

Interview with Author Kylie Welsh by Joanna Penn - October, 2008

Joanna: Hi, everyone! I'm Joanna Penn from <http://www.HowToBeAnAuthor.com>, and today I'm interviewing Kylie Welsh.

Kylie is an author and writer on issues affecting modern Australian women.

Her first book, *"Impertinent Women. Women in pursuit of the extraordinary"*, was published in 2005 by Zeus Publishers in Australia.

She is currently writing her second book, *"Freak or Unique,"* which is a fiction novel.

She is also a freelance writer, and has a blog for Brisbane women, all available at www.kyliewelsh.com.

Good morning, Kylie, how are you? First of all, can you tell us a little about yourself and your books?

Kylie: Well, sure. At the moment I've just moved into an exciting stage in my writing career. Prior to the last twelve months I've been working in the corporate sector and doing writing part-time. Now I'm at a stage where I'm able to write full-time. I've been doing that for the last twelve months.

It has taken some time for that to evolve, but, yes, it's an exciting time. I used to dream about being a full-time writer and now I'm able to do it. I'm doing some copywriting a few days a week and also I'm doing my freelance work around that.

Joanna: That's great.

Kylie: Yeah, it's very good thanks.

Joanna: So tell us a bit about your first book, *"Impertinent Women."*

Kylie: That was published in 2005, as you mentioned, by Zeus, and that was a very exciting project for me to be involved with.

Prior to this, I hadn't really done a lot of writing. I had certainly been involved in writing training courses around self-development and personal effectiveness. That's part of writing but I had not written for publication before.

I started to have a look at women and their relationships and how women were making great advancements in wonderful careers and experiencing financial independence, but many of them weren't experiencing fulfillment in their personal lives. That was my situation as well at the time.

I came up with the idea to start exploring what was going on for modern women in their relationships—what they were looking for now, how their expectations have changed, and that's really how *"Impertinent Women"* evolved.

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It gained momentum straightaway because a lot of people said “I’d love to participate. Interview me. Interview me,” so everyone was very game to talk about what was going with their relationships.

So I had the idea and thought, *Oh, can I really do this?* And part of what made it come to fruition for me was really the opportunity to get other people involved as well. That allowed the momentum to really develop.

Joanna: You mentioned that before your book “*Impertinent Women*,” you didn’t really have any writing experience, so how did you get started? Did you take any training courses? How did you get started in writing?

Kylie: I started more from my passion about the topic than anything else. I saw these changes occurring with women and came up with the idea. I literally just started writing about it. I didn’t, to be honest, really know what I was doing but I was well-read enough to know the basic structure of a book, and how I might be able to expand on certain areas. I really just put pen to paper and started writing what I was thinking and my observations.

The first real step was devising a questionnaire that I could then interview people with. Once I started the interviews, this fueled the book really.

Joanna: So would you recommend non-fiction writers to use interviews with other people as a good framework for their book?

Kylie: I think so—it gives the book more credibility. When you’re talking to different people, it’s not only your opinion.

It takes a while for anyone to establish themselves as an expert or specialist in a field, and certainly when you’re writing your first book, you really need to have, other sources of reference and information rather than just your own.

Joanna: So, how long did that first book take you to write, then?

Kylie: It took me a while, about three part-time - which was a really long time. Because I hadn’t had any writing experience, it took me a little while to develop my confidence. So I did little bits and pieces, and then I’d change it. So yes, it took about three years part-time to do it.

Joanna: Right. And how did you get yourself motivated throughout that process?

Kylie: For me, the area that I was writing about, there was always new information becoming available, so I was always able to keep adding to what I was doing. Also, as I mentioned before, just having other people involved and their passion and commitment was important. That kept it going for me as well.

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Because I loved what I was doing so much, even though it was a long time, I was really enjoying the process. I wasn't putting massive pressure on myself to have it done by a certain time. It was more just exploring the process.

But, obviously, yes, next time around I wouldn't do it that way, but for me that worked at the time.

Joanna: So you just said, though, you wouldn't do it that way again, so what's changed? What will you do differently next time?

