

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

Joanna: Hi, everyone! I'm Joanna Penn from <http://www.TheCreativePenn.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 <http://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, because prior to the last twelve months I've really been working and doing writing part-time, and now I'm at a stage where I'm able to write full-time. I've been doing that for the last twelve months or so.

So it's taking a little bit of time for that to evolve, but, yes, it's an exciting time for me because I used to dream about being a full-time writer and now I'm able to do that. And I'm doing that through doing some copywriting a few days a week and also I'm doing my freelance work around that

Joanna: That's great.

Kylie: Yeah, so it's very good.

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 that I hadn't really done a lot of writing. I had certainly been involved in writing training courses and around self-development and personal effectiveness. That's part of writing. But no published work before.

And really I just started to have a look at women and their relationships and how women were making great advancements and having these wonderful careers and a lot of financial independence, but potentially a lot of them weren't experiencing or saying whether there was fulfillment in their personal lives. That was my situation as well at the time.

I came up with the idea really just 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 sort of gained momentum straightaway because a lot of people said “You know, I’d love to participate. Interview me. Interview me,” so everyone was very game to talk about what was going on in their life in terms of their relationships.

So I sort of had the idea and thought, *Oh, can I really do this?* And I think 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 go ahead.

Joanna: You mentioned that before that book, 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: Well, really, I got started really more from my passion about the topic than anything else, so I sort of saw these things going on, came up with the idea, and 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, and that sort of thing, so, 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 that, then that was just more fuel for 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: Oh, I think so, definitely—it gives it more credibility, I think, when you’re talking to different people because it’s not only your opinion.

It takes a little 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, I suppose, other sources of 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—too long. It probably, all up about three or four years part-time...which was a really long time. But because I hadn’t had any writing experience, it took me a little while to develop my confidence, I think, in that. So I sort of did little bits and pieces, and I’d change it, and take one step forward, two steps back. So yes, it took about four years part-time to do it, which is a very long time.

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

Kylie: For me, I suppose, 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, and that sort of thing. That kept it going for me as well.

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Actually, because I loved what I was doing so much, even though that was a long time, it was something I was enjoying doing so I suppose, at that time, I wasn't putting massive pressure on myself to have it done by a certain time. It was more—I was just exploring this, I suppose, with the way I was approaching it.

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, I think, on reflection, that probably to establish yourself as a writer is a good step initially, because when I was going through the publication process and that sort of thing, I hadn't really had any writing experience and that was somewhat limiting.

So, I think doing some freelance work, posting your articles on the internet, anything like that, just to get your name out there a little bit, and I think that, that side of it is important.

And I also think probably on reflection, it would have been good for me to do it at a course or training in writing a non-fiction book, or maybe even read something like this that other people have done. So, probably 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 sort of thought, *Okay, I've come this far, and yes, that information is going to change probably in the next twelve months again.* But yeah, I just sort of thought I've spent enough time on it. It's as good as what I think I can do and so then I just decided to stop, and 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 basic writing, as in journal writing, in the evening before I go to bed, or something like that. I try and sort of do a little bit each day, but to me, I have always had days of writing rather than maybe two hours of writing or something like that.

I think everyone works differently, but because for a long time I had to juggle other work around that, then I would have to have like two full days a week where I would devote to writing, and now I sort of work at doing copywriting two days a week, so I do my other writing around that.

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But my normal process on those writing days really is to do the actual main writing work in the morning and then the editing and working through that in the afternoon. I tend to work better first thing in the morning and in getting my ideas down, and I tend not to sort of edit as I go.

I'm someone who just thinks that, that can hold back your creativity a little bit, so I like to write everything and then just leave that for a little while and then come back to it 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, so, I think if you wait for inspiration you could be waiting a long time, because sometimes writing is—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, I think.

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

Kylie: For me, once you unleash this side of you, there wasn't any turning back for me. It just felt like this was really what I was meant to do. And 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 importantly for me, it's just, oddly, I really love what I do, and that's the most important thing to me now.

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 doing it. I think really it's about getting your thoughts down and your ideas and your creativity is the most important part.

