

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.