Kylie: Well, on reflection, to establish yourself as a writer is a good step initially. When I was going through the publication process, I hadn't really had any writing experience and that was somewhat limiting when approaching publishers.

I think doing some freelance work, posting your articles on the internet, anything like that is really important. It gets your name out there and I think that side of it is important.

Also, it would have been good for me to do a course or training in writing a non-fiction book, or maybe even read something like this that other people have done. I would do more research initially about that process, rather than just going with the flow, which is what I did.

Joanna: You also mentioned that you kept on getting new material. Now this is a big issue with non-fiction. How did you know when you were finished?

Kylie: Indeed, it's very hard to know that. For me, to be honest, it was more just an instinct thing. I thought, *Okay, I've come this far, and yes, that information is going to change probably in the next twelve months again.* I knew I'd spent enough time on it and it was as good as I could do. Then I decided to stop looking around for other information and just concentrate on finishing what I had.

Joanna: What is your process of writing now? Because now you're making a living as an author. Do you have a ritual or a certain time of day to write?

Kylie: I tend to do some writing most days, but that can be any writing. It might be journal writing in the evening before I go to bed. I try and do a little bit each day. I have always preferred to have full days of writing rather than maybe two hours of writing in the morning or afternoon.

I think everyone works differently. For a long time I had to juggle other work around my writing. Then I would have two full days a week that I could devote to writing. Now I work at doing copywriting two days a week, so I do my other writing around this.

My normal process on those writing days really is to do the actual main writing work in the morning and then the editing through these changes in the afternoon. I tend to work better first thing in the morning, in getting my ideas down. I don't edit as I go.

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I'm someone who thinks editing as you go can hold back your creativity. I like to write everything and then just leave it for a little while, come back and do the editing later in the day. That tends to be the way that I do it.

Joanna: Many people think, *Oh, you know, you have to receive some kind of inspiration before you write*. Would you be of that school or do you think you just have to sit down and do the work?

Kylie: No, writing is very much about being disciplined. I think if you wait for inspiration you could be waiting a long time, because sometimes writing is an effort—not all parts of writing are fun. Some of it is hard work and you need to just set aside the time and do it.

Joanna: Well, you've just said that it's hard work. So, why are you a writer?

Kylie: For me, once I unleashed my writing side, there wasn't any turning back. It felt like this was really what I was meant to do. It's what I get the most enjoyment out of and what I really love doing.

The work that I do is very interesting and I get to meet and talk with a lot of interesting people. But most important to me now is that I really love what I do.

Joanna: So what are your thoughts around the editing and the rewriting process, because many people struggle with the fact that their first draft is not actually perfect? What do you think about editing and rewriting?

Kylie: I think that it's really important not to worry so much about the editing side of things when you're first writing. It's about getting your thoughts and ideas down and showcasing your creativity.

Once you feel you've exhausted that, then it's a good idea to go through the editing and rewriting process. Personally speaking, when I try to edit as I go, it just holds me back. I think if you're starting out it is a good idea to write first and then you can go back and edit.

Some people are more skilled in editing their own work. I do edit my own work but I also like to get someone else to look over it as well. When you're doing freelance work you always have an editor that you're sending it through, so that helps too.

I completed a grammar/editing course about two years ago, to develop those skills a bit more for myself.

But not all writers are particularly great at editing and rewriting their own work. You need to have experience but you can, obviously, let other people do that for you as well.

Joanna: I just wanted to ask you the difference between writing articles and a book, in terms of the editing, because you say you write in the morning, edit in the afternoon. That's sounds more like an article-type of approach. Does that also work for book writing?

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Kylie: No, you are right, it is different. When I'm working on a book, I do tend to write most of the day until I've finished the first draft. Then I go back and do the editing and rewriting after that. So yes, I wouldn't write it in the morning and then edit that in the afternoon. I tend to do the entire book first and then come back and do the edits after that.

Joanna: Thinking about how long it takes to get a book out there, what do you do about the inner critic, you know, those little voices of doubt?

Kylie: Do you mean when you're approaching people?