Then once you feel like you've exhausted that, then I think it's a good idea to go through the editing and rewriting process. Personally speaking, when I try to edit as I go, I think it just holds you back a little bit, so, I think if you're starting, I think it's a good idea just to go for it and then obviously you can go back and edit it.

Some people are more skilled in editing their own work, and with me, I do edit my own work but I also usually 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's part of that.

But I have actually done a spelling/grammatical editing type of course—probably about two years ago—now just to develop those skills a little bit more myself.

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But not all writers are really, 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?

Kylie: No, I suppose—let me just think, I—no, sorry, it is different. When I'm working on a book, I do just tend to write most of the day, and then once I've finished the first draft, that's when I go back and I 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 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 or...?

Joanna: No, I mean when you're—like you said, your book took you three to four 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 the work that you're doing.

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

So, I used to have those thoughts, but obviously, just try and block them out. And do things like your own sort of self-talk and getting your mind positive—you know, viewing you as an author, viewing you as a successful writer, that type of thing. I certainly had to work on that quite a bit.

And a thing to remember is that anyone, really, can become an author. It really is about, I suppose, having the belief in yourself that you're worthy and you're capable and that you can 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 to four 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.

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Kylie: No, that's right.

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

Kylie: I was really just wanting to do something different, I think.

Non-fiction is obviously a lot about interviews and talking to people and fiction is more—I sort of thought about being very creative and building a world of fantasy all that sort of stuff.

But 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: Basically, I haven't really written much of that kind of work before, but there are lots of books about single women and that sort of stuff, and I was interested in, I suppose, even the writing—writing about modern women. I was interested in the exploration, I suppose, of emotional intelligence in women and how this developed in their relationship and I've used that then.

So, I suppose I used the area that I write about in non-fiction to put together a novel. I thought about a main character, and I thought about her learning about herself through her relationships, and I decided at the time that she was going to 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 and spent time with her and got a bit more of an idea of how an artist lives. I do a lot of reading anyway and a lot of reading about romance and relationships as well, so the rest just sort of came to me.

I sort of worked out a bit of a plan as what I wanted to happen, and then each sort of chapter or area in her life, when I really expanded on it for detailed chapters.

Joanna: That sounds like fun.

Kylie: Yes, it was. It was, really.

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

Kylie: Well, for me, it's an amazing feeling and something that I'm very proud of. I think that writing a book is probably one of the most amazing and wonderful things you can do in

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your life, so, I would always recommend anybody to find their passion and write about it.

Because 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, so when you've written a book about something, it means that you've got some credibility. You've actually been published or you've published it yourself and if it's selling successfully, then that gives you a lot of opportunities then to explore other areas that 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?

Kylie: When I quit writing the book, I think I did everything the wrong way around. When I went to get a publisher, probably on the fiction, 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 piled 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 had just got out a book called, "Addition," which is selling very, very successfully and I spoke to her about the publishing process and I think that this is probably a far more sensible way. She really targeted the publisher that she wanted to go with. At the time I think Text Publishing was what her target was.

And then she enrolled in various workshops and different things where she knew people from Text were going to be, and made sure that she made contact and got business cards with these people, so when her book was finished, she really had a relationship established and sent it directly through to this person.

So that's a much more, I suppose, well thought out plan, and so therefore, that happened very quickly for her and she avoided all that. The thing that you really do want to avoid is just ending up another book in the slush pile, which unfortunately is a reality most of the time, so you do need to think outside the square a little bit.

I supposed I learnt, really, 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?

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Kylie: Yes, sure. Every publisher at any time they'll 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, have a relationship with the author, it will get put into what's called the slush pile, and then there will be some junior person who will pick a few of those out and go through them. But a lot of people, unfortunately, they don't even get looked at and that's why it's called the slush pile, because once you get on that pile, there's 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?

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, I think. If you're going to work in a creative field, especially in writing, that is going to be a part of it so I just really knew that it was going 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 was sort of trying to take the good out of the situation, as well.

