

HANNAH
Richell

Secrets of the Tides

Q&A

Maternal love is a strong theme in your book. What inspired you to write a story that drives a family to breaking point?

I began writing *Secrets of the Tides* at a very happy time in my life. I had just become a mother and found caring for my son to be a profoundly joyful experience. But parenthood also brought undercurrents of fear and vulnerability too. I sometimes worried about whether I would be a good mum and realised, perhaps more clearly than ever before, how a single moment could snatch away everything I held dear. Those fears were the starting point for my story and the idea morphed into *Secrets of the Tides*.

Much of your book is set on the Dorset coast. What drew you to this area?

My grandparents used to live in Dorset and so I drew upon childhood memories of times spent at their home in a village near Bridport to create the landscape of the novel. Writing about England while so far away in Sydney was appealing because it allowed me to reconnect with the place. I was able to pull up locations and images like photographs in my mind's eye and then pull out the details I needed in my writing, as well as weave a little romance around it. I've always loved novels with a strong sense of place at their heart, novels like *I Capture the Castle*, *Rebecca*, *Atonement* and *The Shellseekers*.

Greek mythology features in your book. Did you study Classics or is it simply a special interest of yours?

I have my maternal grandmother to thank for my love of the Classics. When I was about seven-years-old she gave me a hand-me-down book of hers, which contained all the Greek myths inside. I read it from cover to cover many times and it inspired me to study Classical Civilisation and Latin at high school. While I wrote *Secrets of the Tides*, I had fun playing around with some of the themes from the myths, to the point where the three central female characters in the novel are named after three women from the myths: Helen, Pandora and Cassandra.

You have previously worked in publishing. Do you think this helped give you direction as a novelist?

I don't think my experience of working in the publishing industry affected my writing style or direction as a novelist in terms of the words I put down on the page. I didn't really know what I would write when I first sat at the computer. I just had a go, and *Secrets of the Tides* was the result. I do think, however, that my time in the publishing industry helped me with my pitch and positioning when it came time to submit the manuscript to literary agents. When I thought the novel was complete, I took a step back and tried to understand where it might sit in the current book market. Where I struggled was in actually summoning the courage to send my manuscript out. I was afraid of falling flat on my face and of doing it in front of people I admired and respected. It's one thing writing a novel, it's another thing entirely having people read and critique it!

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Your book has been selected as a Richard and Judy pick in the UK, a bit like an Oprah selection. It tends to increase sales and raise the prominence of the author. What does it mean to you?

It's a complete dream-come-true. I was working in the publishing scene in London when the Richard & Judy Book Club was first launched in 2004 and I've seen the difference it can make to an author's career. For me, as a debut author, it's freaky and amazing to see *Secrets of the Tides* rubbing shoulders with novels by authors I've long admired and I'm still not sure I truly believe it.

In 2005 you moved from the UK to Australia. What impact did this have on your writing?

I only began to write fiction after emigrating to Australia. There is something so open and optimistic about Australia and I think its 'have a go' attitude has rubbed off on me. I wonder now if I would find myself in this new career if I had stayed in London.

How do you write with small children at your heels?

It's probably the same as for any parent juggling work and kids. At first it was squashed into the cracks – words thrown down in those rare moments when my baby was asleep. Getting a book deal meant I could pay for childcare and the hours my kids are looked after now are purely for writing. That's when I make myself sit down at the computer and go for it, whether I feel like it or not. Knowing it's my time away from them is a great motivator – otherwise why am I doing it ... I could be spending the time with them? Of course, inspiration can still strike at the most inconvenient times – in the shower, changing a nappy, cooking the kids' dinner – but as long as there's a pen and piece of paper nearby to scribble a few words down, it isn't a problem.

What is next for you?

I'm putting the finishing touches to my second novel which I hope will be out next year ... and I'm looking forward to a full-on family Christmas, when I shall step away from the laptop for a while and recharge my creative battery, ready for next year.

Hannah
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