Joanna: No, I mean when you're—like you said, your book took you three years to write. During that time, when you were kind of working on it, did you have those sort of voices that told you that this wasn't any good or that it wouldn't go anywhere or why are you doing this? And how did you deal with those doubts?

Kylie: You certainly do have that. And I had it a lot and as I said, that's probably why the process took me longer, but you really just have to have a passion for what you're doing and really believe in your work.

For me, I really felt that my book was going to help other women. I felt that other women would in some way probably feel a little bit validated as well. And that I thought my book was something really important, an important message to get out.

So, I used to have those doubting thoughts, but you block them out. And do things like your own self-talk and keeping your mind positive is important. Visualizing yourself as an author and a successful writer is important. I certainly had to work on that quite a bit.

The thing to remember is that anyone can become an author. It really is about having the belief in yourself that you're worthy and you're capable to become an author.

Joanna: That's great. So I guess the important point there is that when you're writing your book for over three years, you also had a full-time job, is that right?

Kylie: That's right.

Joanna: Yes. So you weren't writing full-time. You were actually working, so there wasn't the stress on you to write to make money.

Kylie: No, that's right.

Joanna: So your next book is fiction. Why the move into fiction?

Kylie: I really wanted to do something different.

Non-fiction is obviously a lot about interviews and talking to people and fiction is more about being very creative, developing characters and building a world of fantasy.

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I was interested in just taking my writing to a different level and exploring something new and fiction writing for me is a lot of fun. It's very different from non-fiction writing.

Joanna: So just tell us a bit about that new book you're writing.

Kylie: I'm interested in writing about modern women as you know. I am particularly interested in the exploration of women's emotional intelligence and how this develops in their relationships.

So, I used the area that I write about in non-fiction to put together a novel. I developed a main character and I thought about her learning through her relationships. I decided at the time that she would be an artist.

I contacted a local artist and spent some time with her. This woman worked with glass and that's really what I wanted Lucy, the main character in my book to be—a glass artist.

Joanna: All right.

Kylie: I interviewed this lady extensively and spent time at her home and in her studio to get more of an idea of how an artist really lives. I do a lot of reading anyway and a lot of reading about relationships, so the rest just came to me.

I worked out a plan of what I wanted to happen, and then determined how this could be developed in each chapter or area in her life. I really expanded on this more for detail in the relevant chapters.

Joanna: That sounds like fun.

Kylie: Yes, it was.

Joanna: So, how does it make you feel to say, "I'm an author."

Kylie: It's an amazing feeling and something that I'm very proud of. I think that writing a book is one of the most amazing and wonderful things you can do in your life, so I would always recommend anybody to find their passion and write about it.

For me, it opened up a whole other career path and also it enables people to really do what they love and work in an area that's really interesting and motivating.

From a professional perspective, it sets you up as a specialist in a certain area because when you've written a book about a topic you've got credibility. If you've been published or you're published and if it's selling successfully, it gives you a lot of opportunities to explore other areas. If you hadn't written a book, those doors just wouldn't be open to you.

Joanna: That's great. Okay, so just a few questions about the publishing process. Tell us how you got published by Zeus? What was your experience of publishing, in general?

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Kylie: When I finished writing the book, I think I did everything the wrong way around. I think it's a good idea to really research publishers, and maybe target a few publishers.

I'll give you an example. When I did it, I basically had no writing experience, sent it off to all the publishers and ended up being slush pile for my efforts. So, it took over twelve months. I was just getting rejection letters one after the other. And that's not ideal.

Finally, I came across Zeus who were looking for new and emerging writers and were able to offer me an opportunity. So that was an amazing time for that to all be coming together.

But I met with another author, Toni Jordan, who has just written a book called, "*Addition*," which is selling very, very successfully. I spoke to her about the publishing process and her approach was far more sensible. She really targeted the publisher that she wanted to go with.

And then she enrolled in various workshops and different writing programs where she knew people from this publishing house were going to be. Toni made contacts, got business cards and built relationships with these people. When her book was finished, she really had a relationship established and sent it directly through to this person.