And really, it's just about being persistent. Because some people, for example, like Toni, who I just mentioned, that happened straightaway and immediately. That's a very unusual situation. A lot of us, it takes a lot longer, and you have to have conviction in what you're doing and also just really be persistent. And a lot of that is your own sort of mind work, which is up to you to not sort of get too negative, or upset by rejection.

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

Unfortunately, I kept getting told, "You know, we love it, but it's not our type of thing," or, "We published something similar a lot long ago," or those sorts of excuses, but because they were actually saying to me, "We think it's good," that [Inaudible 00:24:20] as well. 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 a proposal, and what to put in it and all that sort of stuff, 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 actually had a publicist at the time, and she only really worked, because they are only a very small publisher, she only worked part-time for me. But yes,

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she sent out some press releases and she got me some radio interviews and some magazine interviews—that type of thing.

She did help, but at the time, I also realized that, that probably wasn't going to be enough. Because 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 be and that's what happened with mine. So, I got a book on self-publishing and publicizing yourself, and read that, and then thought about it more about working in conjunction with them rather than leaving the responsibility up to them.

Because I realized ultimately it is my responsibility to get the book sales through. So I would begin to contact the local newspapers. I also contacted the local book shops and offered to do signings and those types of things that start with building a relationship that way as well.

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

Kylie: No. I did not, but that for me, at the time, wasn't necessarily the big 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 that—it probably was earning, realistically in the shops—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 how to do it and to keep the momentum up, and to think about some good ways to just 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 probably [Inaudible 00:27:30] romance, that sort of area, or women's studies—yes, I suppose it would be classified probably as romance, that type of area.

I'm hoping to procure an agent for my next one. The reason for that is I think that self-publishing has its place, and I think that that's very worthwhile, especially I think for non-fiction, it can work very well.

But I think for fiction, it's a very different area, so for me, I would like to get an agent who can get a bigger and better publishing deal for me this time around. And one that's going to have the opportunity to go overseas, and things like that as well.

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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, so it's getting on the phone and ringing people and selling myself that way. You know, people do get to know your work.

Recently, because I've worked for a publication for the last twelve months, I had another publication contact me because they noticed that I wasn't writing articles for this or that place any more, so your reputation gets into the marketplace.

And, also obviously true, the web and internet and all that sort of stuff, so I've got publishing on a web page and that type of thing. So it gets interest coming from there and also people doing searches or coming across things that operate in that way.

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, but that is also changing.

I'm thinking in terms of getting publishing deals and things like that because, as you probably know, if you go to a publisher, often you'll get paid something like \$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 does actually, usually take a couple of books for you to get that sort of reputation. But I think, though, that doing both is important. I think that 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. Just about writing something and actually sending it out there and seeing what happens. And something does happen 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—I suppose my tip would be, to enjoy the process, more than anything. Because I think writing a book is one of the most exciting things you can do. They should try not to get bogged down in all the kind of concern over it, or anything like that— just to enjoy it, because it is a wonderful process.

My second thing would be, if you do want to get your book published through a publisher, then I would be doing courses and workshops now and making contacts, like the example I gave you before. Think about who you're going to target, just so you're not sort of leaving it until when everything is finished 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.

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

And sometimes just by doing a little bit of training and working with some other people, you get so many different ideas and that sort of thing, so yes, that's the most important thing—is 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've read that when I was troubling through grief many years ago, and the reason why I like that book is because it's a book about passion, I suppose.

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

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, but I also—I suppose because I write about women it's all sort of linked into me as well. But I think you need to write about what you're passionate about. And this is an area I'm very interested in. It makes sense that I would read about that and also write about it.

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: I suppose just that really the most important thing is that you really believe in what you're doing, and that you know you can do it and that you'll do it well. I think it's very important after being in this industry is that you do get a lot of people that will tell you, "No," and, "Going to have to call you," and that type of thing, 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?

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Kylie: Well, I've got my website. It's www.kyliewelsh.com. And on the type of articles that I've been writing, I've got a website [impertinentwomen.com](http://www.impertinentwomen.com). People can go and have a look at my book and read a little bit about it and order it that way as well.

Then I've also got <http://www.brisbanewomen.com> , which is a business about women based in Brisbane and looking at different women's issues.

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.

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>