



This month, we sit in a sunny café and chat to Emma Vuletic, a young writer with a big future. Emma talks to Monica Davidson.

Picking my way carefully through the pram brigade that regularly invades this Newtown café on sunny mornings, I find Emma upstairs, nursing a soy latte. We are mutual acquaintances, and once more marvel at the tiny size of the Sydney creative scene. Both being writers, too, I feel a long natter coming on. We are on our way to a third coffee by the time we drag ourselves away.

Emma started young. She was accepted straight from high school to the Communications degree at the University of Technology, Sydney, in 1994. "It was like entering this wonderland playground where I had cameras, and scripts, and theatre groups to play with," she says. "I was so lucky, because I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something with writing or film, something creative, and I was in the right place for it."

After her three years of study, she grew bored of Sydney and decided to head to London. She immersed herself in the culture there, and found the worlds of theatre and film "colourful and dynamic". She particularly enjoyed the interaction between those creative areas, something she had not experienced in Australia.

She started working almost immediately. "I ended up getting into script assessing for film production companies. I think in London there's more work there. I met some incredible people." She also worked in a private writers' club, apparently run by a millionaire who needed it as a tax write-off. "It was a little basement in Rathbone Place, Fitzrovia. The clientele was so funny. There was an ex-IRA terrorist who'd become a poet, like you do," she giggles.

The club would often be empty for hours, so Emma bought a typewriter, "this old-fashioned ribbon thing", and knew then that she was going to write. "I'd sit there with a glass of champagne and write poetry. It was challenging because I was so broke, but..." she breaks off, with a faraway gleam in her eye. It's obvious that London is still in her heart. "I really connected to London, and to something within myself when I was there," she finishes.

Emma returned to Australia after a few years, and her Dad inadvertently spun her life in another direction shortly after that. He gave her a clipping about the young playwrights' festival called Interplay, now the largest young playwrights festival in the world. "Funnily enough I'd started writing a play about half a year before that, but I didn't know what I was doing. It was all quite amorphous and fuzzy, as an idea. Dad had known that I was doing that, gave me the clipping, I called them up and I got in to the festival."

Interplay completely changed her life. "It was there that I met all the other freaks who wanted to be playwrights, from all around the world, all under the age of twenty-five. It was two weeks of synchronized chaos and creativity and discovery." Not long after that, Emma won the Philip Parsons Young Playwright's Award in 2001, for her play *Imago*.

Since then, Emma has traveled extensively, writing for theatre as well as film, other performance, and some freelance article writing and reviews. She has slowly built up an impressive body of work. She has also acquired an agent, who helps her showcase her work.

Emma's plays include, among others, *360 Degrees in a One Night Stand* (as one of five writers), *Every Single Terror* (part of triple bill *Close to Home*) and *Five Thirty* at Kings Head Theatre, London. Recently her play *The Beekeeper* was part of a showcase of Australian work performed for The Australia Project II: Australia Strikes Back! in New York as part of Australia Week. She has also had a script optioned for a feature film, and her freelance travel writing has seen her hunting for the perfect cup of coffee in London, digging for gold in Victoria's high country and documenting Vancouver's visits from the glitterati.

Despite her successes, Emma's professional life has not always been a bed of roses. "I was lucky to have a little bit of success with my first play, early, and then there were a lot of people who didn't like the fact that somebody young had done something. It was very bitchy, and I'm a very sensitive person, so I ended up retreating back and not wanting to shine too brightly, and being really challenged to write a good play."

She had a few dark years of thinking she was a failure as a playwright, despite her obvious achievements, which finally had a positive outcome. "It was a real blessing because it allowed me to get out of that head space, the bubble of theatre, which was becoming negative for me. It got me into film, and expanded my vision. Now that I don't focus solely on theatre, I'm writing theatre that I'm really happy with." She smiles knowingly, with a wisdom beyond her years. "It's a gift to be able to fail, or to fall."

Emma is admittedly "cosmic" in the way she conducts her freelance life. Money, for example, has never been a big worry, although she's had times when cash was scarce, and she was forced to work as a temp. "I have this bizarre ability to somehow not get too freaked out by the fact that there are often times when it's precarious. I also have the ability to put out for what I want when I really need it, so often I'll be scraping by and then something will come along."

She finishes her coffee. “When I was temping, that was really hard. Recently I’m building more of a foundation for myself, with the relationships I’m building, with people who will hire me as a writer. It feels like (money) will become less of a problem because my foundation is growing stronger.” She grins. “And I’ve made choices – I’m not going to temp, this is what I do, and I deserve to get paid for it. I have something to offer. I’m completely cosmic about that!” she laughs.

Half of Emma’s work now is commissioned, and half is self-generated. It’s a balance that suits her very well. “I really like that because the work that I’m doing for other people gives me structure, and it’s remarkable how structure is freedom in that way. I have somewhere very particular that I have to get to with it, and I enjoy it. It’s problem solving. My own work is a little bit more fluid, it depends more on my mood at the time or my creativity that day, my state of flow. I love it. They fit well together.”

Although she works from home, she is a very disciplined writer. “I can go into this very pure, crystal clear space, and stay there for hours. It’s like a meditation, in a way. It’s also replenishing to be there, it doesn’t feel like you’ve had a hard day at the office.”

Entering into her thirties, Emma is moving from strength to strength, her future as bright as her past. She is obviously passionate about her work, and exudes the beautiful serenity of someone in love with their own life. “I feel like, even though I haven’t had any worldly success, and I haven’t even had a film made, I’m successful. I’m a work in progress, I’m happy, and I love my work. There’s a sense of success in the process that I’m doing, because I enjoy it so much. I can’t imagine it being any more rewarding than that.”



Georgina Capper and Scott Gooding in
360 Positions in a One Night Stand



Since our interview, Emma has married her long-time partner and moved to San Francisco.

Article © 2007 Monica Davidson.
An excerpt from *Freelance Success - Be Creative, Make Money and Love Your Work*, to be published 2008