

Extended interview with Miranda



When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?

OK, this is going to be embarrassing. Up until the age of about five I wanted to be a fairy. Seriously. A pair of wings and a sparkly dress – what’s not to love. I actually gave Rosie this childhood ambition in *Fairytale of New York*, but this is the first time I’ve admitted that it was mine in real life... Then, when I was five, I had a revelation after visiting my local library with my mum – I wanted to write a book that Kingswinford Library would one day put on their shelves. From then on, my dream of becoming a writer overtook my fairy ambitions!

What items couldn’t you live without?

I don’t know that there are many things I couldn’t live without, but there are definitely things that make life easier for me. Notebooks (I have lots of them and never seem to be able to find the same one to write in at any one time) and pens are my weakness – my first Saturday job was working for WHSmith

and I think most of my wages went on stationery and books. I think it's the closest thing to an addiction that I have. That and *Gilmore Girls* – I must admit I am slightly obsessed and my full collection of series DVDs are my go-to source of inspiration when I want to write funny, fast-paced dialogue. Other than that, I love my trusty 'random rug' blanket (that I bought from The Atlantic Blanket Company a couple of years ago) that I always have over my knees when I write and my Tigger mug that my fab friend Andi bought me for my 30th Birthday. And my friends – I honestly couldn't live without them!

If you weren't a writer, what else would you like to be?

Probably doing something with music – it's been an important part of my life ever since I can remember. One ambition I still have is to run a coffee shop one day. In fact, *Wātea* in *Welcome to My World* is based on an idea for a coffee shop that I had with my best friend Helen – comfy sofas, magazines, funky food and fab coffee. We worked together in a coffee shop a couple of years ago and it was wonderful. So maybe when I retire I'll move somewhere gorgeous like Snowdonia or Devon and open a *Wātea* of my own!

Which authors inspire you?

I like to read lots of different genres, so my favourite writers are quite varied! Jane Austen is my all-time favourite romance writer (of course) but I also adore Sarah Addison Allen, Isabel Wolff, Nora Ephron, Jill Mansell and Cecelia Ahern. I'm a big romantic comedy fan and love writers who think outside the box – Sarah Addison Allen's book *The Sugar Queen* is one of my all-time favourites because of its sheer inventiveness. In other genres I adore Neil Gaiman, Sir Terry Pratchett and Jasper Fforde for totally barmy comedy,

Simon Toyne and Charles Cumming for breathless thrillers and Bill Bryson and Tom Cox for fantastic observational non-fiction.

How have you found the last three years as a published author since your first novel was discovered on Authonomy.com?

A complete whirlwind! It's a massive change when your hobby becomes your career and to be honest it's taken me a couple of years to get my head around it. The time demands of writing (especially when I still have a day job) have been the biggest challenge, but with every year I think I'm getting better at organising my time and making room for rest occasionally! The year I spent writing and editing *Welcome to My World* was the hardest so far, I think because the phenomenal success of *Fairytale of New York* spooked me. So instead of enjoying the thrill of success, I found myself totally panicked that I wouldn't be able to write a book to match my first. In hindsight, I didn't have to worry and I made a conscious decision at the start of writing this book to enjoy the process and have fun. Filming the vlogs for *It Started With a Kiss* and all the resulting interaction with my lovely followers on my blog, twitter and facebook have really lifted the writing and editing experience and I'm finally at a place where I feel I can embrace everything that being a published author brings. It really is a dream come true and I couldn't imagine doing anything else!

Do you spend a lot of time researching your novels?

Yes, I do. It's something I've always done with my writing, long before I was published. I love stories where I can learn something, whether it's about the

location, the type of job that a character does, or a central theme of the book – so I try to bring that into the stories I write.

For this novel, a lot of the band and gig references came from my own experience, but I wanted to research the bits of weddings that the band don't generally get to see. So I looked at a lot of wedding venues, met people who work in the wedding industry and spent many happy hours wandering through magazines and excellent wedding blogs like www.rocknrollbride.com and www.theweddingofmydreams.com.

