

This interview by Jackie Hosking appeared in the ezine P.I.O. (Pass It On).

1. When did you know that you were a writer?

I was always a reader from the age of three when I could decipher certain words in the daily newspapers. But I didn't ever envision myself as a 'proper' writer until I was in my early forties when I began writing autobiographical short stories. At the time I wanted to make more sense of my life and somehow I knew writing about it might help as fiction is a way of making sense of what seems senseless.

2. When did you first read your writing aloud or give it to someone to read and what was their reaction? How did it impact on you?

When I first began those short pieces I was lucky enough to have a well known journalist as a friend and he was very encouraging, encouraging enough to show them to a well known literary figure who dismissed as 'hopeless and without that innate knowledge of when a correct word should be used'. I was devastated but it didn't stop me writing.

3. What and when was your first acceptance? How did you feel?

A very short story was accepted by "The Australian" which in the late 80's had a weekly Literary Supplement. Not that it never actually appeared as one weekend that supplement literally disappeared. Still.... Someone liked my work...

4. What is your favourite genre to write? Why?

I have a problem here because I love to tackle new genres. I seem to be best known for historical fiction and am often told to stick to that but there is so much else to experiment with and I do.

5. Of your own work – do you have a favourite? Why is it your favourite?

My favourite is always my last completed work, often not yet published. I am just completing 2 books for 11 + readers, one based on actual history “Afghan Camel Boy” and the other about a small coastal town, this called ‘The Golden Spiral’.

6. What is your favourite genre to read? Why?

I read everything except Fantasy. Can’t get around a lot of it as it seems that many are ‘Lord of the Ring’s’ clones. I possibly read more adult fiction than anything and I am particularly enamoured with contemporary English and European writers.

7. Do you have a favourite author?

Too many to jot down. The classics of course. But there are so many creative and brilliant minds out there. How do I choose?

8. Did/do you have any writing heroes or mentors?

My writing friends are wonderful mentors and critics. I must particularly name Hazel Edwards as we have collaborated on many texts together. But I am lucky in having many others such as Edel Wignel. Jennifer Dabbs. Vashti Farrar. What would I do without them? They listen to my plaintive pleading ‘Would you mind looking at this? Do you think this works?’

9. How do they encourage you?

They are always honest. No point otherwise. If something doesn't work, they will always tell me the truth.

10. Do you mentor others? What do you do?

For the last 14 years I have taught Writing for Young Adults at universities and TAFE's. Last year I mentored the promising young writer Joanna George under the ASA's mentoring scheme.

11. Do you write full time?

Yes!

12. What are your other jobs?

Apart from teaching, are housework and grand-mothering, considered as 'proper' jobs?

13. Have you ever won an award/s or been shortlisted? What was it for?

My historical novels and short stories do well. Latest details on my website.

14. Have you ever been awarded a grant? How did it help you?

No! Though I keep applying. Maybe next year?

15. Do you belong to any professional organisations and subscribe to professional magazine? What are they and how do they help you?

SCBWI, FAW. ASA. CBC. PIO WRITE4KIDS. PIO. BUZZWORDS, VIEWPOINTS are just some. Communication is important for anyone tapping away at home. And they are a wonderful source of potential markets.

16. Do you participate in writing workshops as a student? Which ones were memorable?

17. Only those I run myself. I always learn more from the participants than vice versa.

18. We all know that would be writers should read and write as much as possible – do you have any other advice?

READ. PERSEVERE. READ. PERSEVERE. DON'T GET DISCOURAGED.