

# Profile: Melanie Calvert

**Melanie Calvert** has a Master's Degree and a First Class Honours degree in Literature, and a Journalism degree from Deakin University in Victoria. She was also the winner of Deakin's Vice Chancellor's Prize for Best Critical Essay.

Melanie was born in Launceston, and grew up in Scottsdale in North-East Tasmania. She now lives in Canberra.

## **Describe your early history.**

In the very early years of my life we lived in Derby, a largely deserted former tin-mining town in north-east Tasmania. My sisters used to swim in the town water supply, one sister used to light fires under her bed, and our phone number was 7! We were quite poor and used to eat Kangaroo patties long before it became fashionable.

At age three we moved to the slightly larger town of Scottsdale. My father was the local policeman and my mother a nurse. It was a fairly modest upbringing but the wealth lay in the beautiful blue and green surroundings. Scottsdale is a lush green valley fed by rich red volcanic soil, and cradled by waves of blue mountains. Our police house was small by today's standards and I shared a bedroom with my two older sisters, who delighted in terrifying me with spooky tales.

## **At what age did you begin writing, and what did you write?**

Apparently I could 'read' from a very early age although in fact I just knew all my books off by heart. I had a special arrangement with the town librarian so that I could take out more books than would normally have been allowed. I remember writing stories and then bawling my eyes out because they were so sad!

## **A book you often return to is...**

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales. I love the combination of innocence and gore in children's fiction. Anything by Margaret Atwood because she is fabulous, and she shares my obsession with fairy tales. And Carmel Bird as the first author I read who set her novels in Tasmania. I like to think we have a similar 'unruly' style.

## **Full-time or part-time writer?**

Part-time writer, part-time public servant, full-time Mum. Nothing beats the consistency of a public service pay packet, but they know I'm not there for the love of it.

## **Publications?**

My novel, *Freycinet*, 2012. Bizarre clairvoyant visions lead a woman into a search and rescue mission for two young women lost in the Tasmanian wilderness in this psychological murder mystery.

My Master of Arts thesis, 2001. '*The red shoes : obsessive and contagious narratives*'. Identifying the contagious appeal of the magical fairy tale red shoes using psychoanalytical theory.

'*The Snow Queen Game*' (short story) Hecate, 1999. A woman becomes addicted to a strange computer game that eventually reveals a tragic forgotten secret from her past.

'*Schizophrenia*' (short story) Hecate, 1997. Set in the future, a corporation controls the personal transformations of women; their physical appearance, lives and economic status, so that they are in a continuous state of change.

## **Tell us about your career highlight to date.**

The launch of my novel, *Freycinet*, was surreal; like being awake during a dream!

'Winning' the opportunity to be represented by Pippa Masson from Curtis Brown through the ACT Writers competition *Pitch your Book* was fantastic. Pippa's support, encouragement and praise gave me the confidence to persevere with my writing.

## **What is the greatest challenge you find yourself facing when writing?**

Finding time and carving out the 'head space' for myself. Because I have a young family it's easy to fall into the routine of tending to everyone else. A few years ago I did an oil-painting course and it was lovely to do something that had no purpose other than that it interested me. As far as writing I try to do a little bit each day (and I find that once you get started you'll probably end up doing hours of writing anyway).

