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## Local Romance Novelist Uncovers World of Self-Publishing

By Moya Stone



Author Vanessa Kier Photo provided

One never knows what secrets our neighbors might be keeping. For example Lamorinda resident Vanessa Kier, an unassuming accounting manager by day, toils away each evening and weekend on a series of romance thrillers titled "The Surgical Strike Unit." Having just finished book number four, the author says she started out writing purely for her own entertainment.

Kier has been making up characters and plotlines for as long as she can remember and since high school, jotting down ideas in notebooks. "I've always been a storyteller," says Kier. But did she ever think that one day she might become a published author?

Kier says, actually, she fought against publishing. After years of watching other writers face the ups and downs of the competitive industry, she didn't think she wanted to go through all that herself. But as her characters developed and began to take the lead, Kier felt, in a way, responsible and realized that perhaps she owed it to them to share their stories with readers. "I thought if I loved these characters I'm sure other people would love them too," says Kier, who after so many years of writing just for herself,

finally made the choice to publish.

Romance novels were already familiar to Kier, having read them in college. She chose the genre for her own writing because she believes it's important for character development and emotional depth to have strong relationships "and love interest between two people seems to be the most powerful," says the author.

She initially went the traditional route pitching to agents and editors. Although Kier did get an agent for another book project, offers weren't coming in for her romance novels. Meanwhile she noticed writer friends having some success with self-publishing and so she decided to give it a try.

Having attended writers' conferences for years as well as workshops on self-publishing, Kier was aware that she must first hire experienced people who could do what she couldn't. Number one on the list was an editor. "Every manuscript needs at least one professional editing session," says Kier, "because no writer is perfect." Through her network of fellow scribes, most of whom she met at Romance Writers of America conferences, she found an editor. Then she found a cover designer whose work she liked. Finally she had each novel go through a "nitpicky about grammar and reasonably priced" proofreader.

The next phase of the process was to get her manuscripts ready for e-book formatting. Undaunted, Kier did all the technical tasks herself having purchased a manuscript converting software program called Jutoh. She says she enjoyed the challenges although there was a definite learning curve.

The entire publishing process took five months and in 2013 Kier's romantic thrillers came available on Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble both in print and as e-books. Full of murder, intrigue, and of course romance, the series features an array of agents who work for the SSU (Surgical Strike Unit), a private special operations group trying to stop a deadly scientific program from kidnapping men and turning them into mind-controlled, superhuman soldiers. The stories draw on Kier's undergraduate studies in political science and her experiences in the Peace Corps.

Believing in muses, Kier says the complex plotlines just come to her. She also relies heavily on her characters. It all starts with a character and then Kier tries to figure out their story. "I do put my characters through hell," she admits. "I'd never want to come back as one of them." But she does like living with her characters, writing several hours every day.

There are no regrets for Kier. She says she enjoys having the control self-publishing allows as well as the ability to make changes at any stage in the process.

Now Kier is on to other characters and stories. Check out her website: <http://www.vanessakier.com/>.

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