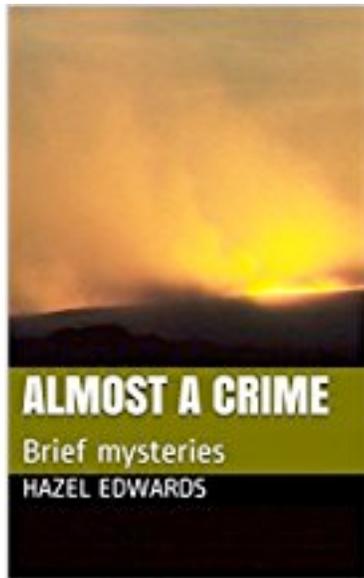


Authors Diversifying

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Q& A with Authorpreneur Hazel Edwards, who has recently taken up a life of crime writing.



You're best known as the author of the much loved children's classic 'There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake'. Why have you turned to writing adult crime mysteries?

I've always written in a variety of genres, but it's just that the cake-eating hippo picture books are better known. Motives interest me most whether I'm writing for children or adults and so mysteries were a natural progression when I was trying to improve my plotting. The technicalities of viewpoint and why someone might have acted in that way intrigues me. Diversity and coping with being

different have been common themes in my stories for all ages. The tension comes from doing something which is different from the values of the society in which the character lives. For a child, the society is the playground. And humour is often a way of coping.

In adult non-fiction, I've co-written 'Difficult Personalities' with psychologist Dr Helen Mc Grath and that has been translated into Chinese, Russian, Polish, Korean, audio, Braille and even American. 'Difficult Personalities' deals with motives but also with strategies. So does our co-written 'Friends' book. Writing factual strategies makes a fiction author conscious of outcomes.

Thus crime was the natural progression of extreme motives. But my type of crime writing is 'softened' with humour or irony. Often things don't work out and the bumbling narrator-sleuth is revealed as inept. So getting the tone right is a challenge.

Brief crime or crime-lettes (my term) meant I could use varied settings and different narrator-sleuths. I chose first person, to get the reader onside quickly through the first character they meet. Later, readers may re-consider whether they wish to remain emotionally involved from that character's viewpoint.

To what extent is 'brand' important for an author?

What is your 'brand'?

In the last decade the

term 'brand' has been thrown around, but I was writing and getting published in my late twenties when I wasn't even aware of the concept. Authors were writers of the books. They weren't 'brands'. Originally an author was associated with one publishing house and that publisher was the brand. Now authors move with each book, and they are the brand. Versatility is vital for survival. A self-employed writer needs a portfolio of skills.

My marketing manager daughter Kim 're-branded' me with a new self-managed website about ten years ago. That was because readers expected I wrote only fanciful hippo books. But I had a variety of publishers and kinds of books. She wanted to indicate the back-list range and also that I was a conference speaker on subjects such as 'Writing a Non boring Family History' or 'Authorpreneurship' which related to my non-fiction adult titles. Plus I was moving into diversity issues such as gender with 'f2m; the boy within', or 'Hijabi Girl'. And there was the adventurous Antarctic literature after my expedition experience.

Inbetween, I'd been co-writing with 'experts' from different cultures and skills. Readers were getting confused.

Kim isolated my 'brand' to three descriptors, 'Quirky, Issues-based, Authorpreneurial' my aim is to take the

reader into a different world and values (culture) for the length of that story, and maybe beyond, and to be known as an author-speaker as well as a writer. But I decided to stay with the one name.

Have you ever used a pseudonym or considered using one?

Yes. I've been 25% of A.K.Aye, four women who co-wrote 'Formula for Murder'. We chose the pseudonym mainly because our four names were too long to fit on the cover. A.K.A means 'also known as' in police circles. Our collaboration was a fun hobby, until Maryse was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and so finishing the mystery became therapy. We self-published our adult novel to enable Maryse to have her copy.

How long did your current novel 'Celebrant Sleuth' take to write? About a year. I'd write from 6 am until 8 am every day, even weekends. Plotting was complicated as I was experimenting with new techniques and voices but my brain was clearer early in the day.

Apart from a print book, where would you like 'Celebrant Sleuth' to go? Television. I've had the experience of abortive TV and film options before, and often the project is not completed due to lack of finances. But I think 'Celebrant Sleuth' is especially suited to television because of the episodic stories

around specific funerals, weddings and diverse cultural and aged groups linked by the celebrant's role as a problem-solver.

Having a country town as the setting, enables continuity of roles and overlap of the florist, caterer etc.

I'd like an audio version. Plus there's the niche of LBTQI readers as Quinn is asexual. And currently same-sex marriage is topical. I did not predict that.

Why have you also released a collection 'Almost a Crime' on Kindle? These were my apprenticeship in self publishing online. The adult short stories were written over a long period and there's sufficient variety in settings based on places I had researched. Antarctica. French barge. Maximum security prison. Suburban Pokies venue.

As the stories were short, I called them 'Crime-lettes' as most suited to time-poor readers who use their devices in transit. A short story read in one trip can be satisfying.

How do you describe your occupation?

Authorpreneur' on my business card is a talking point.

What is meant by a 'Hybrid author'?

One who is simultaneously self and traditionally published. A 'hybrid' author can

be published by traditional ‘big’ publishers like Penguin Random House with a contract, advance, royalties and the support of distribution and marketing rights internationally. But the writer can self-publish other titles for niche markets or special projects which big publishers consider uncommercial or culturally difficult. Then the author is the publisher and has to handle the distribution but sub- contracts professional editing, cover design etc. Still has to publicise. And pay the bills.

This is NOT Vanity publishing where a naïve amateur-writer just wants something in print and an unscrupulous, low quality printer rips them off at a high cost with no quality control nor distribution. Author publishing is comparable quality but where the writer under-writes the costs. Distribution is still a challenge, but often a speaker-writer will sell at workshops and talks. They have calculated whether there is an existing market before they publish.

Circumstances have changed. The means of publishing digitally is more accessible and faster.

What gives you the most satisfaction in the writing process?

The initial idea.

With the exponential changes in the publishing

industry, what digital/new skills have you had to learn?

Updating a web-site even when I'm not a visual person. Social media is a challenge. I try to learn one tiny digital skill per day, even if just how to upload the appropriately sized photo. And the fine line between ego and business PR when sharing life as an author. Legal stuff like important clauses in contracts. Going to a 'dummies' class on updating Ipad skills and how to use photos on various devices for PR.

At a launch, making sure a generic photo is taken of co-authors and book which can be labeled for quick finding, also allowing time for administrivia, deciding which events are strategic and when to say 'No'.

What proportion of your time is spent in original writing? About 20%

What is your next project?

Children's theatre, and for my existing books to travel into new mediums, especially audio.

Hazel Edwards OAM has published 202 books including 'There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake' series currently touring as 'Hippo Hippo the Musical' 'Hijabi Girl' co-written with Muslim librarian Ozge Alkan about a feisty 8 year old who wants to start

a girls' footy team, is her latest junior book. A cultural risk-taker, Hazel co-wrote 'f2m: the boy within' a YA novel about trans youth. A believer in participant-observation research, Hazel has been an Antarctic expeditioner. She mentors 'Hazelnuts' writers and was a director on the Australian Society of Authors' board.

'Not Just a Piece of Cake: Being an Author' is her memoir based on anecdote as a creative structure. Her books have been translated in ten languages and adapted for other mediums. 'Difficult Personalities' (PRH) co-written with Dr Helen Mc Grath is available in Russian, Polish, Korean, American and audio. Currently writing adult mysteries including 'Celebrant Sleuth'.

www.hazeledwards.com

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