

Career story: Accomplishing your goals

This career story features an internationally renowned novelist who pursued her passion for writing stories that make people happy. The account is a great resource for understanding the importance of doing what you love, and finding ways to accomplish your goals. When reading this career story, reflect on what you have learned in and beyond your degree and how this may position you to follow your passion.

At the back of this resource, you will find more information as well as sample questions on learning from biographies and career stories.

Anna's story

Award-winning and internationally renowned novelist Anna Jacobs has written more than seventy novels over the past twenty years. Now the UK's fourth most-borrowed author of adult fiction, Anna splits her time between the UK and Australia, spending half of her time in Mandurah, in the south of Perth. Despite her success, Anna identifies the most rewarding aspect of her work as the ability to spend her days doing what she loves: writing novels, telling stories and receiving feedback from her readers.

I live everyday living the dream I carried in my heart over the ten years it took me to start getting my novels published in the international market. It was well worth all those mornings of getting up at 4am and writing before I went to work.

Interestingly, however, Anna considers her work to be part of the entertainment industry more so than the world of literature.

I write books with happy endings and I have abundant evidence that these stories not only give people many hours of pleasure but leave them feeling happy. ... In a world threatened by terrorism and other horrors, it seems to me that adding to the positive side of life for millions of people is another huge reward.

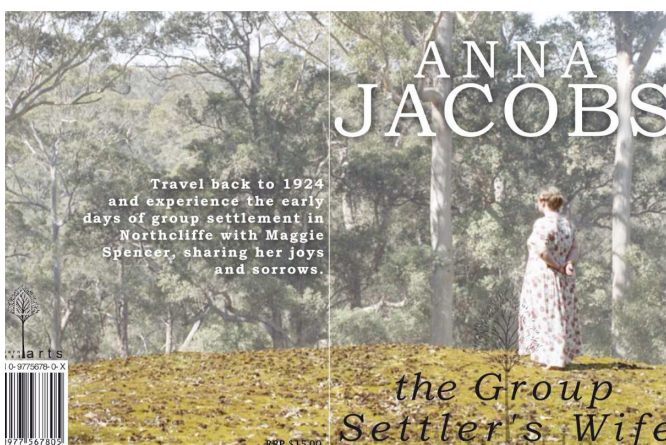


Figure 1 Image supplied by Anna Jacobs

While she feels very fortunate to be able to write full time, Anna stresses that there is much more to the job than writing. Researching, editing and the promotional aspects of being a writer take up much of her time. In addition to this are the logistics of living between Western Australia (WA) and the UK.

Because we spend five months of each year in our UK house, we at all times bear in mind what we'll need to take with us, how to organise not only moving ourselves but moving two offices. ... It's like a counterpoint to our lives now, this dual existence and its needs.

Full-time writers are rare in Australia, and Anna recalls that establishing a full-time writing career, “was hard on top of a full-time job and two children to raise.” Now that she is able to follow her passion full time, Anna identifies balance as the key,

I work at writing as one works at any job. I sit down at my desk and start my writing routine. Some days the words flow more easily than others, but I always get some down.

Giving Back

Despite a hectic schedule, Anna ensures that there is time to give back to the arts sector. She has run workshops and master classes, served on writers' committees, judged writing competitions and spoken at writers' conferences in Australia and overseas. She has also undertaken community-derived projects such as a [Southern Forest Arts](#) commission to write a historical novella about settler families. The result, a novella titled [The Group Settler's Wife](#), forms part of the 'Understory' sculpture and arts walk for the South West town of Northcliffe. As Diana Moss, chairperson for Southern Forest Arts, explains, Anna's selection was the result of a careful process.

Anna was selected from amongst a strong group of writers in the 'South West author' category. Her historical fiction style of writing offered a differing approach to storytelling from the other writers chosen for the commissions, allowing us to provide 'Understory' visitors a range of literary experiences. Anna also brought with her an enthusiastic and established readership, which we thought would benefit the project.

Turning obstacles into advantages

While the ability to both contribute and draw upon local arts and culture is crucial to artistic development, living in WA initially created some challenges for Anna, impacting her ability to further her writing career. In particular, the State's isolation and small publishing sector created some difficulties for her in the early days.

There are no big commercial publishers in WA and when I was first trying to get published there was no Internet [or] email to facilitate contact. ... By the time you've paid to go to the Eastern States, [it has cost] a couple of thousand dollars.

Despite the isolation of WA, Anna says it does give her an advantage,

Living in WA hasn't always been helpful for the research, commercial contacts and networking. ... In the end, we turned the distance of WA into an advantage, because it gives me a background that others don't have.

By recognising this advantage and contributing to the State's arts and culture, many artists add to the uniqueness that characterises the arts in WA. As Diana explains, identity and place are inextricably linked and are an important factor in the WA arts sector, encouraging “the further development of 'a sense of place' and an identity for WA artists.”

Make it count!

Don't let what you at first perceive as an obstacle stop you from following your dream. Recognise your strengths and advantages for what they are and don't let anything hold you back from accomplishing your goal! Anna recognised that people needed fiction that enabled them to escape from everyday life, and for this she always provides a happy ending. She is not afraid to describe her work as entertainment, and this 'niche' has made her a highly successful author.

If you're unsure what your dream is, try thinking about what you wanted to do as a child or about what makes you happy. What stopped you, and what can you do now to change this?

Learning from biographies and career stories

What do you see when you meet a professional?

Most of the time, we see only the role someone holds now. It is likely, however, that the person has experienced a career with lots of twists and turns.

Get the most out of reading career stories or biographies by asking yourself some of the questions to the right.

1. What do you expect you will have to learn during your career?
2. What might you need to do in order to keep learning?
3. What differences, common issues, and links can you make to your own career journey?
4. Identify and reflect on key decision points in your personal and professional development, and then consider:
 - a. Who played a significant role at these times?
 - b. To whom did you go to for advice?
 - c. What can you put in place for the next time you face a major decision?
5. Biographical accounts raise a number of challenges and opportunities. These include innovative collaborations, work within other sectors, diverse locations, and different modes of work. Look for examples of these in your discipline and reflect on what might be of interest to you:
 - a. What interests you, and what can you do to make this a reality?
 - b. What challenges do you foresee, and how will you prepare for these?
6. Biographical accounts often tell us something about the interests, passions, and motivations of the people involved. Can you think of ways to combine your interests and your future work?
7. What would you like to achieve as a professional?

This resource was developed by Dawn Bennett, Mili Chongwe and Kate Farrell.