

Rebecca took the leap and hasn't looked back



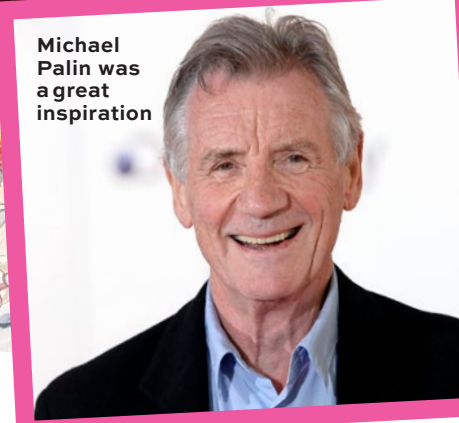
With her sons, Jack and Ben



Writing in bed, just like Barbara Cartland!



Helen Lederer at Rebecca's book launch



Michael Palin was a great inspiration



Meeting Mel Giedroyc

I wrote my first book at 50!

When **Rebecca Rogers** put pen to paper she had no idea how much it would change her life...

Sitting in the swanky Groucho Club in London, the room was silent. Martha Ashby, HarperCollins supremo, was on stage, about to announce the winner of the 2021 Comedy Women in Print Unpublished award. Suddenly, she said my name...

I thought there had been a mistake. Me? A single mum who worked at the job centre, who was wearing her work trousers and a sparkly jacket she'd picked up in the ASOS sale?

I remember wobbling towards the stage thinking that my knees would give way and *holy moly I've got to do a speech*, then tripping over myself thanking Helen Lederer and CWIP, and saying a rude word...

And then meeting the delightful Mel Giedroyc...

And going back to my Premier

If there's one thing I've learned
'As you get older, never be afraid of trying something new.'

Inn and phoning my sons in tears to tell them the news. It was quite a night and something I'd never have imagined would happen to me.

I'd grown up in Birmingham on a diet of Monty Python, *The Young Ones* and *Blackadder*. My dad took my older brother and me to see *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* at the cinema – I was only four and had no idea what was going on, but I very much liked *The Knights Who Say 'Ni'*. We loved all the Pythons, but Michael Palin in particular was a hero to us, especially being Sheffield born and bred just like my dad.

We were that annoying family who had a lot of in-jokes; mostly quotes from long-forgotten TV shows or stories that only we could remember.

I wasn't particularly funny at school, but I remember feeling a bit... well, odd. Everyone thought I was an

extrovert; I loved music and singing, so did a lot of performing, but didn't like going out much and crowds of people exhausted me. I recognise now – it's only taken me 52 years – that I am in fact an introvert. And that's why writing suits me so well.

I got married when I was 29, and we had our first son, Jack, after a year. Ben followed on two years later and soon after that, we upped sticks from London and moved to the South West. It was hard when their dad and I split up, but my relationship with the boys became stronger for it.

We made happy memories going for walks, taking day trips and holidaying in Devon. We were always happy together; laughed a lot and I obviously supported them as they grew up (literally – they're both 6'8"!), but more recently, they've done the same for me. We talk honestly and openly

and – of course – I'm incredibly proud of them and the relationship we have with each other.

In 2019, with the boys fast becoming adults, I found myself reassessing what I wanted out of life. I was tired and bordering on burnout; my office job was full time and juggling life at home with my career had been challenging.

A few months earlier, I'd had a TIA (a mini stroke). Added to that, my dad was very ill, and I wanted to spend more time with him. I had some savings that I'd been clinging on to for a rainy day; well, the rain was blowing in my face. It was time for positive action.

I took a six-month sabbatical from work and decided to write a book. I'd always wanted to do it and, after all, how hard could it really be? I'd written essays at school and university, and surely a book is just a lot of essays strung together... isn't it?

Turns out, it was much trickier than that! I hadn't really thought about all the framework stuff: plot and subplots, arc, structure. Then there was characterisation. Richness of text. World-building. Speech. Pace... my learning curve was steep, to say the least!

But I threw myself into it. I liked writing on my bed rather than at a desk, as the 'desk' bit made me feel like I was at work. Think Barbara Cartland but without the lipstick and the secretary and you won't be far wrong...

I also found that I needed time by myself so that I could set up camp in my head. Some people called it

daydreaming, but to me it was much more creative than that. Time alone allowed me to decompress and, when I was relaxed, it was easier to be inventive and productive. That's when all my world-building happened, and my characters came alive.

I was a slow writer, so I hadn't finished the book by the time I went back to work. Luckily – although it didn't feel that lucky at the time – I was made redundant during Covid, which gave me an opportunity to round it off. Being made redundant felt like a tragedy, but, it was the beginning of something special.

A few months later, I entered my book – *The Purgatory Poisoning* – into the CWIP Unpublished award and the rest, as they say, is history. After the awards was a whirlwind of radio interviews and meetings.

Before CWIP, I'd had trouble knowing how to pitch *The Purgatory Poisoning* to agents, but winning the award was a huge boon and helped me find my lovely agent, Julia Silk. Contracts signed, I set to work with Martha, my editor at HarperCollins, who helped me shape the book over the next few months.

It was published on 2 March, World Book Day. I held the launch at Mr B's Emporium, a bookshop in Bath, and Helen Lederer made a special trip to help me celebrate.

She's utterly fabulous, and my friends were saucer-eyed when she

“THE ONLY PERSON MISSING WAS MICHAEL PALIN”

walked through the door! Jack came (my youngest son was at uni) and it was lovely for me to have him there. The only person missing was Michael Palin, who plainly didn't get the invite, because if he had, I'm sure he wouldn't have missed it. Obviously.

It's been nerve-racking seeing the book out in the world as I've poured so much of myself into it – but the reviews have been great and, crucially, it's making readers laugh. *The Purgatory Poisoning* doesn't fit neatly into one genre; it's cosy crime, comedy, 'female fiction' and a bit of horror, all rolled up into one juicy novel. It's a bit different, and I'm proud of it.

Since winning the award, I've gone some way to overcoming my impostor syndrome. Now, I consider myself an author who also happens to be a civil servant, rather than the other way round.

Thanks to CWIP and HarperCollins, I've written short stories and will be running workshops on 'how to write funny' at literature festivals this year. I'm writing a second book, too. I'm inviting Michael Palin to the launch party now so that he's got plenty of time to plan it into his diary...

● *The Purgatory Poisoning* by Rebecca Rogers is available from Mr B's Emporium, Amazon and all good bookshops.

