me with Cate Sawyer and we ended up working together.

You went on to study at the London College of Art. Tell us about that.



University of Newcastle was really a place for me to begin to find my voice as an artist. I learnt about foundations, the elements necessary to construct a design, and understand the meaning behind the construction.

I found, after I went into the field and began practising and creating, that I was restless to continue to learn. The reason for my studying the Diploma of Illustration through the London Art College, was to work on my skills specifically as an illustrator. I learned more illustration focused techniques, including colour palette, character design, composition, editorial design, sequential design, etc.

The reason I decided to further my studies is so I could not only build my portfolio, but to challenge myself. Studying illustration isn't just the creative aspect – it's understanding deadlines, time management, working to a brief and collaborating with clients. Both of my courses of study have been exceptionally beneficial to my career.

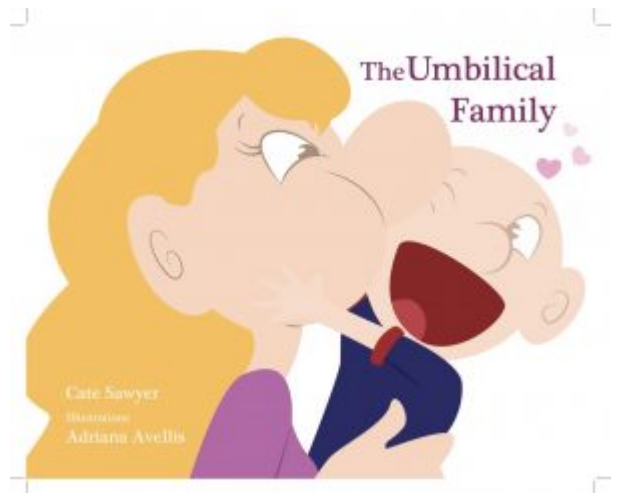
How hard is it for new graduates to break into illustrating?



I found it quite difficult. The creative world is very competitive and there are so many different branches to choose. Initially, I applied for a lot of design jobs, mostly entry level, however I always managed to miss the mark just slightly with what they required from me.

I also contacted publishing houses, hoping (in my young, enthusiastic mind) that someone would give me a push in the right direction. I sent emails out and said I was an illustrator wanting to work in the publishing world and wanting advice on how I could do that. It was pretty brutal when no one got back to me (wiser and older me now understands the processes). I tried to think of other avenues, and when I finally got a response – even though it wasn't exactly the response I was looking for, I ran with it. It takes thick skin, patience and hard work to be in this industry, and for graduates, they just have to be smart and find out different ways they can break in.

What do you enjoy most about illustrating?



It makes me happy. I have been drawing since I was very young, and when I was seven, I decided that I was going to work as a Disney artist. The way the creative team designed these animations that made me feel so much was astounding and filled me with wonder. When I draw, I love the different reactions I get from people, most of the cartoons/illustrations I create are designed to make people laugh. The ability to make someone happy and laugh is beautiful.

What do you enjoy least?

Having creative blocks. They are the absolute worst. Some days I am absolutely fine, the ideas flow and everything is perfect, I could draw from when I wake up to when I go to bed. But those blocks can sometimes hit me for days... and days. When I'm blocked, whatever I create just doesn't look right, I have an idea in my head but I just can't execute it.

Why release 4 books at once?

It's a good idea to establish a rich trail of work. Breaking into the industry with one book is like going to battle with slingshot while everyone else has machine guns. Releasing all four gives variety to our audience, gives them the opportunity to get to know us.

What made you decide to work with Cate Sawyer?

When I received her response to my email asking to meet because she was looking for an illustrator to create some children's books with her, I was ecstatic. I'm pretty sure I still have it somewhere.

The moment I met Cate I knew we would get along. She was friendly and enthusiastic about my artwork (which was the greatest thing ever for me, being new to the industry). Working with someone so established with such a wealth of knowledge and experience has been incredible. Cate encourages me and works with me as equals.

How long has it taken in between meeting the author, and the books going on sale? What was involved in the process?

Three years. Three years with planning, getting side tracked, re-planning, writing, designing, scrapping ideas, creating new ones and finally reaching our goal.

What are your personal favourite children's picture books?

I've always been in love with the *Winnie the Pooh* books – E.H Shepard's illustrations are so beautiful and the stories are something today I feel nostalgic about.

Another is the Dr. Seuss books. I cannot even count how many times I read the *Fox in Socks* as a kid. That book is at my parent's house in absolute tatters because myself and my brother and sister read it so much.

My favourite children's book of all time, however, has to be *Little Moebie* by Martin Waddell, Illustrated by Jill Barton. The illustrations were so soft and playful, and worked in so well with the story.

Which illustrators have most informed your own artistic development, and why?

There are a lot of influences around and I can't say it's just specific to illustrators. An Illustrator I do admire and

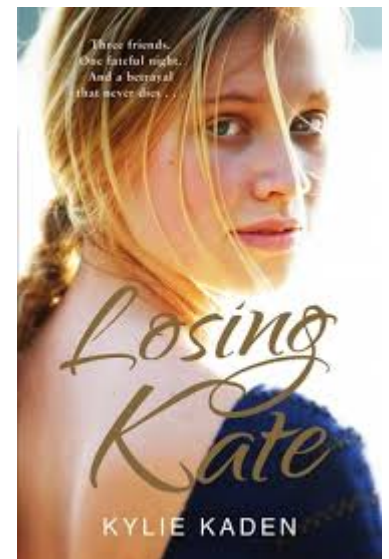
follow is Tim Von Rueden, an independent artist. Tim's artwork has such detail and a mixture of semi-realistic and stylised work, he is an incredible artist. Mostly, I look at the work of Disney animators. I could look at my portfolio and see a lot of influence there. I learnt to draw drawing Disney characters.

