

HEARTS TALK

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Clare always dreamed of becoming a published author right from her very first job delivering papers with her brothers, through working at Maccas, to countless jobs in the corporate world. A member of RWAus and now a published author, Clare reflects on her writing journey.

How did you feel when your first book, *Falling for the King*, was published?

Absolutely elated, relieved and excited that a dream/goal I'd had for so long had finally come true. Being a lifelong romance reader, I always thought I'd like to write a book "one day". "One day" really kicked into gear when I joined RWAus and actively started working towards that goal. And of course, all those years of reading romance, across all genres, was fabulous research, which continues to this day.

I pitched *Falling for the King* to Escape/Harlequin at the RWA Fremantle Conference 2022 and got the news via email that they'd like to publish it ... which to date is my favourite ever email! After rereading that email (many times), I quickly shared the news with my writing group (who I met years ago and have become some of my closest friends) who were absolutely thrilled for me ... cue phone calls, emails and the immediate planning of celebrations. Writing, let's face it, is a hard and at times isolating gig so having support is a must, and who better to share the highs and lows of this ever-changing but oh so addictive industry, than fabulous friends who also happen to be fellow writers?

I quickly accepted Harlequin's offer, then began a round of "firsts": signing a contract, going through the editing process, and seeing my cover... swoon. On release day in May 2023, (something in the deepest darkest days of my writing journey I feared would never happen), I was blown away by all the support I received (and continue to receive) from friends, family, fellow authors, and readers.

What do you find the most challenging aspect about the writing process, and what is your favourite part?

I love getting to know my characters before I start writing their stories. Debra Dixon's *Goal, Motivation and Conflict* process works best for me and usually their backstories (and them) are crystal clear before I get my fingers on the keyboard. But to my utter despair, as a pantser what happens from that point isn't as clear. I often think 'there must be an easier way to do this', but I'm learning to trust that the story will develop if I continually go back to the GMC, and by doing so I will get to type "The End"!

What made you choose your publishing pathway?

I'd always dreamt of being published by Harlequin as I've read (and admired) their books for years. I also found it appealing that a traditional publisher would handle all the behind-the-scenes aspects that I had limited to no experience in.

I know some authors like full control of their publishing journey (including financials) and therefore indie is always going to be their preference. For me, that needed to be counteracted not only by the costs associated with getting a book published (editing, cover design, creative/marketing etc.) but also the additional time this would require especially with my current full-time job, and my fledgling experience in the publishing world. Having said that, in the future I'll be open to both traditional and indie publishing.

Having had your first book published, do you have a preference about how you would like to be marketed in future?

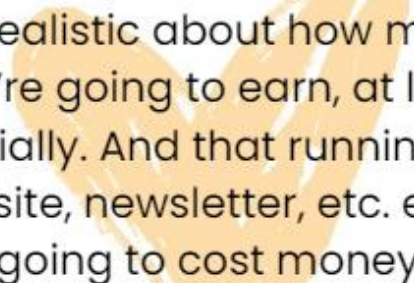
I've had my eye on the goal of being traditionally published for some time and although I'm absolutely elated to tick that off, it's been eye opening to realise that's only the start of the journey. Now it's about staying published and learning more about marketing, without being overwhelmed by all the options.

I'm grateful that I had my website set up before I got published; however, I soon realised it reflected me as a reader rather than as a writer. Since then, it's had a few different versions, and that's something I don't think will ever change as I'll always be learning, adapting to the market, and growing as an author.

Recently I decided it would be money well spent to engage the services of a virtual assistant to give my brand and website a complete refresh. This is the first time I've used one, and not only did it free up time and energy, it was worth every cent to see my brand and website transformed by someone with great expertise, and I'm absolutely thrilled with the results. I would definitely be open to hiring a virtual assistant again, especially the one I used, to assist with other marketing when funds allow.

To date I haven't set up a newsletter, that's definitely something I wish I'd done before getting published and is next on my 'to do list' along with building more of a presence on Instagram, the social media platform I focus most attention on.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?



Be realistic about how much you're going to earn, at least initially. And that running a website, newsletter, etc. etc. is going to cost money.

Where do you see yourself in five to 10 years?

In another five to ten years, I hope to see myself building up a solid backlist in contemporary and rural romance via both traditional and indie publishing and earning a steady income stream from same. There will definitely be physical books that I can hold and a series or two!

And finally, I'll still be learning, connecting with fellow writers and readers, having fun at RWAus conferences (and winning Best Dressed at the cocktail party 😊 with my writing group), and reading, always reading!

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J A MacNally is the Hearts Talk Contents Editor. She has written two full length contemporary romance novels (unpublished) and has three short stories published in RWAus anthologies (Spicy Bites and Sweet Treats). In addition to writing interviews and articles for Hearts Talk, she is a prolific book and film reviewer for online newsletters and her own blog, Such Reviews About Nothing.

