

A Conversation with an Atlantic Canadian YA Publisher

By: Tara Rumsey (TR)

In 2012, Kimberly Walsh, a former Associate Producer at CBC Books and Canada Reads, and Colleen McKie (CM), a freelance writer and editor, conceived of an idea of starting a local publishing house. She wanted to support regional authors producing quality literature for young adults. Out of this idea emerged *Fierce Ink Press*—a combination co-operative and author collective that seeks authors interested in independent publishing, but who want some of the support of a traditional publishing house (*Fierce Ink Press*, 2012). Focusing their resources on eBook publishing and print-on-demand projects, *Fierce Ink Press* publishes YA fiction novels and YA non-fiction short stories. I interviewed Colleen McKie recently to get the full story.

TR: Can you tell me a bit about your book blogging past? Is that what led to your involvement in publishing?

CM: I started off reviewing books for *Edwards Magazine* book club, which was run by a friend of mine. Before that, I had no idea that the world of reviewing and book blogging even existed. I branched

out with *Lavender Lines*¹ about four years ago. It was a great experience and a really cool way to be introduced to new authors. It most definitely led me to *Fierce Ink Press*. My business partner, Kimberly Walsh, used to work for CBC Books. That's actually how I met her. If it wasn't for my book blog, there's a very good chance that Kimberly and I may never have met and the idea for *Fierce Ink Press* never would have come about.

TR: I am really curious to know why you chose a Young Adult imprint. Are you a lover of Young Adult books? Is there more to it?

CM: It's funny, when I was a teen, I never read YA. I seemed to have jumped straight from Amelia Bedelia to Stephen King! When I started getting into blogging, Harper Collins had a Facebook group where they used to give away review copies and each month they had a different theme. One month was YA and I received *Wicked Lovely* from Melissa Marr. And I was hooked. YA is what I predominately read and it's the same for

¹ *Lavender Lines* was a book blog written by Colleen from August 2009 to March 2013.

Kimberly. So it just made sense. Also, there aren't a lot of East Coast publishers that publish in the genre. We really want to give East Coast authors a different choice between going with one of the big publishers and self-publishing. It was definitely a combination of a love of YA books and the need for a local publishing company that published YA.

TR: *Fierce Ink Press* seems to be doing well. How was the initial reception when you announced your start up? Was there a lot of support?

CM: The support, both from readers and the publishing/writing community, was overwhelming. People are really excited that there's an East Coast publisher that publishes not only YA, but genre YA (urban fantasy, sci-fi, dystopia, steampunk, etc). We've been getting a steady influx of submissions and have books line up to be published for the next year.

TR: How is the climate of publishing in Atlantic Canada? Is this a viable career option for teens out there thinking about writing and publishing, or is it more of a passion project?

CM: Publishing, not just in Atlantic Canada but worldwide, is in such flux now that it's a really exciting time. I definitely think that it's a viable career option for teens. There are so many different careers bundled up under the main title of "publisher" that the industry offers something for everyone (editing, layout, marketing, publicity, cover design, etc). But I also think that passion does factor into it. You have to love books and words and reading to be successful in publishing. It's a lot of work and long hours and if you don't have a passion for it, odds are you won't be successful.

TR: Since our journal issue is generally focussed on the Halloween/Horror genre theme, can you tell me a little bit about the first book you published, *The Night Has Teeth*, and why you chose to publish it? Does it have anything to do with the popularity of books like *Twilight*?

CM: *The Night Has Teeth* is about seventeen-year-old Connor Lewis, who goes to Paris for school on a scholarship. Connor has never really fit in anywhere and sees this as a chance at a new start. Things don't go as planned and he ends up caught in the middle of a battle between born and bitten werewolves.

There's also a mad scientist and plenty of teen angst thrown in for good measure.

I was actually one of the beta readers for *The Night Has Teeth*.² I remember finishing it and saying to my husband "If I had a publishing company I would so want to publish this." When *Fierce Ink Press* was born, it was a no-brainer for me. And no, our publishing it has nothing to do with *Twilight*. For me, it was all about the writing and the story-telling. I loved the story from the beginning and the fact that there are werewolves in it is just a bonus for me.

TR: What would you say to budding writers of paranormal/horror/fantasy fiction? Do you think the popularity of these types of books will wane?

CM: Write what you want to write. Never cater to the current trends in publishing because by the time that you finish your book odds are the tides will have shifted once again. With that being said, I think there will always be a demand for paranormal/horror/fantasy fiction because there will always be a demand for well-written books.

² Beta readers are early readers who read a novel an author is working on to give feedback (C. McKie, personal communication, Month Day, 2013).

TR: That's great advice. Do you have any general advice for writers looking to get published?

CM: My number one piece of advice is keep writing. Once you finish writing and editing your book and are either in the process of self-publishing or looking for a publisher, start your next project.

My second piece of advice is follow guidelines when submitting to a publisher. The guidelines are there for a reason. Sometimes writers think if they ignore them and try a unique approach to submitting, it will get them notice more. It will, but not for the right reasons. And quite often if you don't follow the guidelines, the publisher won't want to read your work.

TR: I noticed that you did an indiegogo (<http://indiegogo.com>) campaign for the release of *The Night Has Teeth*. Would you recommend that approach to other publishers?

CM: Definitely! It's a great way to get support for a novel before publication. And because we're a small publishing company, it was a great way to raise the money we needed to do print runs of *The Night Has Teeth*.

TR: Was the campaign a success? Are you going to do it for the second book in the series?

CM: We didn't raise the full amount that we were hoping for, but we still consider the campaign a success...we're mounting another one towards the end of the month³ for our next book, *Membrane* by Carol Moreira. And we are planning one for the sequel to *The Night Has Teeth*, *The Night Has Claws* (So in love with that title!), which will be out in September⁴.

TR: The Halifax Public Libraries system has several copies of *The Night Has Teeth*. Were public libraries in the region generally supportive?

CM: The Halifax Public Libraries have been unbelievably supportive. Besides having copies of *The Night Has Teeth*, they also arranged for Kat to hold reading and Q&As with local teens (something we're hoping to be able to do again soon.)

TR: Are you in favour of having the book in libraries? Do you think it helps or hurts sales?

CM: I am 100% in favour of having our books in libraries, and I definitely think

they help sales. More importantly, making *The Night Has Teeth* available in libraries means that people who may not have the money to buy the book can still read it.

Publishing, at least for us, isn't all about the money. It's about building relationships with readers and giving them top-notch books to lose themselves in.

TR: I think that's a perfect note on which to end. I want to wish you and *Fierce Ink Press* the best of luck and many years of prosperity supporting local authors.

References

Fierce Ink Press. (2012). *About*. Retrieved from <http://fierceinkpress.com/about/>

Colleen McKie is a freelance writer and editor. She runs *Fierce Ink Press* alongside her business partner, Kimberley Walsh, and she also acts as editor for *Fierce Ink's* digital imprint *Fierce Shorts*. She is based in Prince Edward Island where she lives in a big, old farmhouse with her husband Jason and their many rescued critters.

³ April, 2013

⁴ September, 2013