What's next for [Adriana Avellis](#)?

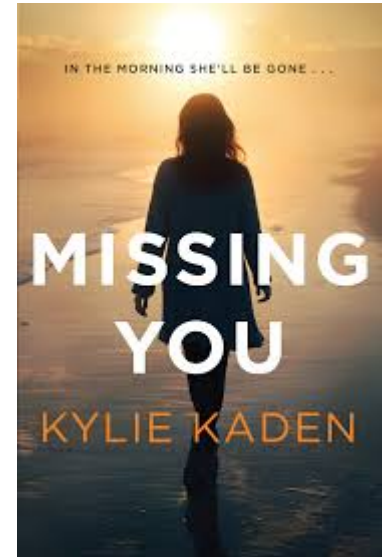
I still have a day job – my artwork is not yet providing a full time income, however, I am working on a lovely new book with Cate Sawyer, some exciting personal art projects on the go, and the usual client work. I am now receiving more author approaches; which is exciting.

Interview by [Carolyn Martinez](#), Author, Editor & Guest Speaker.

Finding Your Authorly Voice



One of my favourite authors is Kylie Kaden because she writes a damn good character driven novel – my favourite kind. Her characters resonate with me; I love the exquisite way their layers unravel during the juicy situations she places them in. Kylie has two bestsellers, and her third novel is due for release in August 2019. I ran into her at a recent writers' event (have I mentioned lately how important it is for all writers to get out from behind



their desks and network?), so I took the opportunity to pose a question to her that I'm often asked by writers usually grappling with their first novel – how does a writer find their voice; is it a formulaic process? When I'm asked this question, people will rattle off the name of their favourite author and mention that by the time they've read six or seven of their novels they all start to sound similar.

Kylie's three novels in, not six or seven, but I do like her response:

'Having *winged* my first book (and most of my second), I feel a tad unqualified to talk about finding a writer's voice. It sounds hard. Like a windswept, uphill adventure involving a hip-flask and walking stick. But I travelled no such voyage.

For me, writing is an unconscious, gut instinct most of the time. In fact, my throat still tightens a squidge every time I say 'I'm a writer', fearful that alarms will sound, people will point and shout 'she has no business calling herself that'. Suffice to say finding my voice was a short and flukey journey.

'My first attempt at writing (mostly for sanity-preservation reasons whilst on mat leave) was found on the slush pile at Random House about a year after I started. I was gobsmacked. *Losing Kate* then launched in April. But it wasn't until they accepted my second (*Missing You*, released April 2015) that I

realised I just might be doing something right, and perhaps it was my ignorance of all rules that made me distinct. My third, *The Day The Lies Began*, is out August 2019 – and only now am I feeling legit.

‘Many ingredients go into writing. Your style is the result of the decisions you make at the word level. Tone and word-appropriateness are dictated by audience and purpose – the odd ‘f’ bomb may be considered acceptable by many in a work of contemporary fiction, but entirely taboo in a professional or technical piece. But the all-important ‘voice’ is the relationship you have with your reader. What comes through about *you*. What makes the work distinct. Like the core of the onion after all the layers are pulled away. So how can that be anything but raw, essentially you?

‘So, I’ve come to believe ‘voice’ should take the least effort. Hone your craft, consider structure and pace, and edit till your eyes twitch. But voice? It’s within you. It’s organic. It’s the one thing most susceptible to being ‘lost in translation’. Kind of like soul. The way I see it novels are a marathon not a sprint and to remain consistent (for a hundred thousand words or so) I can’t be thinking too hard about the personality behind each word. I need to churn them out, work that cursor across those pesky blank lines without falling out of character.

‘One of the great things about my editor is her willingness to leave personality on the page. Genre conventions are one thing, but no one wants to read a contrived, formulaic, well-rehearsed act, or a watered-down version of the writers-favourite-author. Don’t try to please everyone – readers yearn for honesty. Authenticity. A different spin on the well-trodden plot; the quirky turn of phrase, the off-beat observation, the slightly-insane interpretation of a common situation. I feel these little nuances make fiction shine.

‘In short, I believe the advice your mother dished out on your

first nervous day of school, 'just be yourself,' is just as apt when it comes to writing. If it's not working, you may just be trying too hard.'

Kylie's words resonate. I agree – there's a fine line between trying too hard and not trying enough. For sure, perfect your craft – you must learn the craft of writing – but don't neutralise your voice in the honing of your craft.

Kylie is presenting at Arana Hills Library from 6pm – 7:30pm on Tuesday 23rd October on 'Creative Writing Basics'. [Bookings required](#).

If you haven't already read *Losing Kate* and *Missing You*, I highly recommend you do so. Not only are they riveting reads, they're great case studies in character writing.

Publicity ... The Necessary Evil

It's the bane of nearly every author with whom I speak. We just want to write, but alas we must publicise, and most horridly of all – often in front of a crowd.



