

Conversation between Sarah O'Mahoney and Tessa Venuti Sanderson, authors of books for girls.

Tessa: So Sarah, can you introduce yourself?

Sarah: Hi I am Sarah O'Mahoney, I do a range of things including working in a bookshop, volunteering with the Feminist Library , running an online shop called Good Being A Girl and offering alternative treatments such as Reiki, Bach Flower Remedies and menstrual charting sessions and author of Making Pink Lemonade

Tessa: You're a busy lady! Can you tell me how you came to write ***Making Pink Lemonade***? Who is it aimed at? How did you identify the need?

Sarah: The idea for ***Making Pink Lemonade*** came from my own lack of such a book when I first started my period, way back. I wanted to create the book I wish I had had, when I first began to bleed and didn't know what the hell was going on. The book is aimed at 9+ girls who are about to or may already have started menstruating. It aims to demystify and make it seem like an exciting thing to be happening rather than a bad bot to be talked about thing.

Tessa: Am I right in thinking you did the apprenticeship with Red School? Did that have an effect on your motivation too?

Sarah: Yes I did the apprenticeship with Alexandra and I had already had the idea for the book and the format but being on the Quest meant this could be my way to support [Red School's](#) vision and so it kickstarted me to finish it

Tessa: So tell me something about the process of writing it. You say you had the format in mind already. Were there key messages you wanted to get across?

Sarah: Yes, I knew the age range it would be aimed at. I wanted to use the Days of the cycle as the structure and based a lot of that around my own cycling charts. I wanted to work in everyday life alongside the emotions and physical feelings of the cycle. It was important to make it real, funny, serious at times and to encourage a positive feeling about the menstrual cycle and what it can tell us about ourselves - our own inner knowing

Tessa: Yes, I really enjoyed the humour in it. Since I published my book, I've had so many people ask me how I went about it. Can you share something about the process for Making Pink Lemonade?

“I really enjoyed the humour in [Making Pink Lemonade]”

Sarah: Yes, I did send off some sample chapters to regular publishers and a couple of agents, but they all felt the subject was not for them...so again with the motivating force of being on the Womens Quest I decided to self-publish. I was lucky enough to know a graphic designer and typesetter from my work at The Feminist Library, Eva who designed the book cover and formatted the book ready for printing. It was important that it was someone who got what I was trying to do. I found a great printer in North London and Marina was in charge of ensuring printing of the book. I

ended up doing my own small black and white illustrations encouraged by taking an illustration evening class - gave me the confidence to do that.

Tessa: I love how things fall in place to support our creativity! I wondered how much of the book is autobiographical and how much draws on what you've heard women talk about their early experiences?

Sarah: Bit of both. Certainly, the first bleed experience was based on my own and the patterns I noticed in my own cycle once I began charting. But talking to family and friends and young women/ girls I knew fed in funny names for their period, incidents that they remember which were related to having their period, emotions that were felt and not understood and also weaving in other cultural and historical facts and myths about when women bleed

Tessa: If you could get one message across to young girls, what would it be?

Sarah: Own your own bodies, get to know your own patterns within the cycle and feel the power

“Own your own bodies, get to know your own patterns within the cycle and feel the power”

Tessa: Brilliant! Where can people get your book?

Sarah: It is available through my website <http://www.goodbeingagirl.com> and is in a couple of alternative bookshops in London, including the Feminist Library bookshop

Tessa: Is there anything else you want to add?

Sarah: Check out the Menarche/celebrate your period gift set now available which includes the book. Now Tessa would you like to introduce yourself

Tessa: Thank you. I'm a yoga teacher who specialises in supporting women at different stages of their lives. I am also a menstrual educator and teach cycle awareness to women and girls, and also run puberty workshops. I'm an author of two books to date: *Ruby Luna's Curious Journey* and previously *The Pregnancy and Birth Colouring Book with Yoga Nidra*.

Sarah: You too are busy and combining lots of things. Do you feel that they have all fed into your writing and, in particular, Ruby Luna's Curious Journey?

