

PLOTTING A NEW CAREER: JOY RHOADES

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Joy Rhoades has made a seamless transition from lawyer to author as her first book has proved to be a triumph.

“They talk about plotters, pants-ers (writers who fly by the seat of their pants) and plants-ers, which is what I think I am. I have a storyline, but I like to deviate along the way.” So sums up Joy Rhoades and her approach to writing books.

It is clearly a good approach. Joy’s book, *The Woolgrower’s Companion*, published by Penguin in Australia and the UK, has garnered huge praise for its touching tale of a young woman in rural New South Wales dealing with a battle-scarred erratic father, domineering husband, angry male workers, racial prejudice, drought and financial difficulties, in which environment arrive two Italian prisoners of war sent to help on the farm.

The fiction is rooted in the real-life experiences of Joy’s grandmother and mother. Her grandmother was a fifth generation grazier, a lover of history and a great teller of stories. “I always carried in my head a strong sense of my childhood: the people, the history, the light and the landscape,” Joy says. “I was just waiting for the time when those thoughts would spill out onto the page.”

Joy might well have started writing earlier but for her mother’s sound advice that it would be useful first to get some professional training under her belt. This is exactly what Joy did, although it turned out she spent longer practising as a lawyer than she perhaps first anticipated.



While in New York, Joy met her husband and they moved to London in 2009. They now have two school-age daughters. It was in 2013 that Joy devoted herself entirely to writing (in fact, she also now teaches creative writing).

Not that Joy believes her time as a lawyer was wasted; far from it, she thinks practising as a lawyer has been invaluable. “The legal training means you are constantly checking your facts, your conclusions and your analysis on the way. The story has to be plausible. If you don’t get things straight, the reader is subconsciously distracted, using up cognitive load trying work out what is wrong and how to correct it. You want your readers to stay with you and release tension as you go along.”

The other side to her training as a lawyer is the discipline needed to be an author. Joy treats her writing as a work, operating to time frames as if she were still working on transactions under time pressure. “The key thing is to get the writing done - even if it is not perfect, you then go back to what you have done and improve it.”

Joy is well into writing the sequel to *The Woolgrower’s Companion*, only this time she has a clearer idea of the plot. Maybe she is becoming less of a plants-er and more of a plotter.

**The Woolgrower’s Companion* has just been published in paperback by Penguin. The link is: <https://amzn.to/2JcB3wU>.