This week I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Tiana Templeman, lecturer from the Queensland University of Technology, award-winning freelance journalist, author and media industry academic who delivers courses for writers' centres, corporates and libraries. She has delivered 'Working with the Media' courses for Tourism & Events Queensland and teaches Feature Writing at the Queensland University of Technology. We secured her for a session with Brisbane Book Authors and it was full of specific, relevant information. I liked the detail she provided; she doesn't speak in overarching concepts, she gives solid, concrete tasks writers can take on immediately. In fact, I'd even go so far as saying that after hearing her speak I became excited about my upcoming publicity efforts ... perhaps publicity is not so evil after all.

So I hit her up with a few questions with you in mind.

What should authors keep in mind when approaching media to promote their books?

It's important to think about the publication they're approaching and what the readers at that publication are interested in. This is what drives editorial decisions so authors need to present their work in a way that will appeal to the readership.

What should be included in a media release, and how long should it be?

One page is perfect. Ideally, it should contain a paragraph up front drawing on any central themes in the book which will resonate with readers, followed by a brief synopsis and something interesting about the author. Contact details and a link to an online image library should also be included. It can be annoying when large attachments clog up an inbox, however, on the flipside a journalist may need access to the images immediately if they're filling a last-minute space in a newspaper. A link to an online image library solves both of

these issues.

Does a media release stand alone, or is it the body of the email that has to grab a journalist's attention?

A media release will stand alone but the biggest challenge is often getting the journalist to read it when they're busy. For this reason, it's a good idea to include a couple of paragraphs in the email introducing the central themes in the book, the story and the writer. It's fine to show a bit of personality in the email as long as it remains professional.

How do we know to whom to pitch our particular story?

Research, research, research. Keep an eye on the arts pages of newspapers and magazines, look for online sites that promote authors, and see which outlets are running reviews or even snippets with a small blurb and cover photo. The local library is a great place to find a wide range of newspapers and magazines which can be reviewed for possible coverage opportunities at no charge.

What is the lead-time for approaching magazines, newspapers and radio with a story idea?

It varies depending on the publication but a good rule of thumb is 6 months for glossy magazines, one month for weekend newspapers, one or two weeks for dailies and the same for radio.

What are the common mistakes authors make when approaching media?

Definitely sending out mass press releases to journalists without checking if the journalist writes about books and authors. Whether a journalist is a staff writer working at a newspaper or a freelancer, they generally have areas they specialise in. For example, I love books but write about food and travel. Even if I get an amazing press release from an

author, it isn't something I would write about as I don't have editorial contacts in this area.

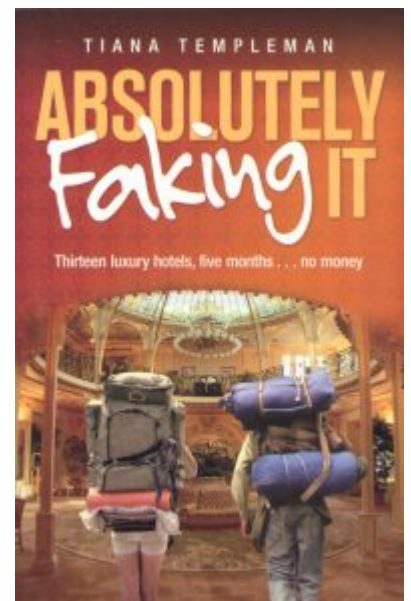
How should an author prepare for an interview to be an engaging interviewee?

The most important thing to remember is the interviewer probably hasn't read your book, especially if it hasn't come out yet. Think about what questions they might ask – your introduction email and media release will help drive these – and have some anecdotes ready to go. Keep them short and sharp and don't limit yourself to the book itself. A quick, funny or poignant story about the writing process or a story behind the story can be interesting and make your interview come across as less of a sales pitch. Also, don't forget your aim is to get people to buy your book, so don't give away all those juicy plot twists!

What's next for you – what are you currently working on?

I'm heading overseas on assignment for the NZ Herald and also redesigning my website. One promises to be much more fun than the other!

Tiana's book *Absolutely Faking It* has nothing to do with publicity – in author terms, she's a travel writer. Although, I have to say, I think *Absolutely Faking It* would be a great title for a book on publicity for introverts! If you're interested in securing Tiana as a speaker or copywriter you can find her [here](#). If you're like Tiana and travel means hiking boots and hostels – you might like reading [Absolutely Faking It](#).



If you're someone we need to feature on our writers blog, contact [Carolyn Martinez](#) and convince us why.

Sydney as a Choice Setting in the Words of Patricia Leslie

Patricia Leslie is an Australian author with a passion for combining history, fantasy, and action into stories that nudge at the boundaries of reality. Her latest novel is *Keeper of the Way*, published by Odyssey Books and distributed by Novella Books. Our Q&A delves into her authorly life and process.



What have you learned about being an author, on the way to releasing your third book, *Keeper of the Way*?

Resilience, persistence, faith, and patience.

Resilience through finding strength after apparent failure: I learned not to take rejections personally, but to feel I'd made headway if I received something other than a form "not for us" note. After all, there are plenty of now famous authors out there who had to pay their dues and collect their fair share of rejection slips. Don't get me wrong. I wanted to give up a few times along the way; shoved my manuscripts in the metaphorical bottom-drawer in frustration, and found other things to do. But the ideas still came. Stories created themselves in my head and before long I'd be back at it,

either dusting off the finished manuscript or bashing out something new. That is how I also learned persistence.

