

A Chat with Graeme Simson

Continued from page 1...

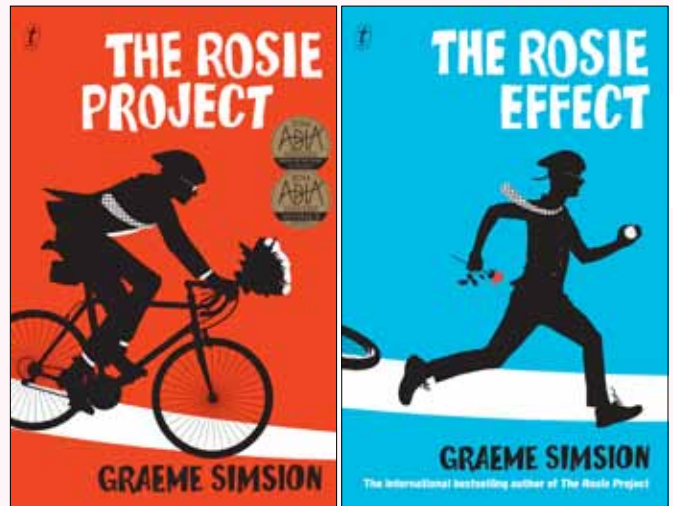
Are you planning another romantic story with an unusual hero? If so, can you tell us about it?

It depends what you mean by romantic. It's a love story, but not a conventional romance. It's about a love affair rekindled after 22 years (working titles are *The Candle* and *The Pretender*—which do your readers prefer?). Our narrator is male, a computer specialist and a part-time piano player. We don't go too much into the computing side, but music plays a big role. Our heroine is a former soapie star, now a lawyer. They're both in relationships. Things get messy when they reconnect with their soul mates.

Do you have any advice for a budding writer?

Work hard. Seriously. It's a profession, and you wouldn't want someone operating on your brain with the experience level of some writers who expect to be published. There are more jobs for brain surgeons than successful writers.

And (sorry if it seems to contradict the previous advice), from the start, write for publication. Essays, short stories, whatever. If you get published, it'll help your credibility



when you go looking for an agent or publisher for *The Novel*. It'll make you finish things to the best of your ability instead of saying "good enough". And you'll get the thrill of publication and of writing complete pieces as you learn. It'll keep you going. **To find out more visit www.graemesimson.com.**

Separating Fact From Fiction in Novel Writing

by A.K. Leigh

Writing a work of fiction based on personal experience is easy, right? Well, yes... and no. Drawing on fun, light-hearted or romantic memories is wonderful. When the experiences are traumatic or painful, it is not so easy. I discovered this the hard way when writing my debut novel, *See Her Run* (Momentum), for which I relied on my past as a survivor of domestic violence to write the story of Diana King—a woman on the run from her abusive husband.

The major thing I was not prepared for was the emotional fallout it would cause. Sometimes it would seem too real, like I was reliving certain events. There were many days where I would have to stop mid-scene. It was difficult to separate the heroine's life from my own. Ultimately, I knew I had to gain some type of emotional distance from the story or I would never finish it. But how could I separate fact from fiction?

One thing that helped was writing the story from a third-person viewpoint. If you are struggling with this in your writing, try switching to third-person. Writing "she" makes it easier to distance yourself from the events more than "I".

At the times when a scene hit a little too close to my heart, and the viewpoint wasn't helping, I reminded myself that it was Diana's story, not mine, and forced myself to keep writing. It was hard, but I persisted.

Using these two techniques, I found I was able to (eventually) see the events through the eyes of a third-party observer rather than a first-person narrative.

That was not the only challenge to overcome, however. I



A.K. (centre) with her identical triplet sisters, Alana and Adriana.

was worried about what people would think of me when reading *See Her Run*. If people knew my background, would they connect the dots and think, "Did this particular thing happen to her?"

I didn't want the world knowing those specific, intimate details, but I also wanted to convey the reality of everyday life with an abusive partner. It was a fine line and I wasn't sure which way to go. Once again, I asked myself how I could separate fact from fiction. How could I convey the fear, distrust and hopelessness connected to the survivor of abuse, yet also keep my particular experiences private?

