

Career built on creative writing

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Playwright Lally Katz, 33, won the Victorian Premier's literary award for drama in 2009 and was a Churchill fellow in 2010. Her play *Starchaser* is being staged by Arena Theatre Company at the Arts Centre on June 2, with schools-only performances from May 30 to June 1.

Schools attended:

Oliver Hoover Elementary School in Miami up to grade 2, then my family emigrated to Australia. I went to Village Creek Primary and Kambah High in Canberra. In the ACT, students do years 11 and 12 at colleges. They have an adult environment and students take more responsibility for their learning. I went to Phillip College, which had great teachers and was very open-minded.

Favourite subject:

English and creative writing. I've always lived in a fantasy world and, as a child, I'd make up stories for myself and my friends. We played games of "pretend" for hours and hours. I was very lucky that my parents allowed me to be that way.

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Teacher who changed my life:

Maria Kelliher and Richard Manning, my drama teachers at Phillip College, were incredibly dedicated. When you took part in the school play, it was for real and the stakes were very high. They allowed me to write short plays for myself and the other kids. From an early age, I learnt how to write different characters and I got the opportunity to see my work performed.

Sports/academic prizes won:

I won the drama award in year 11 or 12 and came third in the *Canberra Times* writing competition in year 11.

When I was 12 I wanted to be:

A writer and actor, although I soon realised I wasn't that great as an actor. When I ask directors if I can be in my plays, they say "no".

In grade 6 I sat next to:

My best friend, Tracy Williamson.

Why I took the educational journey I did:

I did a double major in both drama and English, and minors in psychology and photography in year 12, then a creative arts degree at Melbourne University and the Victorian College of the Arts. I also started Rocket Ship Theatre Company with friends and became president of the creative arts faculty's theatre company. We took over the Open Stage theatre for two weeks each year and I wrote about 80 per cent of one of our productions. Arts directors from different companies came to see our plays and, after graduation, I was commissioned by St Martin's Youth Theatre, Melbourne University's Union House Theatre and a youth theatre in Sydney to write plays for them. I also joined Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company. The first of my plays that it produced, *The Black Swan of Trespass*, played at Malthouse, Belvoir [in Sydney] and the New York Fringe Festival, where it won the Producers Choice Award. We also performed in fringe theatres, pubs and at the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Gradually I got more commissions although I also worked as a waitress, which I loved, until I was about 30. When you're commissioned to write a play, either you come up with the idea or the theatre company suggests it. I give them a two-page synopsis, they make suggestions and I meet the directors and dramaturges. I usually have 200 to 300 pages of notes and ideas before I start writing and I produce about five drafts before rehearsals. Last year was very busy with *Return to Earth* at Melbourne Theatre Company, *Neighbourhood Watch*, which I wrote for Robyn Nevin at Belvoir, and *A Golem Story* at Malthouse.

Best lesson ever learnt:

Swim, don't drift.

What's right with schools today?

Most teachers really care about their students and work very hard. They should receive more support.

What's wrong with schools today?

There is too much pressure on students. Kids should be allowed to have a childhood.

If I could change anything about my education:

I would have spent two days a week not daydreaming through so many maths, science and history lessons. As a result of not concentrating, I have no general knowledge.