

**W**HEN my publisher instructed me to update *Write and Get Paid for It*, my guidebook for people yearning to be published, I figured it would be a major job. So much had changed in the 30 years since the first edition. Back then, mobile phones, the internet, blogging, tweeting and even the notebook computer didn't exist.

The biggest change, however, turned out to be in the gender department. The number of women publishing books in recent years amounts to an explosion of talent and success. Some, such as Anne Enright, turn out literary work of acknowledged merit. The majority work in more popular genres. Well, okay, they churn out chick-lit and hen-lit: entertaining escapist stuff aimed largely at their own sex.

It probably started with Maeve Binchy and then got a major boost from Patricia Scanlan. Scanlan, a librarian, read the first edition of *Write and Get Paid for It*, decided she could do what it suggested, produced an outline plus a sample chapter and lashed both off to an Irish publisher — Poolbeg — with a cheeky cover letter promising to earn them a lot of money if they had the wit to bring out the book. They did. She did.

Not that Poolbeg hadn't brought out books by women before. They had. They tended — with Arts Council support — to bring out slender paperback editions of short stories and literary novels. But Patricia Scanlan was a whole new phenomenon: someone who wrote basic English and told stories. Simple as that. She never had ambitions to join "the canon of Irish literature". She just set out to give other women a few hours in dreamland. To tell a yarn involving girls like the ones buying the book. To make them laugh, cry and identify with the triumphs and disasters of fictional women's lives.

Scanlan's first fat paperback took off like a rocket and has been followed, roughly every two years since, by another. Her books stayed in print. British publishers moved in, figuring (correctly) that her appeal wasn't confined to Ireland. Hardback anthologies of three of her novels came out around Christmas for gift-givers who didn't feel comfortable offering a present of a paperback.

Patricia Scanlan gave up the day job to earn her living, full time, as a fiction writer. It wasn't easy. Anybody can produce one book that appeals, but lots of writers then run out of steam. They end up re-writing the same book under different titles which, over time, turns readers off, or they begin to write about themes and people they don't actually know about, which does the same. Or

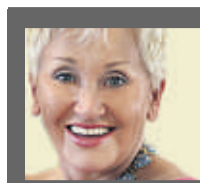
— and this is one of the big hurdles for women who write popular fiction—they're crushed by criticism.

The book pages in newspapers concentrate on important, rather than popular fiction, and so the reviews of chick-lit offerings tend to be at best cursory and at worst contemptuous.

That's unfair, particularly to writers such as Marian Keyes and Cathy Sheridan, who have tackled the issues of alcoholism, domestic violence, political corruption and Alzheimer's with skill and insight. They are the modern equivalent of Charles Dickens, who, it should be remembered, was essentially a soap-opera writer, turning out serials for newspapers that were later turned into books.

What's fascinating is the

**CRIME PAYS:**  
Thriller writer  
Ava McCarthy



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sheer number of women winning two- and three-book contracts and finding time to meet publishers' deadlines.

Mary Hosty manages to combine secondary school teaching with novel-writing. Roisin Meaney, a full-time writer, has now brought out seven novels. Ciara Geraghty's first offering, *Saving Grace*, ensured that she would not have to go back to the day job.

Four factors have propelled many of the recent wave of female novelists into print.

**SUPPORTIVE RELATIVES** When she was in hospital, recovering from a serious illness and reflecting on her chaotic life, Marian Keyes' father brought her the first edition of my book, inscribed with a message of absolute faith that she would become a writer. Other writers credit their mothers, sisters or brothers for pushing them into action.

**CREATIVE WRITING CLASSES AND WRITERS' GROUPS** Ciara Geraghty, enmeshed in new motherhood, attended a creative writing class and, through the direction of her teacher and the support of her colleagues, turned the exercises from the class into a saleable novel.

**CHANGED ATTITUDES WITHIN PUBLISHING HOUSES** Publishers such as Hachette have capitalised on the 'women's market' by being open to new writers and good at turning them into brands.

**SHEER BLOODY-MINDED DETERMINATION** Women already up to their armpits in jobs, families, homework and housework have managed to carve out writing time for themselves. The wonderful Colm Toibin tells writers that they should let the house go to hell. Increasingly, women are taking his advice and allocating themselves writing-time.

