

FINDING A PUBLISHER

A dream fulfilled by Tania Hayes

My name is Tania Hayes, and I am living proof that it is impossible to predict what may happen to you over the course of your life. I was never one who held literary ambitions, yet here I am, about to have my first book published by one of the largest publishing houses in the world.

Ten years ago I believed I had my future mapped out. I was twenty-two years old, and about the walk down the aisle with my soul-mate. My fiancé, Warren, and I thought we had it all figured out — we were both healthy, young, financially established and in love. What could possibly happen to destroy our perfect world?

The day our life swung off its intended course was 21 April, 1997. Without any prior warning or symptoms, my fiancé, Warren, was diagnosed with an acoustic neuroma tumour the size of a tennis ball in the base of his brain. One day we were finalising the plans for our wedding, deliriously in love — less than a week later I was watching Warren slip in and out of consciousness in a hospital bed. The urgency of Warren's condition meant he had to undergo surgery immediately, where he became paralysed down the right side of his body. Things only went downhill from here.

Over the next 447 days of Warren's hospital stay I was advised countless times that our situation was hopeless and that I was better off abandoning him to a nursing home at the ripe old age of twenty-nine. Warren was now a vegetable, unable to eat, speak or move.

Despite all logic I refused to give up on Warren. From the moment he fell sick, I sacri-

ficed my career and everything in my life to be by his side. Eventually, after more than a year in hospital, I discharged Warren against the doctor's advice and took him home to become his full-time carer. I was only 23 years old.

For the past ten years I have devoted my life to rehabilitating Warren, and helping him learn to talk, eat and move once more. Even though Warren is still entirely dependent on me and lives a life in a wheelchair, we have rebuilt our lives to the best of our ability. More than five years later we were finally able to celebrate our wedding, and in 2005 we experienced the greatest miracle of all — the birth of our son, Josh.

Throughout the nightmare of

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Warren's illness I couldn't see anything but the pain and sadness that had become the norm. I could not fathom what an exciting life of opportunities would grow out of our suffering.

I remember clearly towards the end of Warren's hospital stay, a nurse came up to me and said, “Do you realise what an extraordinary story you have to share with world? I wouldn't be surprised if one day I'll be flicking through a magazine and there your story will be! You'll be on television and I bet you'll even write a book. You just wait and see!” I remember looking at her like she was crazy, thinking, “That'll be the day...” I'm not sure if she was entirely serious, but nevertheless, the thought stayed with me.

Becoming an author was

never something that I had considered. However, ten years ago when I was lost in that black labyrinth of Warren's illness, a seed as a writer had already been planted. It would take almost a decade to come to fruition, but unknowingly I had already begun my life's purpose of using the unbreakable bond of love between Warren and me as an example to inspire others.

Three years ago my career as a writer began. I woke up early one morning suddenly excited, and eager to put words onto paper. Slowly, paragraph-by-paragraph, chapter-by-chapter, my book began to evolve, and after two years of writing my first draft was complete. Knowing how perfect my manuscript needed to be

before sending it out, I set about finding a mentor. Out of the blue an opportunity presented itself when I was put in touch with two university students named Victoria Thomas and Dave Cortie, who were at the top of the class in their creative writing degrees. After sharing my manuscript with them, they believed that it showed promise, and so for the next six months they mentored me as I re-wrote the book for the third and final time.

Along the way I also made sure that I gained as much media exposure as possible. I had the opportunity of sharing our story on *Today Tonight*, *Mornings with Kerri-Anne*, on National Radio, in the *New Idea* magazine and in local newspapers and newsletters. The pinnacle of this media



Tania Hayes with husband Warren and son Josh

exposure was when I was appointed the Ambassador for Carers Australia, which saw me launch my professional speaking career.

Once I had completed the final draft of my manuscript I made contact with the NSW Writer's Centre. I had been informed that the Executive Director, Irina Dunn, was the most knowledgeable person in Australia in regards to the book industry, and if my work was at a satisfactory standard, she would guide me in the right direction.

I immediately booked a super session with Irina and I must say to all writers out there who need advice or are ready to publish their book, this is the best money you could ever spend.

On Irina's advice I sent my manuscript off for a manuscript assessment to see if it was at a standard to be considered by a publishing house. Six weeks later and with a positive assessment in hand, I headed back to the NSW Writers' Centre once more. And I am pleased to say that within a week of my final super session, I secured a contract with the most highly regarded book-publishing agent in Australia. I was over

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ABC'S POETICA AT 10 YEARS

Looking for good quality poetry by Mike Ladd

Poetica first went to air on Saturday, February 8, 1997. ABC Radio has had a long tradition of making poetry programs – going right back to the 1930's.

