



staying in | books

Plotting a road trip to remember

Australian authors **MAGGIE JOEL**, **FIONA HIGGINS** and **KYLIE LADD** have just wrapped up an 11-day book tour. In a first of its kind, the trio headed up the three-author Wordy Women Tour organised by Australian publisher, Allen & Unwin. Here **MAGGIE JOEL** reveals the joys and hazards that ensued.

When I received the email a few months ago from my publisher proposing a book tour to coincide with the release of my third novel, *Half The World In Winter*, I was delighted. When I found they were proposing a tour with two other authors, Fiona Higgins and Kylie Ladd — complete strangers! — I was surprised and not a little intrigued.

But the tour that took in NSW,

Victoria and Queensland was nothing short of a revelation.

The life of a novelist is a solitary one. To be in a car or a departure lounge hour after hour with a publicist and two other writers should, by rights, have been torture — did I mention we had never met before? Instead we discussed and dissected, analysed and assessed, shared and compared every inch of our novels, hardly pausing to draw breath. It was well-named, the Wordy Women Tour.

None of us live off our writing. Kylie and Fiona both have young families. For all of us being an author is the job we do at weekends or when family members are at school or have gone to bed. We all took leave from our day jobs and our families to undertake this tour.

We set off on the Wordy Women Tour in mid-October and covered 4000 kilometres, hired three cars,

took four flights and stayed in seven hotels. We attended three literary lunches, five library events and visited 12 bookshops.

Harder to quantify is the number of books we signed, the number of people we spoke to, the number of photographs we have posed for, the number of Facebook updates we have posted or the number of Thai meals we consumed along the way.

The schedule was nothing short of frenetic: we found ourselves cramming down lunch at 4.30pm in the afternoon in the back of a taxi stuck in peak-hour traffic in Melbourne with a crazed taxi driver who swore at everyone and everything, arriving at the event with minutes to spare.

When we checked into our Melbourne hotel our publicist looked at her watch and announced we would meet back in reception in eight minutes. Eight minutes? It took me



seven minutes to locate my room.

Then there was the hybrid car we hired that, I am embarrassed to say, we could not work out how to start.

In Brisbane we landed, went straight to the ABC studios with our suitcases, did two bookshops and a library event then a second radio interview before even seeing our hotel.

And so, at the conclusion of our tour, I can reflect on what I learned: that literary lunches are hard work and the size of an audience is no measure of the number of books we will end up selling. I learnt that my book-signing signature at the end of the tour looks nothing like my signature at the start of the tour.

And that, once each event is over and we've returned to our hotel rooms, there is a frenzy of tour-related social media activity still to be got through before any of us can think of going to bed.

And that seeing people queue up at the end of an event to buy Fiona and Kylie's book is demoralising but when a complete stranger comes up to me and tells me she has read both

my earlier books and loved them, that more than makes up for it.

There were other, unexpected, outcomes too: being a perennial flat-shoe wearer I find I can now walk entire city blocks in heels, with a suitcase. I have, astonishingly, overcome my fear of flying and — equally surprising — my fear of regional Australia.

So yes, the pace was frenetic and yes, I set off on Day One in the company of strangers but when we swung back into Sydney 12 days later, steaming up the Princes Highway singing along to the Frozen soundtrack, I would happily have turned the car around and set off all over again.

Any author tour is ultimately about book sales but for myself as an author getting out and meeting readers and other writers, visiting bookshops and going into libraries has proved priceless.

Undertaking a book tour with two other authors and one amazing publicist turned out to be one of the most wonderful and rewarding experiences I've ever had as a writer. The Wordy Women Tour starred authors Maggie Joel (*Half The World In Winter*, review below), Kylie Ladd (*Mothers And Daughters*) and Fiona Higgins (*Wife On The Run*). All three books are on sale now.



Authors Maggie Joel, Fiona Higgins (centre) and Kylie Ladd left their day jobs behind to live and work together on a book tour. Picture: Troy Snook