**DYAN:** Hello Jacque, how are you today?

**JACQUE:** Good, thank you Dyan. How are you?

**DYAN:** I’m very well. Today, we’re going to go through a number of questions here. I’ve specifically titled this series of podcasts ‘Bringing Our Books to You’, so it’s about the process of bringing books to the public and how we approach that. I want to start by addressing some of the most important parts of the creative process of getting a book out to people: the process of writing a book; how you get to the point of writing a book to begin with; what tools you use; and how it all works for you.

**JACQUE:** Well, I suffer from TGMIS, which is Too Many Good Ideas Syndrome. I can be anywhere and I will think of something that I want to write about, or I have a question that I want answered. For example my kids’ series was mostly about questions that I had about the farms that surrounded where I live, so I dragged my kids along and asked the farmers a million questions.

**DYAN:** It’s good, isn’t it, actually having your children with you, because then all of a sudden you can ask these questions that as an adult you’d look like almost an idiot asking. But if you say to your kids, “Can you just ask them how they just did that?” then all of a sudden it’s a valid question and adults just open up in ways they never would before. So it is fantastic leverage having your children on these excursions.

**JACQUE:** Yes. They weren’t always pleased about it. And they also weren’t pleased when people would stop them in the street and point them out to their own children and say, “Look, it’s Campbell and Lucky!” They were as popular as Bananas in Pyjamas. So they didn’t enjoy that part.

**DYAN:** It’s a hard balance, isn’t it? Because that almost becomes a story itself. As you said, there’s too many good ideas. You were a collector of notebooks. I’m a collector of notebooks. You’ve always got little bits of paper sitting around all over the place in the process of writing books.

**JACQUE:** Yes.

**DYAN:** But then of course you obviously have consolidated those into different stories. So you have chosen a number of good ideas and worked on them. As you said, that’s not just one series. Then, most recently, your goat book was excitingly funded just last week.

**JACQUE:** Woo-hoo!

**DYAN:** Woo-hoo! Very pleased to be seeing that one and how that comes along. I think by starting that kick-starter crowdfunding venture, your creative process begins to be driven more by other people, because the expectation is, “Hey Jacque, we gave you a bit of money, you’ve got to get this project done.” That pressure, though, can also become, “Holy schmoly, whose idea was this?!” I’m attending uni and I’m doing this kick-starter and it’s difficult to manage. But it does give you that really good focus, where after you pull in lots of good ideas you then have to decide, we’re doing this one. On that note, how did you end up choosing the goat idea for your next book project?

**JACQUE:** Well, actually I blame it on a friend, Sandy Curtis. She’s a novelist. She writes romantic thrillers. I rang her one day and I said, “Hey Sandy, I’ve got my novel all sorted, I’m working on it.” She said, “Put it away, work on your Anzac story. I’ve fallen in love with that little goat. Next time you’re in Melbourne at the conference, I want to see it. I want to be able to be hold it in my hands. You have an hour to send me your timeline.” So I sent her my timeline, my drawings. Sometimes you need that friend to say, “Not that idea, this one first.”

**DYAN:** I think that’s what you do get on top of that mountain of ideas, and you don’t look down and say, “Where do I actually build next?” Instead, you just keep on building on the mountain of ideas. You’ve got to consolidate, you’ve got to stake out your camp on the ground and work on it for a while and then move on, because otherwise what’s the use of a lot of good ideas if they’re not actually being produced for anyone to read? Now there is an expectation that you will continue with your series so far. So you’ve got a bit of a fan club that you have to keep up with as well, which is great, because it does encourage you to say “Yes, I’m going to do this, I’m going to set this timeline and I’m going to get it out the door.”

**JACQUE:** Yes. It’s really important to actually see something finished and say, “I did it.” Whether or not I do it because I love writing, I love the process of creating something, I like doing the artwork. It’s really nice. It looks good in my head. But when you can actually physically hold it and look through it and alter what was in your head a little bit to make it better, that’s where the real satisfaction comes from. It’s from seeing it finished.

**DYAN:** I think sometimes as a creative person that can be a real issue, because you see it finished in your head you think, “Why can’t the world see it?” But of course they can’t because they can’t see it inside your head.

**JACQUE:** One day they will be able to.

**DYAN:** Oh Yes. I’m trying not to think about all the things that are happening with technology, with implants and Google glass and all that sort of stuff. Let me just keep my pen and my paper—I’m going to keep writing on paper while I still can. I still haven’t changed to a tablet or anything like that for writing. I still have an affinity for paper, although I ultimately scan it on. How long till words are just projected? Moving on— how do you feel in your profession from where you were, to now, where you are today?

