

New Australian Author Book Release

The diary of
KATY YEHONALA

ROBERT BARCLAY

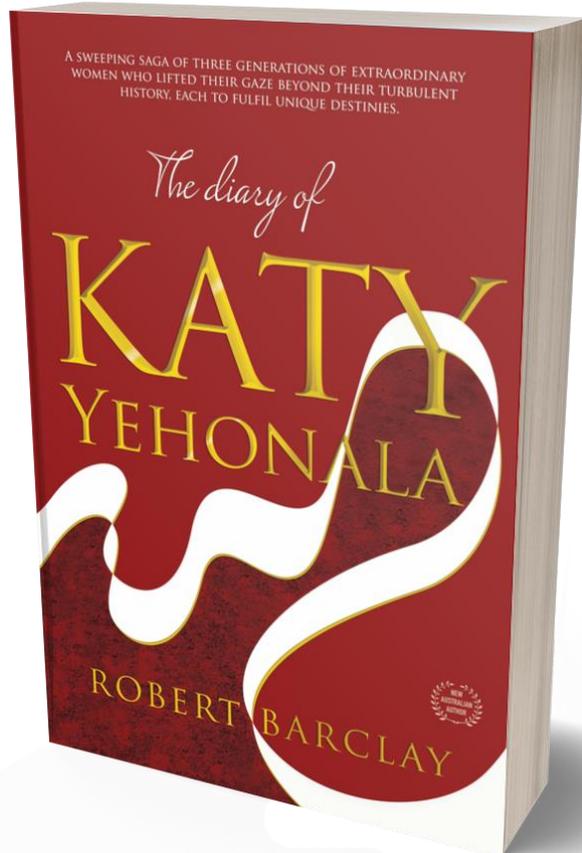
A SWEEPING SAGA OF THREE GENERATIONS OF EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN WHO LIFTED THEIR GAZE BEYOND THEIR TURBULENT HISTORY, EACH TO FULFIL UNIQUE DESTINIES.

The first is a proud matriarch who believes honouring family is worth any sacrifice.

The second is born into a revolution and travels the world, still scarred by her childhood demons.

The third soars to breathtaking heights on the world stage, a mother's selfless love beneath her wings.

The Diary of Katy Yehonala brilliantly evokes another time and place, laying bare its drama and beauty in haunting landscapes and vivid portraits of unforgettable women, so exquisitely narrated that they resonate long after the final page is turned.



RRP: \$24.95

Trade Price: \$11.48

ISBN: 9781922594686

Genre: Fiction, Romance

Format: Paperback

Audience: General

Location: Ringwood North VIC

Visit shawlinepublishing.com.au for more details on the author, Robert Barclay.

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A Conversation with Robert

Who inspires you?

An idea, not a person. That idea is every child deserves a childhood. My charity works in Cambodia, with others, fighting the evils of the child sex trade. I know many people who work unheralded, sometimes risking their lives rescuing kids from traffickers. These people personify the idea of acting according to one's conscience, even in the face of personal risk. These kids and those unsung heroes inspire every word I write.

Where do you get your information or ideas for your books?

I'm a morning person and can happily get out of bed at four a.m. to write if the night creatures give me an idea - which they take away if I go back to sleep. Otherwise, I author stories about what inspires me as a human being which come from direct experience of living in the places and situations I write about, reading about others' experiences, plus my imagination. As I get older, I look at my childhood differently, and now find heroes, villains and just interesting characters in the everyday of my childhood.

My best ideas come from the shower. I know that sounds like another metaphor but there's something actual about the water running away that washes blocks away too, or uncovers something below. Katy gets her revelations from the shower too. In fact the water theme runs through most of the important passages of my books. I see the ocean for, example, as the great life force - always had an attraction to it, even my choice to become a diver and swimming around wrapped in it I imagine is part of that.

Why did you write 'The Diary of Katy Yehonala'? What were your inspirations?

In the 1970s, while we were reading "The Joy of Sex," experimenting with wife-swapping parties, smoking pot, crying as the Beatles broke up and because Elvis died, two of the world's greatest catastrophes were happening. They took place on Australia's doorstep and went by unnoticed for most people. The first, China's Cultural Revolution and famine, killed more people than World War 1.

The second happened in Cambodia, that magical land of the gentle Khmer people. The world continued with its distractions while this fairy-tale country was ravaged under the brutal hand of Pol Pot, and two million Khmer men, women, and children, plus a couple of Australians as it happened, were executed in the Killing Fields or perished from starvation, disease, and overwork. Unlike China, Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries on Earth. Adding to its woes, or because of them, Cambodia became the hub of the most evil industry imaginable, the trafficking of children for sex.

At the time, I was involved in that other 1970s best-seller, the Vietnam War, a country with borders to both China and Cambodia. I saw the Cambodian genocide unfold from my place of work in the labyrinthine waterways of the Mekong Delta.

Later, I lived and worked in China. Immersing myself in the histories of these two introverted countries changed my life and set up a charity to do a little to help.

'The Diary of Katy Yehonala' isn't about the silent calamities of Cambodia or China, but forms a backdrop for part of the story. I wanted to portray Katy and Clara Yehonala, as "universal women," casting aside their cultural millstones from their brutal and cultural past, determined to make a difference, and honour the humanity we all share. They would evoke personal memories of similar challenges we have all experienced, and either overcome or faced being overwhelmed by, and to raise an awareness of a place and an experience we may never encounter ourselves.

How did you decide on the characters for 'The Diary of Katy Yehonala'?

I wanted to write a love story (more than just a romantic love story) to bring to life the almost unknown tragedies of late 20th century China and Cambodia that I knew, through inventing three women who would emerge symbolising the transition of the countries and women in general from that history who are still locked into cultural pieties as most westerners are not.

Their country's backgrounds are little known even now, and what we do know is usually wrong so having them coming from this background would add an exotic element. There is also a stereotype which needs addressing. I wanted Katy's western lover/husband, Simon, to be a link to a bigger story and for Katy's destiny [Asian] and Simon's [western] to eventually come together. The third main character, their daughter, Clara, would symbolise the achievements of the new, post-Mao China and their collective desire to make the world a better place. To add conflicts and interest, I needed the three women to have battles to win in a cultural milieu where women's role is usually the opposite.

