

# Author – audio recording my book 'Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die' : What Have I Learnt?

by Hazel Edwards OAM

My major character is Quinn, an asexual sleuth who presents as female, works as a celebrant and lives in an Australian country town. So I wanted an Australian, not an American narrator for the audio book. I'm not a professional actor and have a light voice.

But I am the author of the published book '[Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die](#)' and that gives me a different kind of authentic 'voice' for reading aloud this adult murder/mystery. Now available on [AUDIBLE](#). These characters have lived with me for a few years. So I know them, even the ones I've killed off.

Being an actor was never one of my ambitions. I prefer to be invisible, behind the story. But as an author, invitations to read or be interviewed on radio or podcasts happen. So across the years, I've learnt a few microphone skills and been in many studios.

And upon request, I've been recorded reading my '[There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof Eating Cake](#)' picture books and even junior novels like '[Hijabi Girl](#)' for Vision Australia in their studio. But a full length, adult mystery of 200 plus pages is a different scale of challenge.

Some of my earlier stories have been adapted for theatre, T.V. and film, so I'm not 'precious' about others changing my work and don't feel the need to control everything.

I prefer to find good people, let them use their expertise and listen when they give advice. Then we end up with a better final version. Amateur recording on my phone was not an option. A professional studio with an experienced producer was vital.

Deliberately, I had written the novel from the celebrant's perspective, to work as a voice-over if the episodic chapters were ever televised. This P.O.V. (point of view) consistency might allow me to get away with the one voice.

## Why did I author-record? And how?

'[Celebrant Sleuth: I do or die](#)' was experimental in several ways. My sleuth was a celebrant: a versatile role for plotting within varied settings and cultures in order to solve mysteries. Quinn was asexual but responding to a female pronoun, so this diverse gender hero for mainstream readers was new. It was also experimental in that this novel crossed genres and didn't fit the conventional 'cosy' Agatha Christie style nor the 'Scandi Noir' nor 'Mean Streets'. Not so much violence, more emphasis on why 'ordinary' people might do that, in a country town (based on one which will remain nameless).

When I spoke on regional crime settings for a [Sisters in Crime](#) panel, there was interest in how I constructed Quinn's fictional country town and why. My reason was to provide continuity for the characters who would meet in their other non-crime related roles like cafe owner or retirement village manager. And provide realistic detail of a country town in an economic downturn.

Usually I work with traditional publishers, but this mystery was author-published with local [Bookpod](#) (although available in varied formats on Amazon too). And that was a good decision for speeding the process and also in terms of financial splits. Costs were mine but so were bigger returns. Depending on subsidiary rights contracts, traditional publishers pass on only 10-50% of receipts of audio sales and digital is becoming an increasingly significant market sector for a book. Now, 'sound'

isn't just a subsidiary right. Maybe audio/digital will become the major right in the next few years, especially with the popularity of 'cold-case' podcasts?

My [Bookpod](#) publisher Sylvie Blair suggested the colour mark-up and this was invaluable as scripting preparation but also for distinguishing characters and narration. My scribbled- on script version is an indication of how the process developed. At first I used an Ipad screen (but could only see one page) , then a marked- up print book with bulldog clips (awkward for turning) and finally an enlarged font, flat double page script, to reduce page turning noises.

Studio time is based on an hourly fee. If a professional actor were used, they doubled the production cost but would be quicker than an amateur like me likely to miff the reading and have to do it again. But I was keen to learn these skills, so it was an apprenticeship too.

Audio recording on my Iphone was NOT an option. Too amateurish. I knew I needed direction in a professional studio and a polished finished product which was in formats suitable for marketing into varied international markets. And because my mystery was cross- genre, it had fallen outside publicity channels which I use with my children's books. The print and e-version had been out a year. Because of the subject matter and same sex marriage laws changes in January of 2018 , already the title had considerable coverage. But '[Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die](#)' would benefit from value-adding a new digital format to the story.

Despite the challenges, I've enjoyed the benefits of recording my own book, even if exhausted by the process at times.

#### **What have I Learnt?**

1. A sense of achievement in learning new skills. Pausing. Tone. Marking up a script. Using ear phones. Forcing myself to listen to my own voice played back. Re-doing. Persistence. Appreciating the tactful advice of the producer.
2. Benefits of reading aloud to deepen future characterisations, especially in a book as part of a proposed series. Your voice needs to distinguish the characters, so you have to think your way into their viewpoints. While workshopping , reading aloud pre-publication to test sounds and concepts and reader interest is common practice with my children's short stories and picture book text. But I suddenly realised I don't do that with my adult books. Next book, I will. Especially for juxtaposed words which sound similar but look different in print, so I've missed the awkwardness. 'Cloud' and 'allowed' is an example.
3. Faster than doing a general , semester- long course to learn audio. Enjoyed the problem-solving of finding the best way to speak from the script e.g. scribbling broken sentence on next page, so it flows without page noises.
4. About 45 minutes to record a chapter, even with mistakes and re-takes. And need to re-record early chapters for consistence of voice once my techniques improved. About 10 hours in the finished, edited book, with music. But longer to actually record.
5. Chapter length varies but so does the complexity as to how many characters speak and how much description or narration ( which is easier for me to read.) One page was a rainbow of colours marked for different characters, That was hard to read well.
6. A digital copy shares the story more intimately, through the ears of the audience at a time they choose. And this reaches some who might never buy a print copy but will do a fast download.

7. Although some of my other 220 books have been professionally narrated by actors chosen by my traditional publishers, '[Celebrant Sleuth: I do or die](#)' was a deliberate audio choice on my part. It is cross- genre crime, episodic and also appeals to the LBTQI + reader. So there are several niche markets. The continuity of the single voice narrator reduced the need for 'character' voices which I was not skilled enough to do.

8. Harry Williamson of [Spring Studios](#) is a highly experienced producer who has musical skills too. So while 'mentoring' me, he could also enhance sound and include original music.

9. Testing the over 10 hours of audio book proof, was a big ask for sample readers. A colleague Ryan was convalescing for a month after a hospital operation and volunteered. As author, I was nervous of listening to my own voice, but pleased with the musical interludes , how Harry had 'mellowed' my voice and appreciated where he fixed my mistakes.

10. Would I do it again? In future, I might tackle my memoir '[Not Just a Piece of Cake: Being an Author](#)' but not for several months. Having the author share the nuances of a story does offer something extra to the reader, but...  
Meanwhile, I'm more interested in TV options for '[Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die](#)'. Open to offers. And I do NOT need a cameo role.

**RESOURCES:**

[AUDIBLE 'Celebrant Sleuth'](#) read by author

Author Hazel Edwards' website links where book is available plus reviews and bookclub discussion notes for '[Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die](#)'

Easy ( and Non-Pirated) access to Hazel Edwards e-books

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['Hijabi Girl'](#) resources including audio by Vision Australia Studio.

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[BookPod](#) Sylvie Blair is the publisher.

[Sisters in Crime](#)

**BIO**

Australian author [Hazel Edwards OAM](#) is best known for her children's classic '[There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof Eating Cake](#)' series (PenguinRandomHouse) but her latest quirky collection of brief , adult short stories, on Kindle, is '[Almost a Crime](#)' .