Guest blog for the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA)

Campbell Jefferys

Being a writer is not so different from a lot of professions: it involves spending much of the day sitting at a desk, working at a computer. That reality is contrasted with how others see the life of a writer: that we tap away for a few hours each day and give readings in crowded rooms full of people fawning over us, all while the royalty cheques roll in.

I have long referred to this as the “party problem”.

I’ve been a professional writer for over two decades, generating a decent income from various sources, including books, journalism, copywriting, public relations, script-writing and ghost-writing, and benefiting from the support of organisations like the Fellowship of Australian Writers (WA). The work is often hard and frustrating, and success has been incremental, but I wouldn’t want to do anything else. I’m very proud that I’ve made a career as a writer.

However, when at a party and asked what I do, saying I’m a writer seems to send my listener off on a creative tangent that has very little to do with my reality. “Oh, you write books? That must be such an easy life.”

If you do write books and have been published, there will follow the assumption that you are a best-selling writer who everyone should know and whose books can be found front and centre in every bookshop. And making a joke that the average book sells about 100 copies and most people wouldn’t be able to pick Dan Brown out of crowd never goes down well.

So, before you’ve even finished your first short story or published your first article, taking on the title of “writer” comes with a lot of baggage and expectation.

The harsh reality is that very few writers will make it to the top of the best-seller lists, and they might find themselves wondering why some writers, whose books aren’t that good, are successful. Then, there are all the stories of writers only gaining recognition long after their work was published (or not), or even after they’ve died, which I refer to as the “Kafka conundrum”.

But wait. There is light at the end of this tunnel. When it comes to writing, and to art in general, I’ve always believed that if something is good, people will find it. Maybe you get lucky and they find it straight away. Maybe it languishes like *Moby Dick* or *The Great Gatsby* and takes decades to be discovered. Maybe it’s supposed to be burned, but some bold person defies those final wishes and shares the work with the world.

As a writer, regardless of where you are in your career and what writing you focus on, everything you work on matters and has value. Avoid measuring your success in dollar signs, sales, reviews, stars, lists and clicks. The true measurement of your writing is the question you ask yourself: is this good? If it is good, maybe others will think so too. Maybe it takes years and years of writing before you end up writing something that’s good.

Because you can always get better at writing. It’s something you can train and practice, where the next draft can be better than the last. Even the world’s most successful writers could learn something in a creative writing course.

This is not a “don’t give up” speech. Writers who write for the right reason don’t need such a speech. As a seasoned writer, I still have so much to learn. I encourage you to practice your craft, attend workshops and aspire to get better, and to write for the sheer joy of creating something out of nothing.

Biography:

Campbell Jefferys is an award-winning WA writer and former FAWWA writer in residence. A professional writer for over twenty years, he is the author of nine books and has written for newspapers and magazines around the world. One of his short stories, *Mikelis*, was made into a short film starring James Cosmo, which screened at dozens of festivals through 2016-17. His latest book, *Rowan and Eris*, features a CD of original music written and recorded especially for the book. He is also a content creator for some of the world’s biggest brands. Apart from writing, Campbell is a musician and multi-sport athlete. He played high level basketball as a teenager, represented Australia twice at the World Age Group Championships of Triathlon, helped found the Berlin Crocodiles AFL team, and currently plays cricket in Hamburg.