**JACQUE:** Well, I didn’t do very well at school. My teachers loved me as a person, but not as a student. When I moved to North Queensland, we were surrounded by farms. There was a time when the government were about to regulate the dairy industry; they were about to incorporate bananas. The local sugar mill closed down. So lots of people that I’d become friends with there were losing their livelihoods. There were a lot of protests going on in the city. So I painted lots of banners. It was really, really hot. They asked me to march with them and I thought, *No, it’s too hot, I’ll get sunburned*. I thought, *I know, I’ll write a book sell the books and then give whatever money I get from that to the Farmers Fighting Fund.* They had an account where they were paying solicitors to fight the government. So I did that, and it’s funny—it was the government that actually bought them and put them into the schools and libraries.

**DYAN:** Who would have thought! As you said, you started out saying “Yes, I’m going to help these people out, I’m passionate about this process, I really want to help out, I don’t want to march down the street, I’m going to write a book,” then all of a sudden you turn around and say, “Gosh, how did I not see myself in this role? This is where I should be.” You do wonder at times if there is someone up there designing a plan for us when something like that happens.

**JACQUE:** It is something that I always wanted to do, to be an artist and a writer. But I was never encouraged. The teachers loved me as a person, not as a student; they told me that Kmart was probably my best option. But I just decided, you have to be what you want to do, and you have to do it with your whole heart involved.

**DYAN:** Because you think of Roald Dahl and Winston Churchill, and their school reports—what did they say? Something like, ‘you’ll never amount to anything’. You almost wonder if that experience actually drives you to want to prove those people wrong.

**JACQUE:** To a certain degree, I think it does.

**DYAN:** It’s a double-edged sword because it can go either way. But I think if you’ve had other experiences outside that make you see that there’s more to you than what these people are seeing, then that does give you the chance to then say, “Hey, how can I leverage this?” As you said, you wrote from your heart and it just absolutely clicked with so many people. You were in the right place at the right time. The irony, to have the government that the townspeople were fighting with end up that funding the books. You’ve captured a whole new audience with going into schools. Actually, your books are up on display in my kids’ school at the moment. So you were given that opportunity. You produced work in a way that was congruent with your feelings, and then it’s just expanded exponentially from there, and you’ve done so many fantastic things and continued to do so many fantastic things from that day onwards. I’m grateful that it happened to you, because we’ve crossed paths along the way as well. I think the next point to talk about is aspects of your work that are your favourite and least favourite. Because you say, coming along with that journey, you had it in mind that you wanted to write as well as be an artist, and there are components when moving on this path that can really make you wonder at times why you’ve done it. But you can also then say, “Hey, I want to go to the next mountain and push further along.”

**JACQUE:** Yes. I think that my favourite part is coming up with the ideas and thinking like a four-year-old. I do that pretty well. My least favourite part would probably be due to maybe a little lack of confidence in myself. So I make sure that everything gets edited. Quite often I’m surprised that there are not many changes at all. You know, I do the best I can do, and then I hand it onto somebody who knows better. Also, I think you’ve got to know what your strong points are. Mine aren’t knowing where the apostrophe goes—I have got it down pat now, but I’ve practiced. Regarding illustrating your own stories, you have to know that each story deserves to be illustrated in its own special way. That will help carry the story and wrap it up like a beautiful parcel. Some of the stories I have written, I have no intention of illustrating them, because I know how I see it in my head. Hopefully, someone else will see it one day. But I know that I’m not capable of illustrating in particular ways, while other people are. In those cases I would send it to a publisher and say, “It’s illustrated in the vein of this person or that person,” the way that publisher does their artwork. I think if you know that and you can respect other people and their abilities, it bodes really well for the finished product. You know you love that little product if you’re willing to put it into the hands of somebody else.

**DYAN:** That can be quite a hard choice, because it will never be exactly as pictured in your head. Especially when you can’t draw something exactly how it is in your head, it’s very hard verbalising it in a way that someone else can, because you’ve got to jump into their heads to be able to explain it in terms and references that they’re aware of, which again can be all too much. But you do. You work together and you end up coming up with a result that both of you are happy with. Often, it can be better than what you anticipated, because you’ve had this different perception overlaid with what was in your head and all of a sudden you’re thinking, “Oh wow, actually I hadn’t thought of that.” So it’s fantastic.

