

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Fiction Young Adult

Author: Claire Merchant

When I was a little girl, I used to make picture books in my free time. When I got a bit older, I started to keep a journal and write short stories, and by high school, I was writing novels. I wrote to dream on paper, and I wrote to find my voice. I lived in a fantasy world when reality stopped making sense to me, and my characters became my friends. I created a place for them known as South Coast where they could run free and thrive. Over the years, the population grew, and it became a place where I could go when everything else got too much. I wrote because I needed to, and I wrote as often as I could. I wrote from different people's perspectives, but I interwove their stories. My characters all live in the same place, so even if they had their own narrative to tell, they still visited each other from time to time. I decided to use each name only once to make it easier to keep track of them, and my little town of South Coast became a metropolis where everyone had a story.

I fell in love with the hope that writing offered, and I loved the endless possibilities that lay before me. I lived out scenarios that I otherwise wouldn't find myself in, and I pursued careers that would take years to study. I wrote about friends, relationships, family, and my surroundings. I explored life in my safe place and had the best tour guides that I could dream up.

When I was studying at university, I decided to send the first young adult novel I had written out to publishers in Australia in the hopes of seeing it in print. When it wasn't successful, I returned to South Coast and kept writing. I continued creating and learning, and I focused on refining my craft.

In the five years that followed, while I studied and then went on to work, I wrote eleven more novels in genres ranging from fantasy, magical realism, romance, adventure, and general fiction. It was only then that I decided to try again at getting my work published. I had just finished writing a fantasy story that I was very close to and proud of called 'Mistry by

Moonlight', and after sending it out internationally, it became my first published novel in July 2013.

I hit the ground running after publishing 'Mistry by Moonlight' with Pegasus Publishers, and seven months later, I published my second novel, 'South Coast Son', in February of 2014. In December of that same year, I self-published a short thriller novel titled 'Foresight' through Amazon, and in 2015, published an additional three of my novels with Pegasus Publishers, 'Forever Ruby', 'Knowing Nora', and 'Midnight Mistry'. The following year, 2016, was also a busy year, and a further four of my novels were made available – 'Mistry at Dawn' (to complete my Mistry Trilogy), 'A Lady Born, A Pirate Bred', 'Christian and Layla', and 'Finding Hope'.

In 2017, I took a break from formal publishing and went on to self-publish two of my shorter novels, 'Dreaming of Reality', and 'Linger', and so far in 2018, I have self-published another two – 'Heart Strings' and 'Daughter Departed'.

My journey so far as a writer has been a whirlwind, but I have loved every second of it. At times, it has been challenging, but there nothing is more rewarding than putting in hard work and achieving something that I only dreamed possible. Writing is my passion, and sharing my books with people and letting them into my fictional world has been both terrifying and incredible at the same time. I have met some amazing people over the years through visiting schools, doing interviews, and connecting through social media, and having people tell me that they can relate to my characters or forge an attachment to them is the best feeling in the world.

My characters tell their stories, their truth, and I like to focus on their experiences, their relationships, and their journey as they figure out who they are and what they want out of life. I know my characters well, and although I don't always agree with them, I can relate to every single one of them. They are all a part of me in some way or another.

My dream and ultimate goal as an author is to reach people and remind them that they are not alone in what they are going through. Reading and writing has helped me so much over the years and has better equipped me to face the real world, and I believe that books have a

remarkable capacity to open your mind, understand different perspectives, and take you away from the overwhelming pressures of everyday life.

I would love to one day see my characters brought to life in film, but until then, I am more than happy to keep doing what I'm doing and share more of what I have learnt with the world.

Excerpt from 'Daughter Departed' [2018]:

"It was hard to believe that almost this time last year I was still finding my feet after breaking up with Marcus. It was more difficult to think that this time two years ago, we were still together, and I was working for my father and trying to belong here. I couldn't imagine that life anymore, and I was glad that something had happened to snap me out of it. I couldn't be upset about Marcus anymore either because I knew that he would find someone who would love him how he needed, and I would too. I didn't regret the other lessons I'd learnt from the mistakes I'd made or the people I'd met, because they'd opened my eyes to everything that I could see today. All of it, in some way or another, had helped me stand stronger as Amelia Saber, and not just who people perceived I was. So, truth be told, I didn't regret anything because it was only after everything that I saw the number of possibilities that lie before me. The only thing I had left to do was decide."