

Katherine Blakeman – Interview with Babs Michel

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KEY:

B – Babs Michel (presenter)

K – Katherine Blakeman (author and interviewee)

B: I got an email from Katherine Blakeman and she said “I’m eighteen years old, I live in Bedfordshire and I’ve recently self-published my debut historical fiction novel, called *The Silent Chapter*.” She’s eighteen! The thing is – you think that’s good? She started writing this book when she was thirteen. I mean, when I was thirteen, I was sitting at home, eating crisps and watching *Grange Hill*. I wasn’t writing books! [laughs] So I thought we’ve gotta get her on the show – hey Katherine!

K: Hi! Hi Babs!

B: Hello, hello! Katherine, at thirteen you started writing a historical fiction novel.

K: Yes!

B: [laughs] You say it like it’s the most normal thing – not that you’re abnormal, that’s not what I’m saying. What I’m saying is... like me, I just, you know, wasting my time away reading smash hits, eating crisps and watching *Grange Hill*, you know. At thirteen, what made you start writing a novel? You know – and a historical novel, at that!

K: Well I’m not gonna lie, there was quite a lot of sitting around and eating crisps *while* I was writing!

B: [laughs] You’ve made me feel better now, Katherine!

K: [laughs] Yes, of course. Like most kids I think, I read quite a lot of Enid Blyton when I was younger, and obviously I’d been writing since I was about six years old. Not writing very good stuff, not gonna lie, but I – I tried. And one day, I think it was about May 2017, I sat down at the laptop with a blank word document in front of me, and what came out was a mix of... Blyton-esque storytelling and a story my grandmother told me from her time in the war.

B: [gasps] Ah, now! Where – so, what, in the Second World War in this country?

K: Yes.

B: Ah, right, okay. So what was your gran’s – the basis of your gran’s experience then?

K: Well, I can’t tell you too much because that would be a bit of a spoiler for the novel...

B: Ah, okay.

K: ...but that was one particular story I embedded in there.

B: Ah, okay, so was she a Land Girl, or was she, um, shipped off from the city for somewhere to live, 'cause loads of kids were put on trains, weren't they, and shipped off to other people – was she in that kind of bracket, or...?

K: Yeah, she was... I think she was five when the war started.

B: Yeah.

K: So she and her brother got shipped off, they were evacuated four times, in and around Bedfordshire from Highbury in London.

B: Wow! Gosh, what a great sort of experience to be able to pass on to you. And obviously that's been sitting in your head somewhere, and you've actually sort of managed to put that down in your novel *The Silent Chapter*.

K: Yeah, that's basically what's in Chapter Eight of *The Silent Chapter*.

B: Ah! And what was it like when you sort of thought "D'you know what, I think I'm writing a novel here. I'm getting through chapter after chapter." – was it fulfilling?

K: It really is, yes. I'd been – I'd tried to write some novellas, little short novels, in the past, but they never really felt like anything. And then, when I started writing *The Silent Chapter* I thought, "I actually might have something here." And it turns out I did!

B: Ah... so have you – so, I'm thinking about other people that, you know, are published authors and stuff. Have you had to send your book to a lot of people? Erm, for them to kind of give you reviews? How has it been received?

K: Well I actually tried to get published traditionally at first, so that is via an established publisher with a literary agent. I applied to many, many agents but got rejected every time [laughs] so from there, one of my writing friends suggested I self-publish. Then I just uploaded the manuscript, created a website, book cover, promotional material – I've done absolutely everything.

B: Have you? And then how do you then get it out for people to read? Is it just, like, coming on the radio? Is it on social media? How do you publicise your book?

K: You name it, I've tried it, basically. I've sent it to reviewers, they've been great. I've absolutely pelted my social media with links – my poor followers, they must be absolutely sick of me. [laughs] And coming on the radio with you, Babs, is probably the most exciting thing that's happened to me in weeks!

B: Oh, Katherine! Well, let's make the most of it. So – where can we find it? Where can we find *The Silent Chapter*? Let's plug the hell out of it! Come on, Katherine.

K: So *The Silent Chapter* is available on Kindle, and it's also available as a paperback, on Amazon. If you just type in 'The Silent Chapter, Katherine Blakeman', you should be able to find it pretty easily. It's got a nice distinctive yellow and black cover, so you shouldn't miss it.

B: And who do you think it would appeal to?

K: I think it would appeal to... anyone who likes a nice cosy, immersive twentieth-century romance that talks about all the things that weren't really talked about back then.

B: Ooh... can you give us a little hint? What do you mean?

K: Well, put it this way... again, you name a topic, I've probably covered it in there.

B: Ooh!

K: It's got themes of motherhood, and there's a bit of PTSD in there, shellshock, from the war.

B: Wow!

K: Yep, there's... a bit of everything, really.

B: Okay! All right, so it's *The Silent Chapter*, you can find it in all the places that you download your books, so go and support Katherine. Um, are you eighteen *now*, Katherine?

K: Yes.

B: This is amazing! I – honestly, I just – how you've had the kind of tenacity to, to do this, and sit down, and the patience and then the actual, kind of, getting over any writer's block, and all that kind of thing, when, at eighteen, there are so many other things to distract you. But you've persevered – it's very commendable!

K: Thank you!

B: You're welcome! And your family, they must be proud.

K: Yeah, they are. My grandmother, I actually dedicated the book to her, and when she found that out – I surprised her with it – and it made her cry.

B: Of course it did! Did she enjoy it?

K: She absolutely did, she really recognised herself in Chapter Eight.

B: Oh, I love that. Katherine Blakeman, it's an absolute joy to speak to you about your book and I'm guessing there'll be more books to follow?

K: Oh yes, definitely, I've already written – well, partially written – another one. Whether I'll publish it any time soon, I can't make any promises – you'll have to keep in touch with me!

B: Well if you do, come back on the show Katherine, you're always welcome.

K: Thank you!

B: Thank you Katherine, and good luck!

K: Thank you!

B: Bye!

K: Bye!

Thank you Babs, and producer Kimberley, for this opportunity!