**JACQUE:** Absolutely.

**DYAN:** It is fantastic. It can be a bit agonising as well because you’re thinking, “Will it actually turn out like I thought it would?” That can affect your confidence, because you think that if it’s not going to be like what you’ve done before, then it’s going to upset the audience. You have to try to let go of that and say, “No, this is a great idea, let’s pull it together.” That probably comes back to your ‘too many good ideas’ problem—you then have to have the frame of mind to say, “Jacque, no, this one.”

**JACQUE:** Yes, that’s exactly right.

**DYAN:** The next question is about the biggest challenge you faced professionally and personally. This all merges together. Personal and professional are no longer two different things. They’re all just squished in, especially with children. I think what you’ve mentioned with choosing the one idea that you’re going to hang on to, and fitting that into your existing commitments to your family along with your goals you have set professionally, is really a big challenge. As an example, can you take us through a couple of days in your week—give us practical steps that you use to work around these challenges?

**JACQUE:** Well, the two boys that appear in all of my earlier books, they’re now young adults. My youngest graduated high school last year and he has his driver’s licence now, so I no longer have to be the ‘mum taxi’. So it really frees me up; last year, I would have to drive him everywhere because he had his Learner’s. So we would drive to school. I make sure I go to the gym every day, even though I’m not a very big exercise person; it’s more social, and the coffee that comes afterwards. But it’s really good; if you’re going to be sitting writing all day or standing at an easel painting, having music on and getting up and jumping around and doing a bit of exercise is really important. So I feel that going to the gym every morning is a great thing. Then I come home and I have six easels up at the same time with paintings in various stages. I also have my computer open and there’s always something on there, maybe my blog or something. I also have pencils and paper, as I always work on my picture books with pencil and paper. I don’t know why that is—as soon as I sit down at my computer, I start killing people, which I guess is not good for a kid’s book! So I tend to use pencil and paper for the picture books. I’ll work on all of those until it’s time to go pick the kids up and take them to the tennis or the piano lessons.

**DYAN:** Yes. Starting your body with movement at the beginning of the day—so many people who’ve been successful talk about that, because it gets your blood flow started and your brain started. If those things aren’t going, then you trying to do anything is a waste of time anyway. Talking about having six easels going all at once, we actually went to see Margaret Olive at the Tweed Gallery the other month. As you’ve said, you’ve got these images, you need to have that. Some people say, “Why do you need six on the go, why can’t you just do one?” There’s things that you need to do and then let them sit for a while and then come back to them.

**JACQUE:** Because you can overwork something. That’s like if you’re writing a story and you’re editing as you go, and you edit and edit and edit, you take the life out of it. You need to just write it, let it sit and breathe, and then go back and sort of think, well, ok, maybe I can have him jumping out of a balloon here, or add that extra element that you missed the first time around.

**DYAN:** Also, I think that the other important factor is knowing when to stop, when to put down the project and say, “This is it, if I do anymore, I’m going to take the life out of it.” So it’s about knowing the point of completion.

**JACQUE:** It’s really, really important to let things sit and breathe for a little while until you start to almost forget about it. So you look at it with fresh eyes, whether it’s a painting or an illustration or a piece of writing, and every time you do you’ll find something that you know if you change a little bit you won’t kill it.

**DYAN:** That is a very fine balance. Over-editing or overworking what you’ve done will take out the essence. I think the other thing with you is about keeping true to your voice, not listening to the naysayers who say “Jacque, that’s not what we would say.” It doesn’t matter how they would say it; this is how you would say it, and that’s the most important factor. That resonates in the book, that you have kept your voice, and people then think, “That’s what I’m looking for. I don’t want it written like how so-and-so would write it or how that person has done it. That’s their voice. I want to experience this voice.” To me, that’s very much what books are about. It’s listening to the voice of the author without worrying about who else has been before them or there after them, and enjoying that experience at the time. If it is written from the heart, then people will go on that journey with you and want to continue on that journey with you. Honestly, that integrity will stand out more than how eloquently you put the words on the paper.

**JACQUE:** Yes. You look at Dr Seuss and even JK Rowling. Both of them were knocked back over twenty times for their books. Look how popular they are, and you know more than twenty people said no to both of them.

**DYAN:** Yes, experienced professionals.

**JACQUE:** Yes. Like in Dr Seuss’s case, he’s made up most of his own words. He had fun when he was writing those books. You can tell. They’re fun to read. I really don’t think—I mean I could be totally wrong—but I really don’t think he sat down and laboured with a plan. I think he just did it. He might have laboured later when he was tweaking and things like that. But if you don’t like what you’re doing, I think it shows.

