



CIARA GERAGHTY

◆ Did you always want to be a writer?

No, I wanted to be a waitress in a café at Dublin

Airport, or a singer in a rock 'n roll band. Achieved neither goal, although was backing singer in a northside 'garage' band in the late '80s/ early '90s. We never made the big time but we did persuade Tony Gibney to let us play in his pub in Malahide.

◆ How did you get into it?

I never knew I wanted to be a writer. When I was 34, I decided to do an evening class, more to get out of the house once a week and do something unrelated to work and mother/wife/employee/friend related duties. I signed up to a creative writing class with no idea of what to expect. I LOVED it. Before I started writing, I felt like I had an itch that I just couldn't scratch. I was restless. When I started writing stories at that class, something happened to me. I can't quite explain it and I'm worried that this will sound crazy, but I felt like I'd come home. A lovely quiet home, where your favourite dinner is handed to you on a plate and your dirty clothes are returned to you clean and pressed and smelling of roses. And where no pot plants die prematurely.

◆ How did you decide what genre you wanted to write for?

It wasn't really a conscious decision. The first line of my first book *Saving Grace* is an answer to an innocuous question I asked a friend one Monday morning by email. The question was 'How was your weekend?' The answer was, 'It all started with a bottle of Baileys that was a year out of date but I drank it anyway.' I copied and pasted the line and about a year later, while doing a 'magic realism' writing class (another evening one), we were sent home to write a fairytale and I opened the Word file where I had stored that line

and started writing and couldn't stop. I didn't decide to write a 'chick lit' book, or a 'literary fiction' book or a 'historical fiction' book and especially not a 'fairytale' as I was supposed to be doing. My main aim and ongoing policy is 'a good tale, well told.' That's what I try to do.

◆ Where did your original ideas come from?

For *Saving Grace*, the character of Grace O'Brien arrived in my head, fully formed and rearing to go. I had no idea what to do with her so I just wrote my way into the story until something interesting happened.

Becoming Scarlett deals with the nine months of a pregnancy. I was pregnant when I started writing it so this definitely had an effect on what I was writing. Also watched films like *Juno*, *The Waitress* and *Knocked Up* around that time, all of which helped to inform the plot of this book.

I got the idea for *Finding Mr. Flood* from a radio phone-in show I heard about 20 years ago, when I had no idea that I would be a writer. A woman rang in to say that her husband pulled up in front of the house in his truck. She asked him for help in shifting a flat-pack piece of furniture that had been delivered to the house that day. He told her he would park the lorry up the road and be back in a flash. He drove up the road and she never saw him again. The story stayed with me for years and years and I often thought about that man and wondered why he left and if he ever came back and what happened to the woman he left behind.

◆ How did you go about finding a publisher/agent?

I bought a copy of *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*, opened the section on 'Agents', read it, then closed the book and put it on my bookshelf and bit my nails for most of a week. Then my husband - fed up with the angst-ridden procrastination and the general drama, took the book back down off the shelf, re-opened the section on 'Agents' and said 'Ring them you big eejit.' So I did.



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Two were on their holidays, one was unavailable and the fourth number I rang was Ger Nichol. I left a message on her machine, she rang me back that day, I told her about the book, she asked me to email it to her, I did, she read it and rang me back to say that she would represent me. Stunned, startled and unsettled. But in a good way. Husband said, 'I told ya, didn't I?' in smug, superior tone.

◆ What do you have to do to prepare a manuscript for submission?

Get it pitch perfect. Be thrilled with it yourself before you send it out. Make sure it's your best work. Be honest with yourself. Can you do more? Are there flabby bits? Make sure every word is dedicated to telling the story. Moving the narrative. Be merciless with the editing. Cut, cut, cut. Less is more. Get rid of as many adverbs as you can, especially 'gleefully.' NEVER say GLEEFULLY.

Print out your manuscript in lovely clear font, double-spaced. Accompany it with a nice letter and perhaps a bar of chocolate (I don't know if this works but

I'd certainly appreciate a Star Bar with my next Visa bill I can tell you!). Be polite. Don't brag or beg. Give them a brief synopsis. Tell them what genre you think your novel might fall into.

◆ What tips would you give to people hoping to pursue a career in writing?

Get your arse in a seat. Make it a nice comfy one, because you're going to be sitting in it for a VERY LONG time. Do not, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, wait for the MUSE to arrive. Just start scratching words on the page and keep doing it until the work is done.

And remember, you are a writer when you write. That's it. That's all you have to do to be a writer. Write. Keep on writing. Get to the end. Keep going. Be stubborn as hell. Ignore people who tell you that it's 'hard.' Don't listen to the woman in No. 66 who loves saying things like 'it's impossible to get published.' Put your fingers in your ears. And keep writing. This is what makes you a writer, published or otherwise. Keep doing it. ■