Faith: I took to heart something John Steinbeck once wrote to a friend about how he still felt that one day someone would realise that he was an imposter: "... the haunting thought comes that perhaps I have been kidding myself all these years, myself and other people – that I have nothing to say or no art in saying nothing." I figured that if the great John Steinbeck felt that way, had that lack of confidence in himself, then who am I to deny those similar feelings in myself.

Patience: The other thing I've learned is that this is a long game. I've gone from strength to strength in my writing, in my research, in my ability to sift through the ideas to find the hidden gems, and in coming to terms with fear. I've done it at my own pace and within the boundaries of what I can handle in terms of stress and pressure. Writing and all it entails isn't done in a bubble. Competing demands must be taken into account.

For the uninitiated, what is urban fantasy?

I think of myself as a writer of speculative fiction, but that is usually too generalised a description. I'm fascinated by the nuggets of information hidden away in history books and archives, most often about women. The sort of thing that isn't well known. I also work from the viewpoint that history, if you go back far enough, reaches a point where it slips into mythology. I've read widely enough to make connections between the history/myths of different cultures. For instance, most cultures were once more women-focussed than currently. The femaleness of their beliefs have been pushed underground or subverted. This is common enough knowledge, but the lengths and machinations that have been taken to hide history are quite often astounding. If you're not much of a reader you might never realise that women, historically, did anything more than keep house and have babies. And this is just one

area of neglect. The same can be said for indigenous histories (any country, any time period), and religious beliefs.

The term urban fantasy, I feel, refers to fantasy fiction set in a realistic urban setting without any elves and dragons (high fantasy). Magic realism would have strong links to urban fantasy as well.

In [*Keeper of the Way*](#), I blend a real mystery (the destruction of Sydney's Garden Palace) with magic and mythology. Magic has a strong hold on our imagination and there are more people than might like to admit who instinctually assign magical reasoning to unexplainable events.

Why set all your books in Sydney?

Sydney's history is really interesting and easy for me to research. It's where I live and I know it reasonably well. There's also a mystery around the Sydney Basin's past that is only coming to the surface now as we learn more about the First Peoples and acknowledge their presence and impact on the area before and during European occupation. I hint a little at this in *Keeper of the Way*. We're also maturing enough (most of us) to realise that what we've learned and been told, what's been mentioned in newspapers and books in the past, only scratches the surface of real life.

Readers I've talked to have been pleasantly surprised that the settings are Australian. Australian readers can relate to the locations and social history of the times in a way they can't with stories set on the other side of the world.

What did you learn about writing process/technique from your first novel?

1. That revision never stops.
2. There's nearly always a better way to say or describe something.
3. No matter how many times you read the words, sneaky

typos and clunky phrasing can be found by fresh eyes (usually someone else's fresh eyes).

What did you learn from your second?

1. That I'm not too bad at this writing caper. Not perfect mind you, but not too bad. There's always room for improvement.
2. That faith and confidence come from within and cannot be relied upon from external sources.

Are you a full-time author?

Unfortunately not. I'm a full time creative – I'm always thinking about stories, ideas, words, ways to promote myself, but I haven't reached the stage where I can quit the day-job and concentrate solely on writing. It slows everything down but that's okay. This is a long game and my plan takes that into account.

What are your favourite and least favourite marketing activities associated with being an author? Why?

I love and hate social media. It's addictive and, once you become hooked on the quick rewards, not getting instant gratification is depressing. I enjoy it, but it's distracting and can take up a lot of time. It can be highly educational, puts you in touch with areas, aspects of life you might not experience otherwise and is fake, shallow, and unreal at the same time. It makes you feel great one minute and inadequate the next. Such a contradiction!

Do you attend writing festivals?

I've appeared at the Sutherland Shire Writers Festival and Sydney Book Expo. I'm totally up for other festivals.

Describe your relationship with your editor.

My editor and publisher are one and the same person. We have a

good working relationship. She's considerate of her authors' sensitivities (and insecurities). Her editing suggestions are usually spot on but she's also open to negotiation if there's a good reason.

What are your favourite author networking events?

I haven't really been to any to tell you the truth. Those I've come across tend to be during the day when I'm at work. If anyone knows of some in Sydney after business hours, drop me a line.

How are you published, and what have been the major benefits and drawbacks of this?

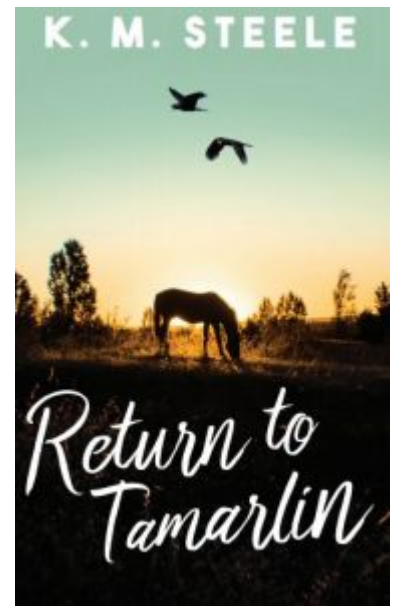
Odyssey Books is a Small press. It's great because I have a direct line to the publisher who is supportive of all her authors and encourages them to interact and seek advice from each other. We call ourselves, The Oddies. It's a great group of people. The drawbacks of being with a small press are the restricted resources for marketing and general reach. However, we're all on this journey together. Odyssey has a great future.

We're all excited about this next question; what's next for Patricia Leslie?

