

Questions to the author

Interviewer: Hi, Donna. So you're the author of [The Zanzibar Moon](#). It's not very often that a fun, chick-lit, quirky romance adventure is inspired by something as tragic as suicide. How did that come about?

Donna: It's a long story because it began in primary school with a story called 'The Mouse with the musical ears'. I don't remember the story but my mum and dad reminded me of the title for years to come. They were pretty chuffed about their daughter's writing talents. I've been writing ever since.

Interviewer: It's obviously many years since that first story as you're over 50. What happened in between?

Donna: There was the teen-angst poetry, followed by submissions to Dolphin Encounters (I've always been an animal lover) other magazines, plus stints at Ellem Advertising. I got to be editor of Wax 'n' Wind a surf lifestyle magazine, Zeus Publications as the book marketing/publicist and some good freelance gigs over the years. I've been published in [The Australian Women's Weekly](#) and [Woman's Day](#) to name a couple. Then I wrote a number of manuscripts (to never see the light of the publishing day), until [The Zanzibar Moon](#).

Interviewer: What was wrong with the first manuscripts? Did you try to get them published?

Donna: Yes, of course. Unfortunately after a few rejections I'd give up and move onto a new writing project. Sometimes I think of them as my learning curve. I was juggling a lot, three children. I have a step-son from my husband's first marriage and two sons together. I had a home graphic arts business, part-time work, lots of sport (it was touch football and basketball then) and of course all the running around with the boys, but that's all no excuse. I should have pushed my writing career, sooner. I regret not getting published by my 30s at least.

Interviewer: That does seem like a handful but there are writers doing all that and still getting published. Why the hurdles for you?

Donna: I guess part of it was having faith in my ability to satisfy a reader for a whole book. I loved writing, so although being published was a dream, the writing was what really mattered most. I did a writing diploma, thanks to a small inheritance from my great Aunty Marge. It taught me a lot and helped my freelance career. I'm not a writer who stays in a den alone. I can write with the family life going on around me, but I also did lots of other things. It's cliché but life gets in the way. Your 20s and 30s are a very social time, and my friends will attest to the fun we had. We also volunteered at our local sporting clubs and that was time-consuming. I went back to full time work too. I never had the luxury of being a stay-at-home writer. I'd love to have been rich, but wouldn't we all.

Interviewer: So, what was the turning point?

Donna: As I got older I thought about being an author more. I had lots of dreams about holding my own book. I'm 53 this year. I realised I was three years older than my own dad when he had died. I think about him a lot. He suicided in 1987 and he would have been eighty this year. I felt I owed it to him to write a book that he would love, one that he'd inspired in lots of ways. [The Zanzibar Moon](#) is dedicated to him.

Interviewer: How did your dad inspire [The Zanzibar Moon](#)? And how did his suicide affect you?

Donna: After a seven-year depression my Dad decided to leave us. The thing that hurt the most was how close we were and that still wasn't enough for him to want to remain alive. Over the years it has been difficult to come to terms with it. It's profoundly affected the people my mum, brother, sister

and myself have become. I still miss him a lot but its irreversible isn't it? We just have to move forward.

By creating an adventure romance in an African setting I'm paying homage to Dad. He instilled in me a love of wildlife, through shows we watched; [Daktari](#), [Tarzan](#), [Born Free](#), [Hatari!](#) (you may remember the song [Baby Elephant Walk](#)) and The Gods Must Be Crazy. I gave him a book called '[A Man Cannot Cry](#)' by Gloria Keverne. It was because he did a lot of crying back then and the book had an African theme. Not long before he died he signed up for Volunteers Abroad, he never went. I planned to go too, but that still hasn't happened either. The closest I can get to Africa is in my imagination by writing this book. Anyway I think he'd be super proud of [The Zanzibar Moon](#). Mum is. She was one of my first readers and gave me some good feedback and picked up on some typos and grammar I'd missed.

Interviewer: I'm sure your dad would be proud too. It's a unique book and the settings are vivid and the characters quirky. I note that you've placed promotions about the causes you believe in; [Umoja Orphanage Kenya](#), [The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust](#) and [AfriCat](#)? All worthy causes but given your father's suicide I wondered why no [Beyond Blue](#), [Lifeline](#) or a cause in Australia?

Donna: There is mention to [Beyond Blue](#) in the story but I only had so much room at the back of the book. It is an adventure romance but there is an environmental and wildlife message. Being set in [Zanzibar](#) and other parts of Africa I wanted to support those themes and organisations. I've been involved in [Umoja Orphanage Kenya](#) and [The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust](#) for years. I'd been told about AfriCat through fellow author [Lynn Santer](#), so my research on them was new. Donna, from [AfriCat](#) was wonderfully insightful and I made some specific changes to the manuscript after getting in contact with her. I think those adjustments have definitely helped the story, and message in general.

Interviewer: What is your favourite place to write?

Donna: At the moment anywhere I find the time. It could be in my office, watching TV (I write in the adverts if it's something I really want to watch), outside, at lunch at work and at the dining table (no cafes for me because I have an espresso machine at home). Ideally I dream of a little writing studio with a veranda and a water view, with lots of shelving, a beautiful desk with lots of nooks and crannies and a daybed to read on.

Interviewer: Favourite thing outside of writing?

Donna: Definitely my family, particularly my grandchildren. I though loving your children filled your heart and then along comes grandchildren, which makes you realise your heart can take in infinite amounts of love.

Interviewer: I guess as an Indie Author and self-publisher you can add those causes, while with a traditional publisher the choice might have been out of your hands?

Donna: Exactly. I've enjoyed the process and being in control of all things. I'm lucky to have worked in publishing and gaining the experience needed to do so. I've really worked at the end product being so much like a traditionally published book that no one will realise its self-published (unless they read my story). The quality, cover, editing, style, paper; everything is massively important. I'm lucky I've chosen to do this at a time Indie Publishing is being accepted. Many well-known authors started out this way; Matthew Reilly, E.L. James, Lisa Genova & H.M. Ward to name a few I know of.

Adding the causes was imperative to me. Though I won't want my two grandchildren reading [The Zanzibar Moon](#), because there is a fair bit of sex, I do want them to know, I want the planet they will be living in to be as beautiful and full of nature and wildlife as it was for me.

Interviewer: Well it's been nice chatting about [The Zanzibar Moon](#). Where can readers buy it?

Donna: [The Zanzibar Moon](#) is available worldwide through [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Noble](#) and [Book Depository](#) etc., Australia through [Booktopia](#), [Fishpond](#) and of course my website www.warmwittywords.com.au. Available in paperback and ebook: \$22.00 and \$4.99. Thank you so much for inviting me for this interview and nice chatting to you too.

Warning: Don't ask the writer about her addiction to Peanut Butter (it's unexplainable), why she likes doing a round kick in Kick Fit classes, what it's like to be practically the shortest person in a room (yes most over-eight-year-old kids are taller), how many injuries she had in touch football and basketball and why she gave up, why the Tinnitus in her ear doesn't really bother her (useful if you don't want to hear something) and how she's been married for 27 years (yep and even to the same bloke). Definitely don't ask, unless you're brave enough for the answers or need a good laugh.