I did what many other writers do: I took a kernel of truth... and exaggerated it. Don't get me wrong, that was still hard to put on paper, but it meant I was able to write what needed to be written without fear of 'exposure'. This might help you

if you are struggling with the same concerns.

Another issue arose with my antagonist (the abusive husband). Due to what I had been through, the urge to make him one-dimensional was high. It was hard to see him as a rounded character. I was grateful to have a brilliant editor who helped me flesh out the antagonist's motivations and show the reasons someone could fall in love with him (i.e. charming, romantic and generous). If this is an issue for you too, I recommend getting a third-party perspective. It is the best thing you can do for both your story and character development.

The final challenge I encountered was the fact that my judgement regarding what made a good plot-point was sometimes clouded. My editor told me she wanted to cut a particular scene because she thought it didn't fit with the personality of the antagonist. I wanted to tell her, "But that happened to me, it does fit the antagonist." The scene was raw, intense, and cathartic to write... but I could see she was right.

So, I sucked it up, pressed the delete button and cut the scene. I learned that facts don't always make a good story. A certain scene might ruin the flow, pacing or character development. Even the plot can suffer. All of these are more important than having your factual scene in the story. If your editor tells you to cut a scene, before arguing, ask yourself if you are letting your facts get in the way of a good story.

That's the challenges out of the way.

There were also definite benefits to writing a novel from a viewpoint of personal experience, such as:

- ♥ It added credibility to my story.
- ♥ It made the story authentic.
- ♥ I had a well of data to draw on that didn't require hours spent on research and survivor interviews.
- ♥ I knew it would help others.

The last point was especially important to me. I could have kept quiet about my past. My publisher, Momentum, told me it was my choice whether I went public with the information or not. I decided to do it, in the hope that others (women and men) would see that you can overcome a painful past...and even write about it.



A.K. Leigh is a romantic suspense author, sometimes blogger, and identical triplet. She is a huge Michael Jackson fan, martial arts movie buff, and professional astrologer. She uses her graduate diploma in counselling to assist in delving into the depths of the human psyche in her writing. She lives with her husband, three children, and one grumpy cat in Queensland. Visit her at www.fallinlovewithleigh.com, www.facebook.com/AuthorAKLeigh and Twitter at [@AKLeighAuthor](https://twitter.com/AKLeighAuthor).

Seeing Triple

A.K. Leigh also told us what it's like being an identical triplet. A.K., being an identical triplet is pretty rare we assume! Did you get treated like celebs in your area? Did your parents dress you the same when you were young?

Yes, I believe the odds of naturally conceived identical triplets are one in every 1 million births. My husband jokes about being married to a woman who is literally one in a million!

Haha, we weren't really treated like celebrities, but there were a lot of stares when we'd go out together. The moment we were old enough, we changed our hair colour and hair styles, so our similarities are not as pronounced now.

We've been in Queensland's *The Courier Mail* and local newspapers a few times, appeared on the Channel 7 news and were featured in an SGIO Insurance commercial. And, yes, we were dressed the same. Note to parents of multiples: don't dress your children the same :-/

How would you describe the different personalities of you and your siblings? Have you all taken diverse paths in life?

Our personalities are very different. I tend to be romantic, sensitive and introverted. If I don't know somebody well, I have to force myself to speak, mingle and make conversation. Alana is a lot more extroverted, and always has been. She has a brilliant sense of humour and will almost give you her leg if you need it. Adriana is somewhere in the middle. She is confident, generous and assertive. We have a similar outlook on life and inclusive spiritual beliefs.

We work in different fields. I'm an author, Adriana is a lawyer and Alana works in tax and mortgage broking. I am married with three children, Alana is married with one child, and Adriana is married with no children.

How old are you now? Are you still close?

We are 36 now. Yes, I am close with both Alana and Adriana still. Alana and Adriana would gang up on me sometimes when we were little (they might remember that differently!), but not anymore...

Do you think you'll ever write about a triplet heroine?

There is a novella series I've outlined, in which the heroines are identical triplets :)