That's a well thought out plan and it happened very quickly for her and Toni avoided all the rejection most first time authors have to deal with. The thing that you really do want to avoid is just ending up in the slush pile, which unfortunately is a reality.

I learnt the value of building relationships and making contacts, which I really didn't have any idea about beforehand.

Joanna: Some of our listeners might not know what the slush pile is. Can you just explain that?

Kylie: Yes, sure. All publishers at any time will have hundreds of unsolicited manuscripts sitting in a slush pile, and what that means is that people, first time writers usually, have sent in a manuscript for them to look at.

Now, unless they know the author or have a relationship with the author, the publisher will put your manuscript into what's called the slush pile. A junior person will pick a few of those out and go through them. A lot of people unfortunately don't even get looked at. That's why it's called the slush pile, because once you get on that pile and there is not a lot of opportunity to get out of that pile.

Joanna: That's great. Just a question, then, on rejection, because this is something that everybody should expect to happen to them. You've said you have twelve month's worth of rejection slips. How did that make you feel and how did you get over that?

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Kylie: Look, it makes you feel not very good at the time, but it is part of the process, so you do need to toughen up. If you're going to work in a creative field, especially in writing, this is going to be a part of the process so I knew that it was likely to happen.

Because I believed in the book, I tried to maintain my enthusiasm by knowing that, with each rejection I was getting one step closer and that I was learning in this process. So I tried to take the good out of the situation, as well.

And really, it's just about being persistent. Because for some people it can happen straightaway but that's a very unusual situation. For most it takes a lot longer, and you have to have conviction in what you're doing and also just really be persistent. A lot of that is your own mind work. It is up to you to become too negative or upset by rejection.

The thing that I've seen dealing with the publishers is that they are busy but reasonable people. A lot were very complimentary about the work that I was doing. They said that they really liked the book. I didn't actually get anyone say anything awful to me. So that was a good thing as well.

Unfortunately, I kept being told, "We love it, but it's not our type of thing," or, "We published something similar not long ago," or those sorts of excuses. Because they were actually saying to me, "We think it's good," that is what I focused on, rather than the rejection. So it's about looking at the positives.

Joanna: And did you just send a proposal and three chapters, or did you send your whole book?

Kylie: I sent a proposal and the first three chapters. I did a workshop on writing an effective proposal, and what to put in it and then sent it off from there.

Joanna: So did your publisher help you with marketing? Or was that your responsibility as an author?

Kylie: No, they did help me. I had a publicist at the time and she worked part time on my book, along with all her other authors. But yes, she sent out some press releases and got me some radio and magazine interviews.

I also realized that her publicity wasn't going to be enough. If you are successful in getting a publishing deal with a very big publisher, then you can pretty much see your book in most book shops throughout Australia, and overseas.

But if you go with a small publisher, then it's only certain places that will stock it and that's what happened with mine. So, I got a book on publicizing your book and read that. It gave me some good ideas. It is important to work in conjunction with your publisher rather than leaving the responsibility up to them.

I realized ultimately it is my responsibility to get the book sales through. So I would begin to contact the local newspapers to try and get stories too. I also contacted the

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local book shops and offered to do signings. Those types of things allow you to start building relationships which is important.

Joanna: And I guess the big question—how did your book sales go? Did you make a million dollars?

Kylie: No I didn't. For me at the time it wasn't necessarily the biggest thing. I really just wanted to get my book published and to establish some credibility that way, which I did.

Look, it sold very well in the time. Realistically in the shops it sells for maybe about three to six months, which isn't a long time. And when a book gets published through a publisher— that initial period—there's a lot of marketing activity and your book sales are good, but that only lasts for a short time.

So then, ultimately, that's when you need to keep the momentum up, and to think about some good ways to keep your book sales coming through.

Joanna: Right. So, after learning all of that, what are you going to do differently with your next book? Are you going to seek publication, or go through an agent, or self-publish? What are you going with this next one?

Kylie: Well, with the next one, because it's in the area of fiction and it's a romance, I'm hoping to secure an agent. The reason for that is I think that self-publishing has its place and that's very worthwhile, especially for non-fiction, it can work very well.

