

From legal eagle to sea eagle: Jock Serong



Contrary to popular belief, writing – rather than the law – was Jock Serong's first career choice and for many years he balanced the two before finally making the jump.

Words and photos by Carol Altmann

The most commonly told story about Port Fairy editor and author **Jock Serong** is that he was a lawyer who became a writer, but in fact it is the other way around: he was a writer who fell into law.

"English and English Lit were always my favourite subjects at school, but when I told my career counsellor that I wanted to be a writer, they suggested I do a law degree, because 'there's plenty of words there'," he says with a wry grin.

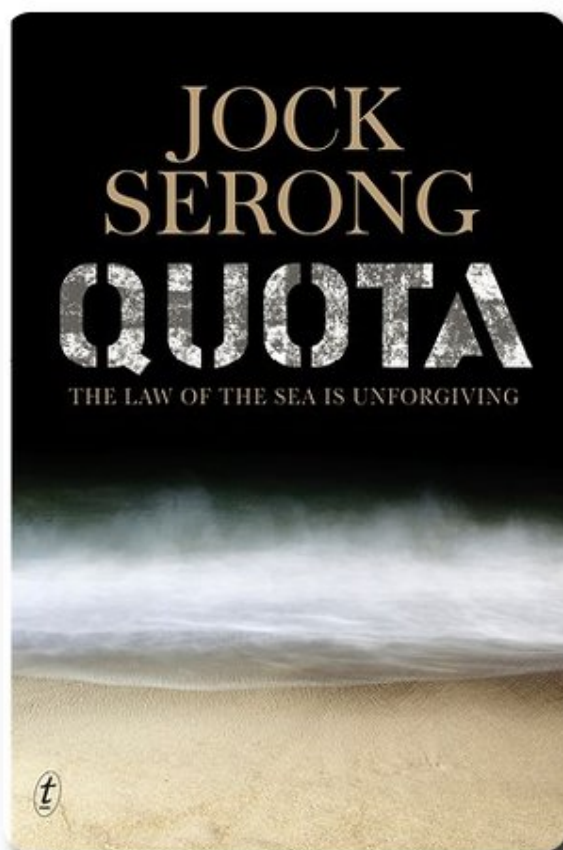
But what every writer knows- and what career counsellors never quite understand – is that there are words, and then there is *writing*: storytelling, building a narrative, creating a scene, turning words into living, breathing objects.

Worse, once you know that you love to write, the bug never leaves you.

All of the teenagers who kept journals and wrote short stories and loved English – and then grew up to become anything but a writer – still have a writer's heart. Some listen to that nagging voice, most don't.

Jock listened.

“I started writing professionally as a freelancer about six or seven years ago and had, if you like, three jobs: as a parent, my legal career and my writing, and the pressure to keep those three going all at once was increasing,” he says.



Jock's first novel was

published earlier this year
and has been optioned for
television.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] H [/dropcap]aving relocated from Melbourne to Port Fairy 10 years ago, Jock had already chosen between lifestyle and a more traditional career path.

He was a barrister in Melbourne, but came to Port Fairy to work as a solicitor after he and his wife Lilly, a nurse, decided it would be a better place to raise their children (they now have four, aged from 3 to 10.)

And besides, the surf was excellent.

Jock, a surfer, began writing for two or three different surf publications, while also working at Maddens Lawyers. It was his surfing connections, however, that eventually opened the door to a life submerged entirely in writing.

“Early last year, Mick (Sowry) and Mark (Willett) were nursing this idea of a high-quality magazine built around ideas of the ocean and they asked me if I would like to edit it,” Jock explains.

Like a cliff diver in Acapulco, Jock stepped to the ledge and took the plunge.

[Great Ocean Quarterly](#) was developed over the next six months and, like *Bluestone*, has just marked its first birthday. Also like *Bluestone*, *GOQ* is edited in the front room of a house, Jock’s house, which is where he does most of his writing.

“The last 12 months have been exhilarating, in that usually at this stage in your life, you have a sense of where things are going and you are consolidating. I feel like I am back in that period of your 20s, where you throw it all up into the air,” Jock laughs.