Finish the Crossing the Line series (two more books) and then get moving on a story I've had on the back burner for years (set in Ancient Gaul). I'd also like to write more short stories. I have a bunch of ideas that didn't make it into Keeper of the Way.

K M Steele and Why All Authors Should Go Regional

K M Steele is an Australian author who loves a good plot and a great sentence. She recently published her debut novel, [*Return to Tamarlin*](#). It started out as a diarised account of fictional family events experienced by two sisters, because she was fascinated by the way siblings can remember the same events so differently.



Author Q&A

Why do readers connect with the story?

A good percentage of my readers are Australian and female – readers who enjoy two strong female characters. The novel is also enjoying a strong readership in Western NSW where it is set – exploring the landscape and the difficulties of rural life.

What is your professional background?

I have a PhD in English (Creative Writing/ Australian Literature). *Return to Tamarlin* was part of my final thesis. I was writing and submitting fiction for many years before I started my PhD, but the discipline of completing a thesis that was half theoretical exegesis and half creative writing certainly helped to hone my craft. I currently write in between a full-time day job, teaching creative writing, and marketing my novel.

Tell us about your process – are you a plotter or a winger?

I often start with a plot, but I rarely stick to it. I usually

have a very strong beginning and ending – it is the bit in the middle that takes time to evolve. I tend to write my first draft at a gallop. I want the bones of the story there, and I'm always impatient to get to the end. Once I have the story down, I go back and start layering. That's when I'll add plot twists, and little idiosyncrasies in characters or communities, and start to explore certain themes within the novel in more depth. The first draft can be painful because it often feels like I have to force the story from one end to the other. The layering is the fun, creative part.

What have been the hardest lessons you've learned as a writer?

Patience. I never had much and I still have to work on it, but your entire life as a writer is consumed by waiting, and that takes patience. Waiting for ideas, waiting for replies on submissions, waiting for competition results, waiting for proofs – it doesn't matter where you are in your career as a writer, you still have to wait!

Do you enjoy the promotional side of being an author?

Yes, and no. I enjoy meeting people face-to-face, and doing readings and talks. I enjoy answering questions, and talking about the process behind the writing. However, marketing the novel and selling my author brand, while necessary, is not quite as easy and very time consuming.

What's been the most extraordinary 'meeting a fan' experience you've had?

I just finished a mini book tour to Lightning Ridge, Walgett and Coonabarabran. I was amazed at how much everyone appreciated the fact that I'd travelled all the way out there to read to them in person. It proves that no amount of digital interaction is as good as a real live author.

What's next for K M Steele?

I'm currently writing *Tiny's World*, a novel set in Mackay in the 1980s. I'm trying to recapture the zeitgeist of the time and having plenty of fun in the process.

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

Kylie Chan – On Writing, Publishing and Marketing

From Taoist immortals to distant galaxies, Author Kylie Chan writes Fantasy based on Chinese mythology. She's had 10 novels published by Harper-Collins, and 3 novellas self-published. In a hybrid mix, her manga/text combined novel 'Small Shen' (manga by Queenie Chan) was published in Australia by Harper-Collins and self-published in the US and UK with Ingram Spark. That's a lot of experience all wrapped up in one author so of course I was quick to pick her brain for your benefit.

Who are your readers and why do they connect with your books?

I have readers from thirteen to ninety. I'm approached by children at conventions who I feel are far too young to be reading my stuff, but many of them are extremely mature for their age! One of the best things that happened was at a signing, and the bookstore manager, her mother, and her grandmother all came to get the books signed. Her grandmother was in her nineties and was a huge fan of the 'White Tiger'.

What's your professional background?

For most of my life I've been a specialist in information technology. I started out in the early eighties working on mainframes in the Bureau of Statistics in Canberra. PC's hadn't even been invented then, and when they appeared I raced to learn about this more portable and accessible technology. I've worked as a trainer, and in Hong Kong I was a consultant and expert in business intelligence systems. When I returned to Australia I had to start from the bottom again (for the

third time) and just couldn't face it. I decided to write a best-seller instead. I'm a full-time author now.

In terms of process, are you a plotter or do you wing it?

I do both: I have a big story arc idea in my head, and then release my characters into the world and gently steer them in the direction I want them to go. Sometimes they refuse.

What are the hardest lessons you've learned as a writer?

That the income isn't nearly as much as I thought it would be. I would be making far more as an IT consultant. But writing gives me freedom and happiness that I wouldn't give up for anything!

Do you enjoy the promotional side of being an author?

I love it! I love getting out and meeting the fans, and talking to everybody. Catching up with my peers at events is the best thing ever. Going to conventions is super fun, I adore the cosplay and because I have a nerdy background I can relate to my fellow nerds!

What marketing channels are worthwhile for authors, and what's over-rated?

'Building your author platform' is seriously over-rated. It's more important to produce quality stories. Having a terrific marketing effort and online presence will only work ONCE if your books aren't fun to read or poorly edited; your readers will go to your work, see that it's of poor quality, and never return. They'll tell their friends, too. The biggest reason people buy books is because someone they trust has told them the book is good. No amount of the author telling them to buy their stuff will work (more than once).

What's been the most extraordinary 'meeting a fan' experience you've had?

This happened at an Oz ComicCon last year.

Young woman: 'You have thirty seconds to convince me why I should buy your books, with ten seconds to think about it.'

Starting... now.'

Me: 'No.'

Her: (shocked)

Me: 'They stand on their own merit. If you don't want them, that's fine.'