But for fiction, it's a very different. I would like to get an agent who can negotiate a bigger and better publishing deal for me this time around, one that will provide the opportunity for overseas publication.

Joanna: So you said you're working freelance and doing things. So how are you currently marketing your writing?

Kylie: Well, I market it basically through contacting people. It's getting on the phone and selling myself that way. People do get to know your work.

Recently, because I've worked for a newspaper for the last twelve months, I had another publication contact me. They noticed that I wasn't writing articles for the newspaper anymore, so your reputation gets into the marketplace which is great.

Also obviously marketing yourself on the internet is very important. I get contact from people reading my articles on-line.

Joanna: So, I guess a big question would be, how difficult is it to make a living as an author or a writer?

Kylie: I think it is difficult, but it's not impossible and that's the thing to remember. Not many people earn a living from being full-time authors.

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In terms of getting a publishing deal with a publisher often you'll get paid only \$2.00 per book that's sold, so you need to sell a lot of books to be able to set yourself up to do that full-time.

And that can happen, but it usually takes a couple of books for you to get that sort of reputation but you've got to keep thinking big picture.

Also, to me, getting writing work coming in wasn't as challenging as what I thought it was going to be. It is about writing something and actually sending it out there and seeing what happens. You will get results if you are persistent with it.

Joanna: That's great. So just back on the book writing then, what are your top three tips for new authors?

Kylie: I think the most important thing to do is— to enjoy the process more than anything. Writing a book is one of the most exciting things you can do. You should try not to get bogged down in all the kind of concerns or anything like that— just enjoy it, because it is a wonderful process.

Secondly if you do want to get your book published through a publisher, then I would be doing courses and workshops now and start making contacts. Think about who you're going to target. Don't leave it until you have finished your book and then start thinking about what publishers you should target. I think it's good if you think about it up front and start building those relationships.

And if you are going to be self-published, then that's a great idea as well. Just do make sure you do some training in publishing and promotion, because learning how to market yourself is not a skill that comes naturally to many people.

Sometimes just by doing a little bit of training and working with other people, you get many different ideas. That is the most important thing—knowing how to promote yourself and market yourself.

Joanna: Okay, I guess the other thing is that writers are avid readers. Do you agree with that?

Kylie: Yes, definitely.

Joanna: Yes. What is your favorite book at the moment and why?

Kylie: Well, my all-time favorite book is, "*Wuthering Heights*," by Emily Brontë and that's always been my favorite book. I read it when I was travelling through Greece many years ago. The reason why I like that book is because it's a book about passion and it introduced me to the classics.

I hadn't done a lot of fiction reading at the time when someone gave this book to me. I had just finished university and was really associating reading mostly with study. I became totally absorbed in it and this whole different world. I absolutely loved it. I remember that experience, and I still read that book from time to time now.

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Joanna: And, so would you then, because that's obviously, you know, because that's actually romance genre, but would you agree that you write what you read?

Kylie: Yes, I think you do. I suppose because I write about women it's linked into romance as well. But I think you need to write about what you're passionate about and I am interested in all women's issues. I enjoy books with strong, complex leading characters, whether they are male or female.

Joanna: That's great. So, we're coming to an end now, but is there anything else you'd like to share with the listeners?

Kylie: The most important thing is that you really believe in what you're doing and know that you can be an author and that you will do it well. You do get a lot of people that will tell you, "No," but really with conviction and persistence, it will happen.

Joanna: Yeah, now that's great. Thanks for that.

Okay, so how can people get in touch with you or find your work?

Kylie: Well, they can go to www.kyliewelsh.com and see the type of articles that I've been writing. I've got a website www.impertinentwomen.com where people can have a look at my book and order it that way as well. Then I've also got <http://www.brisbanewomen.com>, which is a business about women. There you can read my hugely successful blog *Brisbane Woman* where different women's issues are explored and discussed.

Joanna: That's great! Okay, Kylie, well thanks ever so much for your time. That was great.

Kylie: Lovely. Thanks for your time.



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

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