Tessa: After having my second child I read Yoni Shakti by Uma Dinsmore-Tuli. In that there is a chapter of menstrual cycles and that led me to Alexandra Pope and the Women's Quest. I was inspired to set up a Red Tent, which has been running for 5.5 years now. It was hearing women's stories at that and on the retreats that I've been on that made me think that we need to take cycle awareness straight to the girls. So they don't have to wait decades for this empowering information!

Sarah: Absolutely! How did you decide on the picture book format of Ruby Luna and the tone. It's humour and honesty shine through

“[Ruby Luna's] humour and honesty shine through”

Tessa: We have a book called *Press Me* by Herve Tullet for children. My girls have always loved the actions in the book and want to read it again and again. One night I was reading it with my youngest and the idea popped into my head that I could do a similar one for anatomy! I wanted the pictures to be relatable rather than biology textbook-like. Originally, I had planned to get an illustrator to do the drawings because I love her images in Juno magazine. However, I had such a clear idea of what it should look like that I thought I would have an attempt myself and got wonderful feedback from people.

It was also important to me that the illustrations were multicultural because all the books about puberty I had looked at to date were with white children only.

Sarah: I love the brightness and the interactiveness of the illustrations and the colour text. Was it important to make it completely not a textbook and did you enjoy the experience of illustrating?

“I love the brightness and the interactiveness of the illustrations”

Tessa: The feedback that I have got is that because it's interactive (in an old-fashioned sense, rather than touch screens!), children want to go through it again and again. Unfortunately, I think a textbook style would not have that effect. It also means that it's entertaining and keeps the topic light-hearted, which is important for making it easier for parents to talk about this information. I loved doing the illustrations but had to have a few goes at some of them. For example, the drawing of the pelvic organs changed about 5 times because it is often pictured incorrectly in text books and I was trying to convey what I knew from my yoga training about the pelvic floor not being directly underneath you, but rather tilted.

Sarah: Overall how was the publishing process for you?

Tessa: I did an excellent [online publishing course](#) by Lucy Pearce. Through that I decided to go down the self-publishing route so that I maintained more control. The book is print-on-demand so if someone orders through Amazon or Wordery the book is printed and sent directly to them. My husband is pleased that this means there aren't piles of books in the garage!! I also can get author copies and get a bigger cut from those sales. I also love being able to sign the books or write a message for a daughter or sometimes for a woman who wishes that she had a book like this when she was young and is reclaiming something.

My top tip would be to think about the end product and work back there. Especially when you're including illustrations this important for avoiding unexpected expenses because you most likely will be limited by various formats and cost implications such as thickness of paper.

Sarah: It is an empowering thing to fully create and publish your own book. Are you planning a follow up to Ruby Luna?

Tessa: Yes, I have a book under way for older girls with more information about periods and also a boy's version! It is called Dante Leon's Curious Journey and is being read by families at the moment to give feedback. There have been different challenges creating the boys one compared to the girls but I'm hopeful it will be ready by the Spring.

Sarah: That is exciting and quite a challenge in terms of the boy's version! But needed in the same way. What's the best way to buy your books?

Tessa: If people are in the UK, they can buy them from me through my website <http://www.cyclicalwisdom.com/Tessas-books>, but otherwise through Amazon or Wordery worldwide. I've also created other complimentary things such as hand mirrors, pin badges and decorations that you can browse at <http://www.cyclicalwisdom.com/crafts>

Sarah: Wonderful! I love that the books go out around the world and the message too. What message sums it all up for you?

Tessa: Your menstrual cycle is like a barometer that gives you important information about your physical and mental health. Women are incredibly lucky to be able to tap into this inner wisdom and we now have the key at our fingertips to do this.

**“Women are incredibly lucky to be able to tap into this inner wisdom
and we now have the key at our fingertips to do this.”**

Sarah: Oh yes love that. It has been great talking with you Tessa, it has felt like a conversation even without seeing you!

Tessa: I really enjoyed this opportunity to find out more about you!