(She just went away.)

Another one:

Young man: 'I don't read books, I've never read a book, and I won't read yours. If I did read, why should I read these ones?'

Oh! I have another one! This happened at Angus and Robertson in Post Office Square a few years ago, when I was just starting out. I was doing a signing with Marianne de Pierres.

Older woman: 'Oh you're signing your books? What are they about?'

Marianne: 'Mine are space opera science fiction.'

Me: 'Mine are fantasy based on Chinese mythology.'

Woman: 'So they're fiction?'

Us: 'Yes.'

Woman: 'Oh, I'm far too intelligent to read fiction.' (Sticks her nose in the air and walks past us into the store.)

(Marianne and I still laugh at that one)

What's next for [Kylie Chan](#)?

I'm busy working on the next 'Dragon Empire' book. I have a few workshops coming up that I'm presenting at the Queensland Writers Centre: one of them will be 'self-publishing 101' where I go through the basics. I'm appearing at Byron Writers Festival in August to talk about self-publishing with Ingram Spark. I'm giving a workshop at the Rainforest Writers Retreat. Oh, and I have an idea for a new story based in the 'Dark Heavens' universe!

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

Examining Life Under a Different Lens – Fantasy

Author Bernadette Rowley

‘All children, except one, grow up.’ That’s the opening line in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, and that’s the brilliance of fantasy writers – they grab our attention, drawing us into scenes that examine life through a different lens, under different rules.

Author Q&A:

What draws you to writing Fantasy Romance?

First of all, I love fantasy so that comes first. I spent decades living in the fantasy worlds of Feist, Tolkien, Eddings and Robert Jordan to name but a few. When I was challenged by my mentor, Louise Cusack, to write a romance, I naturally chose the fantasy genre. *Princess Avenger* was that romance and from there, my world of Thorius has given me seven other stories so far. What could be better than ‘happily ever after’ with a big serve of magic?

Why do you think your characters resonate so well with readers?

That’s lovely of you to say that, Carolyn. I’d like to think readers can relate to the faults and failings in my characters as well as their heroic qualities. I try to get to know the characters before I start writing and some really do capture my imagination and take on more of a life of their own- most do actually. Princess Alecia from [Princess Avenger](#) is a favourite and shares much of my idealism from my younger days.

There are others like Lady Katrine Aranati from [The Master and the Sorceress](#) (soon to be released) who were secondary characters in previous books and demanded a story of their own.

Are there any rules you have to follow to ensure fantasy characters are believable and relatable?

Not rules as such. It's the same for any character. The author has to know and understand the character to be able to portray them realistically and consistently. Before I start writing, I brainstorm each main character from physical characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, greatest loves/hates, ambitions, family structure they grew up in, place in family, their deeply held beliefs and much more. I get a sense of their experiences leading up to the start of their written story. The hero and heroine may be larger than life but they still have the same basic flaws and failings as the reader. It's about placing challenges in front of them and having them solve them in an authentic way, but perhaps with magic or even in another form.

What's the difference between an expertly written character that draws the reader in, and a poorly written character that readers don't connect with?

Once I know the character, I can write deep in that head space. As I'm writing, I become the character and express what the heroine is feeling/thinking in the moment. This deep point of view allows the character to get their hooks into the reader and gives them a deeper experience. Of course my editor is such a help in drawing to my attention anything that isn't consistent or believable for a particular character.

What are the Top 3 Best and the Top 3 Worst features of being a writer?

Editing is my favourite part of being an author. I love seeing the prose take shape into something I can be really proud of. The first glimpse of a new cover is such a buzz. Receiving

praise from a reader who has enjoyed your book is totally wonderful.

Balancing that, the worse features would be the struggle to get your work out there (marketing), the poor monetary return and self-promotion which is so difficult for introverts- which most authors are.

Would you care to share with us your proudest moment in your writing career, and perhaps also a low-light moment for perspective?

I was really proud when Penguin Australia offered to publish Princess Avenger. It had taken six years of deliberate focus on writing to be published to get to that point. Penguin published [The Lady's Choice](#) as my second book as well and I was over the moon. Then they declined further books. That was probably the lowest point. I knew I could self-publish but I wanted to have books with a major publisher as well. I pitched to Pan Macmillan Australia who offered me a two book contract- another very high point. [The Lord and the Mermaid](#) and [The Elf King's Lady](#) were born.

Do you have a personal favourite from your booklist?

My favourite is [The Lady's Choice](#). The heroine, Benae, has a very strong relationship with Flaire, her horse, and is also a healer. She can communicate telepathically with Flaire and her healing style is also with her mind. Being a vet, I would love to be able to delve deep into the body and heal with nothing more than the power of thought. I also had a very close relationship with my horse, Captain, when I was a young woman.

[Princess Avenger](#) will always hold a special place in my heart, being my first published work. I love how sassy Alecia is. I also adore shapeshifting hero Vard.

