

## **YON Beyond - a writers group journey**

### **THE PLAN**

*Write a Book*. That's what I wrote on my bucket list. My initial motivation was simple. Numbers are my friend. English was not. So I thought the best way to improve my spelling, grammar and vocabulary would be to write a story.

Every birthday and Christmas my husband shakes out my bucket list for inspiration. One year he helped me tick off '*Learn a musical instrument*'. He gave me a beautiful guitar and paid for lessons. But to be honest I'm hopeless at it.

The following year, he scoured my list again and at number 69 - I kid you not - is '*Write a Book*'. So hubby bought me the **Year of the Novel** Course at the Queensland Writers Centre. I never imagined how much that course would change my life. On the last Sunday of every month for nearly a year, Dr Kim Wilkins navigated me through the novel writing process. I started in February with a blank page, but by November I'd written 68,000 words and typed THE END. *Lost in Kakadu* was born.

### **THE ACTION**

In the beginning *Lost in Kakadu* was planned as a survival story. Whilst I love survival stories, I'm also a hopeless romantic, so I decided to merge them both. What surprised me most was how the story evolved into a beautiful love story. With my newfound knowledge on character and story arcs, the delicate drawing out of the relationship between my two controversial characters and making their connection so real that you could believe it to be true, was writing heaven. I never knew writing romance could be so special.

But writing that terrible first draft was easy. Editing it was the next challenge. So I promptly enrolled in Year of the Edit, and again with Dr Kim as my guide my manuscript went through a well-deserved beating. I learnt about POV's and cliché's, first person and third person perspectives. I learnt syntax, synonyms, sentence structure and just about everything else in between. I worked hard, did my homework, read the prescribed reading, experimented and practiced. Then practiced some more. *Lost in Kakadu* grew to some 92,000 words and after many more years of editing it was published by Escape Publishing in 2013.

### **THE REWARDS**

My hard work has paid off, as *Lost in Kakadu* has been nominated for a clutch of awards and most notably won RWA's Romantic Book of the Year this year, romantic elements.

But for me, doing the writing courses is not only about enhancing my skills, it's also about meeting like-minded people who share my crazy passion. In 2009 with three fellow writers I'd met during the YON course we founded a writing group called **YON Beyond**.

The group has evolved since then and now boasts a core group of nine writers. We meet online every Tuesday and we meet monthly in a face-to-face environment either at a coffee shop or at the State Library of Queensland. We also enjoy an annual writers retreat to further our skills and provide a more focused environment to work on manuscripts, brainstorm, provide feedback and generate new story ideas.

We cover a broad range of genres including new adult, memoirs, short stories, contemporary romance, crime, romance suspense, erotic romance, historical romance and fantasy.

We are dedicated to furthering our education to enhance our writing skills. We've participated in diplomas and online short courses or master classes and workshops through Queensland Writers Centre and Romance Writers Association. We've all attended various conferences including RWA, GenreCon, ARRA, Conflux and WorldCon.

When we started **YON Beyond**, being published was just a wonderful dream. We smashed through the dream barrier in 2013 when three of us published our debut novels. Since then, Noelle Clark has published 6, Isabella Hargreaves has published 2, Tania Joyce will publish her debut novel in 2015 and I have another 3 novels releasing next year too.

We also have first, seconds and thirds in a number of writing awards from USA, NZ and AUS. Between us we attend book launches, participate in blogs and explore the world of online marketing. Together, in **YON Beyond** we are critique partners, knowledge conveyors, inspiration assistants, a shoulder to lean on, a sounding board for plot ideas and unlimited writing support partners.

We love to write. It is in our blood. And it all started with a Year of the Novel course at QWC. You can find out more about our group at: [www.yonbeyond.com](http://www.yonbeyond.com)

*Kendall Talbot's debut novel **Lost In Kakadu** won Romantic Book of the Year 2014. She has three books due for release in 2015. **Treasured Secrets** (April) and **Treasured Obsession** (October) are the first two books in a romantic suspense trilogy and **Double Take** (September) is the first book in a detective series.*