**DYAN:** Yes. He did have one challenge one time apparently. This is just a story that may just be a myth. I read once that he was having a fairly heated discussion with one of his publishers or editors at one stage, and they said, “Oh that’s ridiculous, you can’t do that.” He wanted to use less, I think, than ten words. Ten words to write. He said, “Well, excuse me please, I think you’re wrong,” and then he went and wrote the book only using those ten words, saying, “You guys don’t know what you’re talking about.” So he was continually trying to break the mould and use language in such a way that children would want to pick up the books, or whoever would want to pick up the books. And as you say, he got it so much better than the publishers, because he said, “It doesn’t matter what you say. I’m going to provide something I believe that works for people,” and he has.

**JACQUE:** He channelled it into a naughty boy. Defiant, stamping foot.

**DYAN:** Oh no, children never do that. I’ve been assured children never stamp their feet. They’re always very polite. Is that right?

**JACQUE:** No, not when I was a kid.

**DYAN:** It’s funny. I lived in a very small country town. You would be sent off outside for many hours. You’d have breakfast and leave and then you’d come home just before dinner and then you basically had to go to bed. So there was no chance of foot stamping because you weren’t in the house most of the time. Now you’ve covered one of the other points I had there about balancing parenting and self-employed commitments. You’ve spoken about how you work your day to manage these sometimes opposing needs. You can always have the best-laid plan and it doesn’t always work. As you know, you just sometimes need to be a little bit flexible with how that works, which sometimes is a real challenge in itself. As you say, you think you’ve covered it all and then you decide to do something like go back to university. Tell me a bit about that.

**JACQUE:** I’ve had a huge change in life in the last year. All these things that I’ve been doing, I don’t have the piece of paper that says that I can do them. So in order to move on and earn some reasonable income, I need that piece of paper. I’m going to university. Hopefully, they’ll tell me why my books have been doing ok.

**DYAN:** That would be another irony, like when the government funded your That’s Not a …’ books. You’ll then end up lecturing at the university before you finish the degree.

**JACQUE:** Well, they actually use my ‘That’s Not A …’ series in the education faculty in the university. So, you never know.

**DYAN:** Why can’t you just get the honorary degree instead of doing the study stuff?

**JACQUE:** I don’t know. But I’ll tell you what, it’s a lot trickier than I thought it was.

**DYAN:** I guess because there’s so much procedure and this is due on this date and you need to have read these things before you turn up there and you’re saying, “Oh, really, do I have to do that?” I know the kids have been free there and you’ve just finished all that with the last year at school. But it’s always that much harder because it’s easier for you to say ‘go and study’ to your children. But then when you’ve got to do it yourself, you’re saying, “Oh.”

**JACQUE:** Especially when I consider hard work to be getting a paintbrush and dancing around painting. So you know, it’s a big change.

**DYAN:** Ok, I’ve got to focus here. No thanks, I don’t want to focus. Those deadlines creep up so quickly. The semesters are set out and you get your timetable at the beginning and oh, I’ve got to do that assignment here, that sounds easy. And then all of a sudden, you turn around and oh my goodness, that’s next week, when did that happen, when did that period of time go past? So getting in early and finishing the project and then you’ve of course added in uni—I must be twiddling my thumbs at some stage during the night, I don’t want to sleep, I’m now going to do kick-starter as well!

**JACQUE:** That was poor timing on my part. But it worked. It’s funny because I had one of the uni guidance officers call me last week because I sent them a message saying, “I don’t know if I’m doing this right, please call me,” so they did. I said, “Had you called me last week, I was a bit manic.” But this week, something happened, and now I happen to have so much more time and I’m managing really well. I realised it was the lack of kick-starter. But I still have all my commitments to fulfil for that too, which I’m slowly working through. So all those animal photos are turning up for the portraits and things like that. I’m someone who works best when I’m busy and when I have multiple deadlines. I only started drinking coffee a year ago, and I don’t know what I did before that, but wow!

**DYAN:** The guy who writes *Dilbert*, he wrote a book a couple of years ago and he said anyone who doesn’t drink coffee is mad. It just gets you through. I’m like, “Oh yes, you don’t want to go into reading about coffee because the debates are strong, for and against.” Although, I have read it is the second highest commodity traded in the world after oil. I think that says something.

**JACQUE:** Absolutely.

**DYAN:** It’s scary. Now we better get onto the crazy fact about you, that epitomises who you are?

**JACQUE:** Well, in a former life, I think I was a princess. So I have a tiara that I tend to wear when I feel that I need that little bit of extra ‘oomph’ in what I’m doing, a little bit of confidence in myself. I’ll put the tiara on and head out the door much to my children’s dismay! No, I’ve only done that a few times. But I’ll wear it when I’m writing or painting or watching TV or whatever. Sometimes I forget that I have put it on.