Jock, from Port Fairy, has no regrets about moving to writing full time: “The alternative was to spend the next 20 years not ever knowing if I could have done this”.

[dropcap style="color: #dc943c;"] A [dropcap]longside *GOQ*, Jock has recently published his first novel, *Quota* (Text Publishing), a crime novel based in a remote town in south-west Victoria.

Just in case you thought – like me – that Jock might never sleep, the novel was developed over several years and involved several major re-writes before that magical moment of being accepted by a publisher.

“All writing has that edge of hard grind under it, the hard work, but I was happy to keep going and to keep at it; I find the process fascinating,” he says.

Quota has been well-received by readers and reviewers and has been optioned for a television production by Madman, in Melbourne. Jock will write the adaptation.

As Jock wanders down Sackville St on a perfect spring day in Port Fairy, saying hello to everybody who has already said hello to him first, there is a sense that his life has turned out exactly as it was meant to be.

When asked if he misses law, he gives a writer's answer: "I miss the characters and their stories".

"But no, no regrets. The alternative was to spend the next 20 years not ever knowing if I could have done this."

Jock Serong will join authors Regina Lane and Clint Greagan for the Warrnambool Books Bookwiz Trivia Night this Thursday, Sept 18, at The Last Coach, in support of the Leila Rose Foundation. [Click here for full details](#).

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Writing a star-studded novel



Poet, author and teacher James Laidler at the 2010 Ex-Libris Festival, Port Fairy. (Image courtesy of Ex-Libris).

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] B
[/dropcap]oy, we have some talented school teachers in South-West Victoria.

Not only do they have the exhausting and often unappreciated task of fronting up to a classroom each day to teach, but they are often also writers, poets, musicians and novelists in their “spare” time.

This week, **Michaelie Clark** from [Warrnambool Books](#) has chosen a book by Emmanuel College teacher, poet and novelist **James Laidler**, who is rapidly building the sort of CV that makes your eyes water, such is the spectrum of his talent. Here is Michaelie’s summary of his latest work:

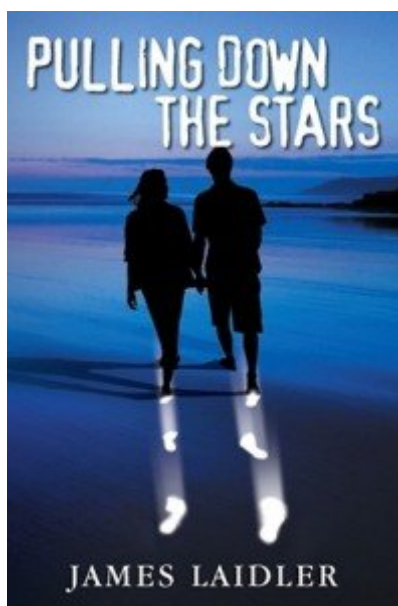
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Set in Warrnambool, and incorporating some of the city's most famous landmarks, *Pulling Down the Stars* is the second novel by award-winning local author, James Laidler.

Infused with vignettes and the evocative language that defines Laidler's style, the book bridges teen and adult themes and spans genres with its eclectic mix of humour, romance, drama and suspense.

The story revolves around Charlie, a young psychiatric nurse living with his widower father and stroke-affected grandfather. Burdened with the dysfunction and responsibilities of his family, as well as the guilt of wanting to be free to do as he pleases, shy, deep-thinking Charlie finds an outlet in his song-writing while he waits for life to look up.

Instead, his life is turned upside-down when he meets Maxine, a spiky, hot-blooded surfer-girl who works at the local abattoir in order to rebel against her well-to-do parents. Thrown together by unconventional circumstances, a trust and understanding slowly builds between Charlie and Maxine, but unbeknownst to either of them, there is a dangerous threat lurking in their midst...



Find out more about James via his [website](#).

And congratulations to Warrnambool Books for taking out the social media prize at the recent Warrnambool Small Business Awards!

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