Irish thriller writer Ava McCarthy wrote much of her first novel sitting in her 13-year-old Mazda while she waited outside schools to pick her children up. Although she can now afford to lease an office, she liked this approach because, inside a car, you don't notice a dirty towel that makes you realise you forgot to load the washing machine — no distractions.

All of which explains why so many holidaymakers will bring a book by an Irish female writer to the beach this summer.

*Write and Get Paid for It*, described by Patricia Scanlan as "just what every aspiring writer and journalist needs" is published by Londubh at €12.99

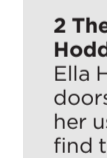
## THE WRITE STUFF

Eason's top selling summer reads



### 1 Personally I Blame My Fairy Godmother, Claudia Carroll, Harper Collins, €12.99

Jessie Woods believes in fairytale endings but, quicker than you can say Cinderella, her life falls to pieces and suddenly her prince isn't quite so charming.



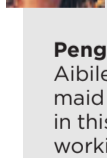
### 2 The Truth About You, Melissa Hill, Hodder, €12.99

Ella Harris finds a cardboard box on the doorstep of her cafe. At first she thinks it's her usual muffin delivery but is shocked to find that the box actually contains a newborn baby.



### 3 House Rules, Jodi Picoult, Hodder, €12.99

A boy with Asperger's syndrome is one of the last people to see a twentysomething before she goes missing, and when her body is discovered, he is arrested for her murder.



### 4 The Help, Kathryn Stockett, Penguin, €9.99

Aibileen, a middle-aged African American maid has spent her life raising white children in this novel about black domestic servants working in Southern households in the early 1960s.



### 5 Miss Conceived, Emma Hannigan, Poolbeg, €13.99

Angie Breen's body clock is ticking so loudly she is certain passers-by must be able to hear it. Still single at 40, she's beginning to despair.

>ANNA COOGAN

## Money matters...

# FOLLOW YOUR CASH TO WIDER HORIZONS



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"I MAY as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," is how one woman describes her attitude to spending these days. While another woman says she has never paid less attention to what is in her bank account, as it is only going to be bad news.

Fatalism, it seems, is hitting when it comes to spending, and how we deal with our money.

"Taking time to look at your spending can prove to be one of the most worthwhile financial exercises you ever do," says personal and financial coach Linda Nicholson, a qualified chartered accountant.

"It costs nothing and the only ingredient you need is honesty. Of course, how you choose to spend your money is entirely up to you as there is no right and wrong, only personal choices," says Linda, whose coaching practice is on Pembroke Road.

"But if you want to make improvements to your finances, the first step is to become conscious of what you do or don't do with your money. I recommend you keep a money diary to track the money flowing in and out of your wallet or bank account.

"You can do this easily on the back of an envelope or in a notebook. Keeping a money diary can help you to become more conscious of your behaviour around money and more aware of the financial choices you make on a daily basis," says Linda.

"Your spending habits reflect the choices that you make with your money. So what does your spending say about you? Are you someone who always makes the minimum monthly payment on your credit card? A lot of people fall into this credit card 'trap' which enables the debt to build.

"Credit card companies love when you do this because it makes them a lot of money. Perhaps you don't want to deal with this right now or perhaps you think you've plenty of time to pay it off so what's the hurry?"

"If you have an overdue credit card balance, you have everything to gain by dealing with this sooner rather than later."

Money expert Linda goes on: "At the very least, consider leaving your credit card at home and not using it until you have cleared your balance in full.

"Keeping a close eye on your lifestyle expenditure can be very informative. Are you spending too much in any one area? For example on food, takeaways, alcohol, cigarettes, nightclubs or gambling.

"Maybe you have a really stressful job and rationalise your high spending on alcohol by telling yourself you need a few glasses of wine to unwind after work. Perhaps you're living on fast food and TV dinners, telling yourself you have no time to cook as you work long hours.

"How you spend your cash is your choice, but ask yourself whether those choices are working for you? Are you feeling healthy and happy or are you feeling tired and drained? Is it time to make new choices?" she asks.

Linda says: "Do you assume that you cannot afford something without taking the time to get the facts? Perhaps you wish you had more money to return to education or retrain but you keep telling yourself that you can't afford it.

"Then you discover that you're spending in excess of €100 every Friday night (that's more than €400 a month). When you take the time to look at your reality you may discover that you have more choices than you thought you had," she says.

For more information log onto [www.lindamnicholson.com](http://www.lindamnicholson.com)



KEEPING SPENDING UNDER CONTROL:

Linda Nicholson