**DYAN:** But as you say, it’s like an anchor. Some people would do a particular breath or they’ll have their favourite book they like to pick up or something that will be an anchor to remind them, “Hey, I have done this, I have been there, I can do this again, and this is just a step in the process.” So your anchor is a tiara. I think you might need to upgrade from the plastic one though. I’m thinking you have to get a few more . . .

**JACQUE:** You can you tell it’s plastic by looking at it, can you?

**DYAN:** How could I not? I have four daughters. We go through plastic tiaras like there’s no tomorrow. They just don’t make them well.

**JACQUE:** Mine has done pretty well actually.

**DYAN:** You’ve probably given it a little bit more TLC than my children, who grab either side and say, “It’s mine!”

**JACQUE:** My boys don’t fight over my tiara, so it’s survived quite well.

**DYAN:** Now, I’m going to recap what I saw as your ‘top three tips’ and I’m interested to get your feedback as to whether or not you think I’ve hit on the right points. You might say I’m off-track. One point that stood out to me the most was: having that frame of mind to review and point you in the right direction when you’re getting lost in that sea of ideas, is really a cornerstone to making sure you continue to move forward. Another was knowing where your strengths are and being able to accept the fact that you don’t have the ability to do a particular project and handing it onto someone else, and saying, “That’s not a weakness. That’s just not a strength.” I think that’s a really big difference. Just because it’s not a strength, I think people focus on it being a weakness, when it’s not really. It’s understanding that you’re not just good at that, but it’s not a bad thing. You’ve just understood that that component will not work if you try to do it and then still working on what is best for you to be working on, because otherwise it’s a waste of time. The last one, which totally resonates with who you are—I think it does, and you can tell me if you think otherwise—is that being honest, being absolutely congruent and true to who you are, that resonates extraordinarily through everything that you do. No matter where we look, where your name sits, if it’s on your website or your books or on your pictures, that integrity just absolutely shines the whole time. I know how hard it can be, because as the saying goes, reputation takes years and years to build and can be lost in a few minutes. To keep your integrity, it’d mean saying ‘no’ and offending some people, I know that, along the way. But saying, “No, that’s not who I am, I’m not going to go down that path, I’m going to take this path and I’m going to stick to it whether you like it or not,” that can be really hard.

**JACQUE:** It’s like being a mum. The other thing I thought, whatever you do, if you do it from the heart, even if it’s something that initially you don’t feel like you want to do, like the washing, if you’re putting your heart and soul into something, it will always turn out better than what it would be if you’re just slaving away doing something because you have to. I’m not very good at saying no to people. I have to convince myself sometimes that I’m actually loving something. I know that if I don’t love it while I do it, it just won’t be any good. That will affect your reputation. You know, I’ve had friends say to me, “Just do a crap job, they’ll never ask you to do it again.” I think ‘Yes’, but no, I can’t, I can’t do that.

**DYAN:** As you say, that integrity has to be held the whole time. It is challenging at times, because as you say, if you don’t do that job, you’re not going to get paid. But how do I do this job to keep my integrity? You’ve got all these factors pushing you away from where you want to be and you have to keep pulling your self-acknowledgement in again to say, “No, that’s not who I am, I’ve got to do it this way.” And I know when you read articles in different publications that often they’ll give artists a really hard time about taking a particular track and going, “Oh you know this, down the slide.” In the past when I was reading that, I’d sort of roll my eyes and go, “Yes, what are they on.” But once you become one of those people with that focus, you go, “Actually I can completely understand that now, I can completely understand why these people have said ‘I’m not doing that, that’s not who I am, no I’m not going to do a job that’s not in line with my values.’ Because all of a sudden, I’m not that person anymore. I’m being someone else.” So you’ve got to be continually pulling yourself into that.

**JACQUE:** Yes, that’s why artists are poor.

**DYAN:** Yes. Oh yes, they’re rich when they’re dead. That’s the only thing. No one wants to buy their work when they’re on the planet. I’m like, “Oh my goodness, couldn’t you have appreciated them while they were living so, you know, they could feed their family?!” It’s a hard balance. Did you have anything else to add before I wrap it up?

**JACQUE:** No, I don’t think so. Just trust in your gut and listen to advice, and once you’ve listened to the advice, trust in your gut again, because you were right in the first place. Yes, just, from the heart.

**DYAN:** From the heart. Awesome. Thank you very much for your time, Jacque.

**JACQUE:** Thank you very much for having me. I really appreciate it.