

Self-made

Celebrating our life stories

words Sarah Davies
photo Jaredd Craig

Sarah Davies is a writer, storyteller, poet and performer; fromsarahspen.blogspot.com

Sitting on the windowsill in my dining room in front of a group of old friends, my parents and my new partner, preparing to read from my newly published short story collection, it really did feel like an ending and a beginning.

I was 50 in 2018 and I was in a reflective mood, the previous six years had thrown me pretty much every curveball in the book.

In the middle of 2012 I found a tiny lump, no bigger than a pea, in my left breast. I went to my GP to get a referral to the breast clinic, convinced it was just a cyst, which made the diagnosis of grade-three breast cancer all the more shocking when it came. There followed surgery, chemo and radiotherapy, through all of which I was generally pretty well.

In the autumn of 2014, having recovered from the cancer treatments, with a clean bill of health, and having got a part-time job, my husband suggested one Sunday afternoon that we should go for a walk in our local park. No sooner had our feet hit the path than he said he thought we should separate. He didn't want to discuss it, the marriage was over and he was leaving. I had to quickly find a new full-time job so I could afford to pay my way and also support our son in adjusting to our new life. There was no time to stop and ponder, I had to make sure life went on.

In 2016, with divorce on the horizon, my son and I decided to move back to Wales, where

we'd both been born. I was lucky enough to find a new job and a house and we set off – to start again.

The following year I started writing again. I joined a local writers' group, more to get me out of the house and socialising rather than anything else. I hadn't written any fiction since school and although I'd been a freelance writer for many years, the difference between writing magazine articles and writing short stories is quite stark. But I realised I had quite a few stories to tell.

Writing the stories, some of them purely fictional, some very autobiographical, enabled me to work through a lot of thoughts and emotions I'd consciously not given any time to over the years. I'd always been focused on providing a decent life for my son and had always tried to look forward and get away from the pain, disappointment and anger of the past. But all that stuff has to be dealt with, has to be processed, otherwise it eats you up. And so writing the stories helped me work through the baggage and come to a happier place.

In 2018, when I was thinking about my 50th birthday on the horizon, I thought I'd like to do something to celebrate myself – the good and positive things – and so I hit on the idea of collecting some of the stories together and self-publishing a book.



"I'd put the book together to celebrate myself and my family and friends, nothing else mattered"

I did all the formatting and designing myself, right down to the cover image. When I got to the end of the project, when there was literally one button left to press to make the book a reality, I lost my nerve. I couldn't imagine anyone wanting to read what I'd written... what could I possibly have to say?

My, at that time, very new partner, phoned me and told me not to be daft and to push the button. He reminded me that I'd put the book together to celebrate myself and my family and friends; nothing else mattered.

And so there I was, on my 50th birthday, surrounded by family and friends, celebrating the highs and the lows that had made the woman who could write the stories that had been *50 Years In The Making*. ♦

Sarah's oh moment is going for a run.

"Fifteen minutes into a run when I've settled into my comfortable pace and my mind has settled into its wandering mode. That's when I have all my best thoughts."