Some of readers might remember old shows like "Quality Street" and "The Poet's Tongue."

Poetica is part of that tradition, but has consciously tried to be more radiophonic, less expository.

Our emphasis has always been on the performance of poetry, and to explore radio forms for poetry. We currently have about 70,000 listeners each week, maybe more, because we don't get figures for all the rural and regional listeners.

When we put a show together we look for good quality poetry that will work well as a listening experience. That is, it needs to be the kind of poetry that communicates readily to a general audience via the ear and that keeps people listening over the 40 minutes.

By "good quality" I mean the poetry doesn't bore us, is exciting and satisfying, has something to say about the world, avoids cliché, is individual in content and form, is memorable, insightful, truthful, vivid and so on, but these

general parameters are applied to very different sorts of poetry - everything from ancient Egyptian Love Poetry to John Clarke's parodies.

I can't stand snobbery in poetry, and we'll put on simple poems of direct communication by relatively unknown poets as well as complex meditations by Nobel prize-winners.

Everyone wants to know how to get onto the program. Well, I'm sorry but we don't take unsolicited material. We tend to produce programs on

Poetica is based in Adelaide where Krystyna Kubiak and I work, but we have ABC colleagues who produce for us in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth.

We also use freelancers here and overseas, and we try to travel to other centres and regions. Occasionally a proposal will come in for a complete program and we'll take it on. It has to be something we haven't done before and something that will sustain for 40 minutes on air. For example, Sir David Griffin

drawn from other sources – classic and contemporary.

We present well-known works as well as promoting emerging Australian poets. The main thing is to make the show a bit of a surprise each week. We also consider the reading of the poetry. Often we employ actors. Supporting Australian performers is part of our brief. Also, if a poet is available and a good reader, we use them. This gives us vocal variety and lets the audience know that poetry is a living, breathing form written by their contemporaries.

We are now in our tenth year and as well as our Saturday afternoon broadcast at 3.05 on ABC Radio National we have a Thursday afternoon repeat at 3.05 pm and our shows are generally available as audio on demand for one month after broadcast by visiting our website at www.abc.net.au/rn/poetica

We don't yet have podcasting because of complicated copyright issues. The publishers are on side but we are still waiting for agreements with the actors' union and commercial music bodies. Everyone wants it to happen, but it's just a matter of working out a fair mechanism for dealing with all the levels of copyright. **MIKE LADD**

"We present well-known works as well as promoting emerging Australian poets. The main thing is to make the show a bit of a surprise each week."

the life's work of a single poet, or very strong thematic sequences of poems, or anthologies of different poets' work on a single theme. Mostly these are sourced from published books of poetry.

The producers of Poetica select material based on their own knowledge, reading and research, their attendance at poetry festivals, and poetry books sent to the program. We currently receive about two new books of poetry each week, far more than we can produce.

sent me a bunch of poems that had been kept in a shoebox for fifty years. They were written by Australian and British POW's in Changi Prison. It was like opening a time capsule and the poems were really good. A program called "Changi Days" came out of that, and later the poems were collected and published in book form.

When we select material we also have to keep in mind our program brief. Without quoting the whole thing, I can tell you that we aim for 60% contemporary Australian content; 40%

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the moon! The hard work and sleepless nights from the past three years were finally creating a dream come true. But the best was yet to come.

I was driving home one night about two months after my agent had taken my book on board. Warren was in the car with me, and as I pulled up in our driveway and stepped

out of the car I heard the phone ringing inside the house.

Leaving Warren still belted into the passenger seat I raced into the house unable to get to the phone. It was my agent, and the words that played on the answering machine were the ones I had been dreaming about from day one: "Tania, we have secured a publishing contract with one of the largest book publishing companies in

the world."

As you can image, I began screaming and dancing about the room! Warren was in the car panicking, as all he could hear were my shrieks and thought that we had been robbed. I was so excited, but as quickly as it had come my excitement turned into emotion. Tears filled up in my eyes, because the sacrifice of the last ten years was finally

bearing fruit. I was going to become an author.

Writing a book is a laborious, demanding task. There are millions of books written each year and so very few that ever reach the bookshelf. I am living proof that if you believe in your dream, and work harder than you ever have in your life, you too may have the chance to become a published author. **TANIA HAYES**