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International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

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9-23-2016

## Le Savali: The Journey

Courtney Sina Meredith

Panel: Real Work

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### Recommended Citation

Meredith, Courtney Sina, "Le Savali: The Journey" (2016). *International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work*. 922.

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## Courtney Sina MEREDITH

### Le Savali: The Journey

I had many dreams when I was a teenage girl. I wanted to own a bar, be a lawyer, travel the world, compose and perform my own music—and I also wanted to be a writer. To my mother’s credit, she let me spend my first six months out of high school pursuing the first dream. Of course I only got as far as sampling the drinks in as many bars as I possibly could, before I woke up one afternoon (such is the life of an aspiring bar owner) to an intervention. My mother had enrolled me in the University of Auckland and my studies began in the following weeks.

I went through an introductory course called “New Start,” and, much to my surprise and delight, my first essay topped the class and was posted up on the wall for everyone else to read. On the back of my high marks, I was accepted into law school and followed my second dream with great vigour for the next two and a half years, in conjunction with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in Political Studies.

As my studies intensified, so did my passion for writing. Plato’s ideal state became a cautionary tale about excess; alongside my legal papers that pushed for a separation of powers above all else, I began to question myself as a country with its own masses, auxiliaries, and guardians. John Locke’s case for land and water (“he leaves as much as another can make use of”) struck me poetically as an assurance that all great thinkers before me had left in their wake an abundance of un-thoughts. My introduction to female Victorian poets, alongside contemporary New Zealand writers and many Pasifika voices, fed into this notion of un-thoughts: the richness of my experiences with total strangers on the page was proof that I could make connections with almost anything, if I was willing to move my body and my mind, resulting in new thoughts that would fuel my ideas and propel me into the future. The intimacy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese* convinced me to view myself as a vessel brimming with life’s experiences, and to have the courage to spill onto the page.

At twenty-one, I left law school and told my parents I was going to be a writer. To my great fortune, I was poached into local government before I even had a chance to finish my arts degree—my gift of the gab landed me a role in sponsorship for community events. I felt immense pride that my income came directly from hard-working families across the city; in return, I gave my heart to the job. I eventually finished my last paper and graduated in 2010; by then I was twenty-four and I held three important portfolios as an arts advisor: diversity, indigenous people, and youth. The choices I made with my discretionary budgets had a real impact on artists and communities across Auckland, and the work fed me as an artist, too. I learned how to write without any words: beautiful moments that I created between people could be directly traced back to late nights at the office. I encouraged myself to look at the characters in my plays with the same tenderness, and to believe in my poems and stories as collaborations with the world around me. I chose to not be alone in my creative process.

I currently work full time as the Partnerships Manager for the arts faculty at the Manukau Institute of Technology in Auckland. I lead on commercial, industry, and community engagements. People often ask me when I’m going to leave my job and become a full-time writer. As far as I’m concerned, I *am* a full-time writer. Around the forty-hour working week I put in just as many hours, if not more, working on various manuscripts, mentoring young writers, fielding media requests, sitting on New Zealand’s

literature sector steering group, assessing applications for literary grants and awards—and the list goes on. Writing is nine parts living to one part writing. All writers tackle that truth in their own way.