

Swatch

Glasgow School Libraries eMagazine

The **YA-Idi** Glasgow School Libraries' **BOOK AWARD** Issue

Maisie Chan



Ann Sei Lin



Victoria Williamson



Exclusive interviews with our shortlisted authors
PLUS: #TRENDING | SHELF HELP | MANGA | QUIZ | RECIPE |

MAISIE CHAN

Award-winning author Maisie Chan chats with Swatch about her work, what it's like being an author, and her YAldi Book Award shortlisted book, *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu*.

Q: Why did you want to become an author?

MC: Many people say they would like to write a book but not many people stick with it. It's not an easy journey to take if I'm being honest. BUT I love being an author more than any other job I've had (and I've had quite a few!). I get to create stories, follow characters on their journeys, imagine worlds and 'play' as part of my job. I also love the other stuff that comes with being an author such as doing talks, meeting readers, writing blog posts like this one, and being interviewed. I was never very good at sticking with office jobs and I did want to work with children. I think of myself as a 'storyteller' rather than a wordsmith, and I think that is why I like to write different things – novels, short fiction, screenplays. I like the variety of it all. I think being a British Chinese writer (and a writer of colour in general) brings with it an extra layer. I feel like I'm making a difference by populating bookshop shelves and library shelves with books that have increased representation of historically marginalised people. Various people kept telling me that I should write but I didn't really take it into consideration until my late 20s. I also think I wanted to prove something to myself. I'd never really had a stable career before; I went from job to job and never really found much satisfaction from the other roles I'd had.

Q: Tell us about your books

MC: My main two novels are *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* and *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu* – both are published by Piccadilly Press/Bonnier UK. *Danny Chung* did amazingly well and I still feel like it's all a bit of a dream. I never thought anyone would buy it or read it. And yet my debut novel was on TV, it was shortlisted for the last Blue Peter Book Awards 2022 and the Diverse Book Awards. It won the Jhalak Prize and Branford Boase Awards in 2022 also and is



Photo credit: Maisie Chan

still being nominated for awards in 2023. It's the book that keeps on giving! It's a humorous tale about a boy whose gran from China comes to stay

in his room. *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu* came out in the summer of 2022 and has been listed in a couple of School Library awards. It's about a girl whose grandad is acting strange, and she wants to take him on a road trip to Blackpool with her grandad and her best friends. It's got some Chinese deities, cosplay and lots of *Strictly Come Dancing*. Some of the themes in *Lizzie Chu* are a bit heavier than in *Danny Chung*. I also write the *Tiger Warrior* series and have written short stories in various anthologies such as *The Very Merry Murder Club* edited by Robin Stevens and Serena Patel.

Q: What inspired you to write your book *Keep Dancing, Lizzie Chu*? **MC:** I knew I wanted to write about a girl and her grandad. It was inspired by my own relationship with my dad, Ron who was quite a bit older than me. I was his young adult carer and was responsible for him until he passed away. I also wanted to link the road trip to *The Journey to the West* which has obstacles and inner demons and so *Lizzie* has her companions, and they meet lots of people on the way to their destination of Blackpool. I wrote this book during the pandemic and watched a lot of TV! I found I couldn't read

books as much – I wanted escapism without the effort. However, it was clear that TV series like *Strictly Come Dancing* were there to make us feel joy in such a terrible and stressful time. I wanted the book to be a homage to *Strictly* and popular culture because when we were in lockdown and couldn't go out, it was community and escapism that helped us forge through.

Q: What would you like your readers to take from your stories?

MC: I hope my novels promote empathy in the reader and perhaps they might learn something new. I purposely do things such as have a diverse cast of characters as that is my reality. I know people from all over the world, of all persuasions and class. I also want to show that British Chinese people are just normal humans. I centre those stories that have gone unheard and unread so that perhaps we can understand one another better.

Q: Who are your favourite authors or books?

MC: I love *When A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness, *Noughts and Crosses* by Malorie Blackman, *Needle* by Patrice Lawrence, *One* by Sarah Crossan and *Milions* by Frank Cottrell Boyce. I've recently enjoyed *Cats We Meet Along the Way* by Nadia Mikhail and *Rebel Skies* by Ann Sei Lin. *Wren* by Lucy Hope has a classical feel to it and is very good. And anything by Elle McNicoll is brilliant!

Q: Which genres do you enjoy writing and why?

MC: I find writing contemporary realism quite easy. I enjoy mixing humour with pathos. I do have fun writing the Tiger Warrior series because I get to have dragons fight humans, or for a character to fly or shoot fire balls. It's not something I thought I would be able to do as I didn't think I was very imaginative, so I do want to write more fantastical stories.

I've recently written a couple of historical pieces – one was about Mary Queen of Scots for Historic Environment Scotland, and I have a story about a monk who went to India to bring back the Buddhist scriptures and I loved learning about both periods in time and these extraordinary historical figures. Perhaps I will do more of that kind of writing if I can. Research does take extra time but it's all so interesting.

Q: What advice can you give to young people who'd like to be authors?

MC: I have some cliched advice – read a lot and write. Be observant to people around you. Take in life's experiences – the good and bad and you can use those for your stories. Write notes on your phone. Journal or do 'morning pages' (writing whatever you want without

thinking each morning) if you feel stuck. Don't edit if you feel stuck just go with the flow. You can edit afterwards. Your first draft is likely to need more work, so if you can find a trusted person to read your work, they might help make it better by seeing things you can't (that's why an editor is gold for an author). Read for pleasure but then you can go through the book again and read as a writer, why did the book work, what would you do to improve things? Look at courses and competitions to give you structure, deadlines, and something to aim for.

Q: Tell us about your future projects

MC: I'm working on more Tiger Warrior books now and I really want to get a start on a memoir. I've been wanting to do one for over a decade! I'm also thinking about my third novel and will begin that soon – it will be a middle grade novel but have some historical elements to it. I'd also like to do more screenwriting too. I've just worked on an episode of Pip and Posy for Sky/Channel Five.

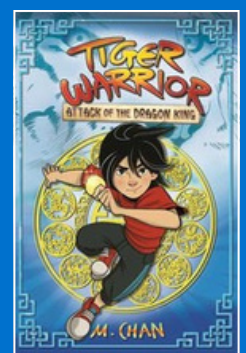
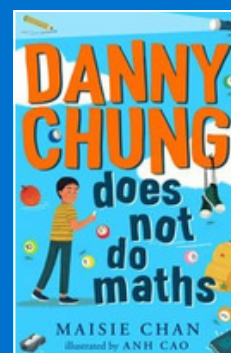
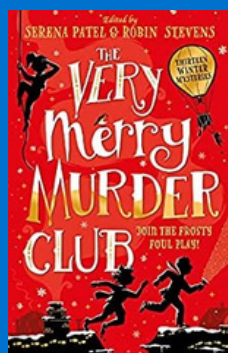
Q: Did you use your School Library when you were in Secondary School? Do you still use your local Library?

MC: My form room for a couple of years was the library so I was in there a lot. I was quite a quiet pupil and sometimes would like to hide away looking at books at lunch and breaktimes. I do use my local library which has fantastic stock and I urge everyone to join their local libraries and borrow loads of books!

Q: Describe a Library in 3 words.

MC: Solace. Knowledge. Expansion.

BOOKS BY MAISIE



Find out more about Maisie's work at:

maisiechan.com

