

Family matters

Listen (Viking) is a family drama that deals with 'abandonment, infidelity, dementia, alcoholism, loss, growth, love, all the stuff of life' (see review, p40). Debut novelist **Kate Veitch** spoke to **Deborah Crabtree** about the writing process.

Listen is your first novel. How did novel writing compare with your journalistic writing?

Definitely the hardest thing about writing fiction, especially a first novel, is that there's no deadline and no-one else to get your engine revving. You have to believe in your idea, which will often seem ridiculous, and discipline yourself to write what will often seem like rubbish, and do it every day for months or even years without a pay packet. But I was a freelancer, never a salaried journalist—seldom, in fact, a salaried anything—so I was somewhat hardened to all that.



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From the initial idea to publication, how long was the novel writing process and what kinds of difficulties or challenges did you meet along the way?

The first draft was completed in five months of full-time writing in mid-2004 while living in Bali. Ideal conditions. The manuscript was then plucked from slush pile by angelic agent Fiona Inglis, who deftly steered me to the Penguin colony—enormously welcoming and congenial. Not what's meant to happen! Three subsequent drafts under caring wing (flipper?) of a terrific editor, Belinda Byrne. A bit over two years from first notes to launch party. Still pinching myself.

Family relationships are central to *Listen*. How closely did you draw on your own family relationships while writing it?

Somewhat, of course, especially the experience of a parent developing dementia: a lot of that is directly from life. But my siblings and I never disagreed on how to handle our dad's condition, thank heavens. Apart from that, no portraits. A fleeting, sketchy resemblance here and there, but I'm very much a novelist rather than a diarist!

And on the subject of family, you and your brother (actor/comedian) Michael Veitch both have books being released around the same time. How did that come about, and has it sparked any healthy sibling rivalry between the two of you?

Complete coincidence, and sorry, we're a dead loss for tales of sibling rivalry, healthy or otherwise. Michael and I form an almost nauseating mutual admiration society. Mind you, it probably helps that our books are so utterly unlike. Mike's book, *Flak: True Stories from the Men Who Flew in World War Two*, has photos. And lots of stuff about planes. And no dirty bits.

Finally, what can we expect next from Kate Veitch? Is there a second novel in the works, and if so, can you tell us a little about it?

Yes, there is a second novel underway, since it's too late for me to retrain as a brain surgeon, and writing is really the only thing that suits the life I'm leading just now. I'd love to tell you about it—but I won't. I'm really wary of talking about what I'm writing because I think it's too easy to talk it all away—lose the oomph (technical term). It's just another one of these novels about ordinary people in all their twitching complexity. That's what interests me most.