



# Putting it out there

WE ALL HAVE A BOOK INSIDE US, RIGHT? BEST-SELLING INDIE NOVELISTS KIKI ARCHER AND CLARE ASHTON EXPLAIN HOW TO GET YOURS PUBLISHED ILLUSTRATION BY IEVA KUOJAITE

If you've looked at the Amazon lesbian fiction chart recently, you will have seen two new indie authors at the top of the list. Kiki Archer's *But She is My Student*, *Instigations* and *Binding Devotion* have all reached number one. Clare Ashton's number one best-seller *After Mrs Hamilton* is currently short-listed for a Goldie Award. We asked Kiki and Clare to chat about their writing and experience of indie

publishing and to offer some tips for budding novelists.

**WRITING ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW**

**CLARE:** My first novel, *Pennance*, is an atmospheric tale set in Cornwall in winter – a modern gothic romance. It was easy for me to write since I love Cornwall at that time of year and often head down there to walk

round the coast. But my most recent novel, *After Mrs Hamilton*, involves a high-class escort, which raised a few eyebrows. Several people questioned how I wrote some scenes so truthfully. I tend to shamelessly use the experience of friends and relatives, and my own, when I write novels and I also research topics. Kiki used to be a teacher, and it shows in

her funny lesbian chicklit novel *But She is My Student*: a story of a student and teacher who are attracted to each other.

So, which do you prefer to write: what you know, or what you need to research? And did you get some awkward questions about the attractive teacher in the book?

**KIKI:** Oh my goodness, yes, everybody thinks I love myself because they think that I think Kat is me! And I must admit that I wrote Kat as the woman I would love to be. The perfect teacher, the perfect friend, the perfect lover. Unfortunately I am well aware that I am none of the above!

But yes, I had so much fun writing the school scenes and remembering the horrific teenagers I encountered throughout the years. But I actually loved being a PE teacher and I miss it enormously. However, my children are my priority and writing is the perfect career to let me put them first.

**STRETCHING YOURSELF**

**CLARE:** Your latest novel, *Binding Devotion*, is more serious. What's the reaction been?

**KIKI:** It's been great. It hit the number one spot on Amazon, iTunes, Smashwords and Lulu. This is the first novel that I knew people were waiting for. Therefore I tried even harder to write a story that was worth reading. My debut novel was written for an audience of one. I wrote it simply to try writing a book.

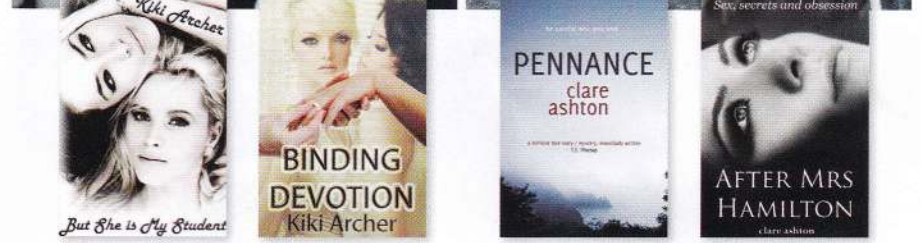
I realise that I have fallen into this career and landed on my feet, but now, with *Binding Devotion*, I feel that I have taken off my training wheels. It is so rewarding to be contacted by people telling me my books have helped them come to terms with their sexuality or given them the confidence to be proud of who they are. Or simply that they have had a good laugh at some of the scenes in the book.

**KIKI: How did you get into lesbian fiction?**

**CLARE:** I submitted my first novel to UK agents. I had a lot of positive feedback, but some didn't want to risk a lesbian novel. But the great feedback gave me enough confidence to self-publish. I did submit to a couple of US lesbian (lesbian fiction) publishers



Indie go-girls: Kiki Archer (left) and Clare Ashton



(there are very few in the UK), but *Pennance* didn't fit their lists. I know more about the US publishers now, and I may have had more luck with others. So one thing I do recommend is to research the lesbian publishers thoroughly before submitting a manuscript.

**THE BEST AND WORST BITS OF BEING AN INDIE**

**CLARE:** There's a lot to recommend indie publishing. I love that I can write what I want (and publish it when I want), no matter how controversial or different to typical lesbian novels. I've had people say that *After Mrs Hamilton* is one of their favourite books and they loved its unconventional plot. That's thrilling to hear.

**Would you recommend the indie route?**

**KIKI:** Being an indie author is exciting and I would highly recommend it. I love having complete control over everything from book covers to release dates. The only downside is promotion. Without a big publishing company it's difficult to be seen. However, the support of the LGBT community and magazines have helped indie authors overcome this. ●

As well as writing, Clare ([rclareashton.wordpress.com](http://rclareashton.wordpress.com)) co-edits the UKLesFic blog ([uklesfic.wordpress.com](http://uklesfic.wordpress.com)) and Kiki is an active advocate for LGBT equal rights ([kikiarcher.com](http://kikiarcher.com)). You can catch them at L Fest ([lfest.co.uk](http://lfest.co.uk)) in July for an indie author Q and A session and book readings.

**TIPS: PUBLISHING YOUR NOVEL**

- Read about writing, eg *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers*, and avoid rookie mistakes.
- Get feedback, be brave and act on it.
- Get someone else to copy-edit your book – it's difficult to spot your own mistakes.
- eBooks still need a good cover. If you can't afford a professionally designed cover, try cheap photo libraries and free software packages.
- Write a good blurb – it's key to selling your novel.
- Amazon KDP (ebooks for Kindle) and Smashwords (for Kobo, Sony reader, iTunes and B&N) are both free to publish with.
- Createspace and Lulu are good quality print-on-demand companies that sell via Amazon.

**MARKETING AND SELLING - THE HARDEST STEP**

- Lesbian is a niche market so easier to target than the mainstream. Announce your book on online discussion groups such as *The Virtual Living Room*.
- Make your work free for a few days to start the ball rolling and get initial reviews.
- Send your book to lesbian reviewers such as Terry Baker.
- Start a blog and talk to other authors on Facebook and Goodreads.
- Most importantly, keep writing. The more books you write the more opportunities people have to find and like your work.