

Interview With Mei Yen Chua by Joanna Penn November, 2008

This interview was carried out by email in November 2008 and subsequently edited for presentation.

Mei Yen Chua is the author of “Brisbane’s Budget Bites 2009” which is a guide to eating interesting multicultural foods on a budget around Brisbane. You can read more at

<http://www.BrisbaneBudgetBites.com.au>

- Mei Yen, please tell us a little about yourself and your book

I moved from Sydney to Brisbane about 4.5 years ago, having lived in very vibrant communities and immersing myself in the food cultures of these places, it was a shock moving to Brisbane. My foodie instincts got the better of me; I saw a need for a cheap eating guide for newly arrived people and locals alike to food around Brisbane. When I first moved to Brisbane, nobody could recommend me places to eat and delis to buy ethnic groceries from. I thought there was definitely a market for this sort of guide. I wish I had this when I first moved to Brisbane! I hope people find Brisbane’s Budget Bites is useful for a guide to eating out on the cheap and for locating ethnic providores and great coffee spots.

- How did you get started in writing? Do you have any training as a writer?

I’d always had an interest in writing – I was a voracious reader as a teenager. I did an undergraduate Arts degree in Japanese and Writing Praxis and went onto finish a postgraduate degree in writing. I’ve also dabbled a bit in writing for performance at university as well. I work as a freelance writer as well for magazines.

- Why are you a writer? Why is it important to write?

I’m not sure why I’m a writer. It’s my most natural mode of expression as I can’t sing or dance or draw so I write. It’s important to express oneself now and again and if the act of writing feels natural and you feel good doing it, why not give it a go.

- What are the best things about being an author? How does it make you feel?

The best thing about being an author is having an audience. I don’t mean that in an egotistical way but there is something fantastic about someone reading your work and being able to take something away, or learning from it.

- What is your process of writing? Do you have a ritual or a certain time of day to write? Is it inspiration or hard work?

Writing is a mixture of inspiration and hard work unfortunately.

- What are your thoughts around the editing and re-writing process? What do you do about the inner critic?

I think editing is important, it’s always good to have someone else look at your work for you – someone whom you trust. I don’t necessarily think that an author is his/her best editor. You need to step away sometimes in order to see the work for what it is and you definitely

Interview With Mei Yen Chua by Joanna Penn November, 2008

don't achieve it by being too close to it. Listening to the inner critic can be debilitating sometimes, and if you can let go of the work, I say let go earlier, rather than later.

- How long did your book take you to write?

About 1 year.

- How did you keep yourself motivated throughout the process?

Thinking about the end result, how it was going to benefit lots of people and businesses. Friends and family definitely helped keep me motivated as well. Keeping busy with other projects also helped maintain a healthy level of interest in the book.

- Are you published by a publisher or are you self-published?

I am self-published.

- What are the pros and cons of being published/self-publishing?

The cons are there lots of aspects to deal with in self-publishing – not only are you the author, researcher, marketing manager, publicist, sales person, financier, distributor and publisher: you've got to overcome the stereotype of the badly produced, amateurish books you sometimes see in libraries and markets. Convincing retailers and readers that your product is just as good as any book published by big, reputable publishers is extremely hard work.

Pros are the immense satisfaction knowing that you've given it a go and succeeded at it. You discover and learn a lot in the process of putting together a book from concept to completion. You discover skills you didn't think you had and build on weak points as you go along. The financial rewards might not be great but the emotional rewards are great and deeply satisfying.

- How did you get testimonials or celebrity endorsements?

I wrote to them and explained my project, those on a similar wave length usually understand the concept and will endorse it after reading sample chapters.

- How are you selling your book? What are your most successful sales channels?

I am selling my book through independent bookshops, franchise bookstores and through the internet.

- Do you use any PR/ marketing? What works best for your book?

Yes, I sent press releases to local newspapers and relevant lifestyle magazines with an interest in food and cooking. I also made up postcards advertising the book and left them in cafes, shops and letter box drops. Word of mouth is also an important marketing tool in spreading news that the book is available.

Interview With Mei Yen Chua by Joanna Penn November, 2008

- What kind of internet sales/marketing are you using?
Minimal online marketing. People are searching through google and finding the website there or they are getting the address off the postcards.
- What did you learn? What would you do differently next time?
More men buy through websites than women. More women buy in person than men – would perhaps come up with a more specific marketing for females next time.
- What are your top 3 tips for new authors?
 1. Believe in your product/ story as you have to be able to talk about it confidently.
 2. Don't believe in people who tell you it's never going to work.
 3. Speak to as many people as you can about your project – don't hard sell too much. If your story is interesting enough, people naturally will want to read about it.
- Writers are avid readers. What is your favourite book at the moment and why?
My current favourite is 'The man who ate the world' by Jay Rayner. It's about the story of a food critic who roams the world in search of the 'perfect meal'. It's hilarious and makes you wonder about the absurd lengths some people go to be seen eating at certain establishments!
- How can people get in touch with you? What are you working on now?
I am currently investigating viability of an updated/new version of BBB for 2010 due to the overwhelming support from this edition. People can get in touch with me by either visiting <http://www.BrisbaneBudgetBites.com.au> or emailing: info@brisbanebudgetbites.com.au



Joanna Penn is an author, speaker and consultant who helps people create their own books.

If you are interested in writing a book, you can get your free workbook at <http://www.HowToBeAnAuthor.com>

Joanna also has coaching programs available at <http://www.TheCreativePenn.com>