I also receive amazing research help from my fabulous Twitter followers, who have saved my sanity on many occasions through the writing and editing process of my books. This time they've shared their best and worst wedding stories, told me about amazing wedding venues and even inspired details about the characters. I love this side of research – not least because it makes a nice change from the solitary pursuit of writing!

What is a typical working day like for you?

I don't have one! I work part-time, so writing has to take place around my day job. I have two days a week to write, together with evenings and weekends. I don't have a set working pattern, but actually this works well for me – with everything else so varied, it helps to be flexible about when, where and how I write. When I have a deadline to meet, I will write at every opportunity and at all hours to get it done!

I generally try to write something every day (although I never beat myself up if I don't) and I always carry notebooks with me for jotting down ideas, snippets of dialogue and character sketches. One of the things that makes writing so exciting is the fact that inspiration is everywhere. For example, Harri, the main character in *Welcome to My World*, was inspired by a really cool-looking young woman I saw in my local coffee shop in Stourbridge. She just looked like the kind of person who could have a fascinating life – and that was my starting point for the character. Love it when that happens!

Have you ever had writer's block? If so, how did you cope with it?

I've definitely had times when I can't resolve a problem in my plot, or not been sure where to take a character next. I think every writer experiences that. But since I became a published writer with a schedule to meet and scary deadlines, I've had to find ways of getting round the problems!

The best remedy I've found is to write ahead of the obstacle. I'll write a scene that comes later in the plot and focus on that rather than feeling helpless about the problem. I believe that writer's block is ninety-nine percent psychological and one percent problem. So if you can trick your mind into thinking you've already resolved the problem, it will often resolve itself.

Do your characters ever surprise you?

All the time! In fact, I would be rather disappointed if they didn't...

I know that some writers like to have everything neatly planned before they begin, but I can't work like that. While I believe wholeheartedly in having a good structure for my novels, I always leave room for serendipitous things to appear. More often than not, the little scenes, bits of conversation or cameo characters that appear when I'm not expecting them to are the ones that people who have read my books seem to love the most.

Major characters surprise me, too (which is one of the things I love best about writing). For example, in my first novel, *Fairytale of New York*, Ed Steinmann was initially just meant to be a supporting cast member and a bit of a sidekick for Rosie in her florists' store, Kowalski's. But as soon as I started to write him, he assumed centre-stage and ended up becoming one of the book's major characters. Although I know I'll look like a loon for saying this, I am almost convinced that *he* decided to build up his role...

Which five people, living or dead, would you invite to a dinner party?

Awesome question! OK, here goes...

1. **Jane Austen** – she would have the inside track on everyone else at the table and would be a fantastic person to sit next to. Imagine the wry observations she'd be whispering all evening...
2. **Victoria Wood** – she's my hero and a massive inspiration to me as a writer. I think she would have the best stories to share at the dinner table.

3. **Jim Henson** – just because I’m such a fan. I can imagine him making napkins and cutlery talk to entertain the other guests.
4. **Albert Einstein** – I read a biography about him a couple of years ago and was fascinated by him and his life. It would be amazing to sit with him and just listen to him speak.
5. **Russell Howard** – because he’s such a positive person who clearly loves life. I think his energy would be a great addition to the dinner party – and can you imagine the conversations he would get into with Albert and Jim? Now *that’s* a party I’d love to be at!

What’s the strangest job you’ve ever had?

It’s a joke among my friends that I end up with the most random jobs and, believe me, I’ve worked in some odd places. I once had to sing backing vocals for a Nigerian reggae gospel singer in a Nigerian accent so it fitted in with his voice. I also worked in a small industrial bag factory in a converted stable that was allegedly haunted by a ghost horse (I’m not kidding, they brought a medium in and everything). But probably the oddest job I’ve had (and, strangely, one of the jobs I’ve enjoyed the most) was a tour guide at a nuclear power station when I lived in Essex. Imagine an air stewardess’ uniform with matching hard hat, ear defenders and steel toe-capped shoes – that was my uniform! It was a great job and I met so many interesting people as I took them around the site, including a team of nuclear physicists and a Dambusters pilot!

And what can you tell us about your next novel?

It's going to be fabulous! There will be rivalry, awesome tunes and maybe the odd jazz hand, all set in a gorgeous seaside location. I know you're going to love it!