[Princess in Exile](#) was the second book I wrote and continued Alecia's love affair with her dark and dangerous hero. Once I

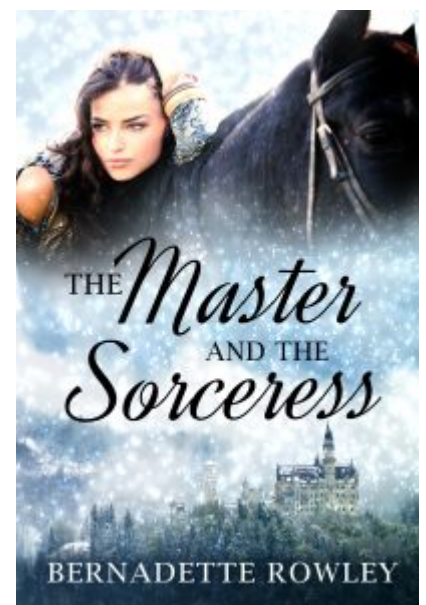
self-published, I was able to bring this story to the world. I'm totally in love with the cover.

[The Lord and the Mermaid](#) is fabulous as it is such an impossible love story. The hero is sailing captain Nikolas and he is so delicious. He shelters Merielle when he finds her washed up on the beach even though he is sworn to hate mermaids.

[The Elf Kings' Lady](#) tells the love story of two secondary characters from *The Lord and the Mermaid*, Alique and Kain. They are also impossible together but they manage to find a way to overcome that. This is another story where my healing background takes centre stage.

[The Lady and the Pirate](#) brings together a pirate hero and a desperate lady smuggler. I love these two so much! Again they beat the odds to find an enduring love. And this book gave birth to *The Master and the Sorceress* which will be released in April 2018. Katrine is the younger sister of Esta, the heroine of *The Lady and the Pirate*, and demanded her own story as only younger siblings can. I love her and I adore the cover of this book!

What's next for Bernadette Rowley?



I have two books for release this year. The first is *The Master and the Sorceress* in April and the second is *Elf*

Princess Warrior. Elf Princess is a spin off from *The Elf King's Lady* and has a dark elven princess as the heroine. I can't wait for you to read this one!

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

Rachel Amphlett – Crime Fiction and Espionage Thriller Author

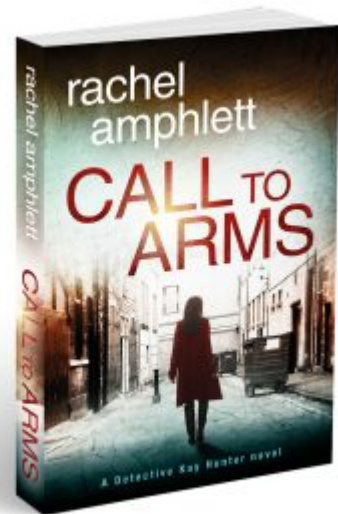
Before turning to writing, Rachel played guitar in bands, worked as a TV and film extra, dabbled in radio as a presenter and freelance producer for the BBC, and worked in publishing as a sub-editor and editorial assistant.

She now wields a pen instead of a plectrum and writes crime fiction and spy novels, including the [Dan Taylor](#) espionage novels and the [Detective Kay Hunter](#) series.

Originally from the UK and currently based in Brisbane, Australia, Rachel cites her writing influences as Michael Connelly, Lee Child, and Robert Ludlum. She's also a huge fan of Peter James, Val McDermid, Robert Crais, Stuart MacBride, and many more.

She's a member of International Thriller Writers and the Crime Writers Association, with the Italian foreign rights for her debut novel, *White Gold* sold to Fanucci Editore's TIMECrime imprint, and the first four books in the Dan Taylor espionage series contracted to Germany's Luzifer Verlag.

Her latest release is [Call to Arms](#). (**Synopsis** – Loyalty has a price. Kay Hunter has survived a vicious attack at the hands of one of the country's most evil serial killers. Returning to work after an enforced absence to recover, she discovers she wasn't the only victim of that investigation. DI Devon Sharp remains suspended from duties, and the team is in turmoil.



Determined to prove herself once more and clear his name, Kay undertakes to solve a cold case that links Sharp to his accuser. But, as she gets closer to the truth, she realises her enquiries could do more harm than good. Torn between protecting her mentor and finding out the truth, the consequences of Kay's enquiries will reach far beyond her new role... *Call to Arms* is a **gripping murder mystery**, and the fifth in the Detective Kay Hunter series).

AUTHOR Q&A

What draws you to writing Crime Fiction and Spy Novels?

That's easy – it's what I was brought up on. Both my parents' and grandparents' bookshelves were teeming with books by the likes of Dick Francis, Ed McBain, Jack Higgins, Alistair McLean, Len Deighton, and Frederick Forsyth, so it was only a matter of time before I headed off down that path.

Why do you think your characters resonate so well with readers?

I'm hoping it's because readers can relate to them, and that I make sure that they're motivated characters – even the bad guy has to have a reason for what he's doing, and if you have a motive for every single person on the stage, then it's easier

to get the reader to empathise with them even if that makes them uncomfortable.

With the Detective Kay Hunter series, I was determined to have someone who didn't have a broken home life – there are enough like that around. Instead, I wanted her to be resilient without being arrogant and gave her somewhere safe to return to after a day's work.

I have a lot of fun writing the various series, and I hope that comes across in the stories as well.

What are the essentials for success on Amazon and the other big depositories?

I think the best things to do to give yourself a head start on any of the retailers' websites is to make sure you have your work professionally edited and get the best book cover you can. Take a look at what other publishers are doing and emulate your cover design to be "on trend" – you can always change it in later years if tastes change.

I ran a series of advice segments about publishing and marketing for ABC Brisbane over the Christmas/New Year break in 2016 with lots of tips and tricks. The show notes for those can be found [here](#).

How big a part have your series – Detective Kay Hunter, English Spy Mysteries, and the Dan Taylor Espionage Thrillers, played in your success?

I think series give readers and me as a writer a better chance to explore character development and to let otherwise "minor" characters their time to shine in the spotlight. Often, I'll get to the end of a new book in a series and think "this person has more to say", and off I go again.

The standalones were fun to write, too though, so I wouldn't discount writing a standalone if that's what you want to do.

After all, if a story gets hold of you, it's not going to let you go until you write it...

What have you been your most rewarding and fruitful marketing experiences?

Building a mailing list has to be number one out of everything I've done – I love hearing from readers, and the members of my Readers Group and launch teams are phenomenal about supporting my writing and helping to spread the word. Some of them have been with me since the beginning, and are from all over the world.

Would you care to share with us your proudest moment in your writing career?

One of the proudest moments was when I was asked by the local Sisters in Crime group to read out an excerpt from my first spy novel at the Brisbane Launch of Stella Rimington's *The Geneva Trap* – she's such an inspiration and has obviously had a very interesting life as the former director of the British Secret Service.

Do you have a personal favourite from your booklist?

I think it's *Look Closer* – that was the standalone novel that gave me the confidence to plan and research the Kay Hunter series.



What's next for Rachel Amphlett?

Well, I'm halfway through writing book six in the Detective Kay Hunter series, so that will keep me busy for a while!

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

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.

Nothing Stock-Standard about this Writer – David Bobis and his alter ego Dean Blake

There is nothing stock standard about writer David Bobis and his alter ego Dean Blake. I'm not going to spoil anything with preamble. I'm awarding him an honorary 'most honest writer' I've interviewed. I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed talking with him.

You're quite diverse in your writing. Describe the projects you work on.

In terms of work that's commercially available, my short story, [Child](#), has been published in a number of anthologies in Singapore and the United States. A special edition of *Child* is also available on Amazon and iBooks for a few cents.

I've published a book of short stories, [Surface Children](#), under a pen name, Dean Blake. It contains stories I'd written as a young adult, stories that I'd give to my friends to read whenever they were bored. It contains stories about love, horror, vanity, stories about my friends themselves.

I'm working on a full-length novel. It's still in its infancy, but it'll be a story about magic and everything that's beautiful and dangerous about it.

Full time, I'm a co-owner of a digital marketing agency, [Studio Culture](#). It's a great job, because I get to help craft brands and stories for a number of different businesses, both in Brisbane and around the world. I also get to work with an amazing, super-creative team.

Besides that, I write for a design magazine called [No Cure Magazine](#), which allows me to interview some of the greatest

artists in the street art / skate / surf scene.

I also publish my short stories on [my blog](#).

As you can probably tell, I don't get much sleep.

Which of your works are you most proud of, and why?

I'm proud of everything I've released to the public. I remember once in uni, a friend of mine was giving his most treasured books to other friends, and I asked him, "How about me? Don't I get a book?" He turned to me and said, "You're too simple for books." One day, when I see him again, I'm going to shove a copy of *Surface Children* up his arse and email him an invoice for it the next day.

Although I'm proud of everything I've done, I'm also ashamed of everything I've done, if that makes any sense. I believe that I should always be improving my craft, and that my newest works should always surpass (and ultimately embarrass) their predecessors.

Which has been the most commercially successful?

Surface Children has been the most commercially successful. As it's my first "book", it's been sold at the higher price point. It's also received the most marketing attention.

How did you choose the pen name Dean Blake? When do you write as David Bobis, and when as Dean Blake?

Back when I was studying, a company paid me to write a blog about the nonsense I'd get up to in my life. As I didn't want potential employers to google "David Bobis" and see a treasure chest of dirt, I opted for a pen name instead that contained my initials – hence "Dean Blake." That blog (now called [Generation End](#)) then developed a bit of a following, so I couldn't exactly let Dean Blake go. Plus, I was becoming quite attached to this alter ego of mine. Someone in a book signing once commented, "You've chosen a really white name." There's

nothing wrong with that, right?

As a general rule, my professional and G rated stuff go under my actual name. The rest belongs to Dean Blake.

Why are you a writer?

Reality can be a turd sometimes. I believe it's my job to help people escape, or live another life, or travel to a distant planet, or laugh, or see things from another perspective, through the stories I write for them. I wrote my first story at the age of six – it was actually a comic about kids who loved to fart, and I gave it to my friends and family so that they could smile a little.

How do you define success as a writer? Are you successful?

I think success as a writer, or success in any aspect of life can be narrowed down to this question: are you happy with what you have? Well, reader, *are you?* Are you happy with what you have?

There is a lot I am grateful for and am proud of, but I have a long way to go. So I would say I'm far from successful. But I suppose you'll never really know how truly successful you are until you reach the end of your life.

What aspects of your personality or background make you the writer you are?

I grew up in the Philippines, where we had to pump water out of our backyard, so all the crazy stuff that happened to me in the past adds a bit of colour to my personality.

Also I'm not a normal person. If you talk to me, I'll probably be smiling and nodding, but deep inside I'll be somewhere else, like in a canyon, or in a drive in cinema, or in a cabin inside the moon or something. Through my writing, I believe I can take people with me, to where my mind goes, and we can go on a few hiking trips.

What's next for David Bobis?

I'll be speaking with a number of authors in Brisbane about how to get published ([link here](#)) so please do come along. I'm also working hard on my next novel, so please subscribe to my mailing list at davidbobis.com to be kept in the loop.

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