



Doctor, writer, stray dog collector – Get to know Anne Biccard, the doctor we know you'd want on call. The only thing we're not sharing is her cell number!



In the soon to be best-seller, *Saving a Stranger's Life: The Diary of an Emergency Room Doctor*, we meet Anne Biccard in all the drama, humour (yes!), and blood and guts of an emergency department. What inspired her to write, where does she write and does she have a playlist for the book? This interview shares a little of what makes her tick.

Did you listen to music while you wrote *Saving a Stranger's Life*. And would you suggest a playlist for people reading your book?

I think music is so personal, but I like cello music like Hauser and Yo-Yo Ma and light piano classics like George Davidson and Jan Mulder. I'm not so keen on music with lyrics when I am reading or writing as there may be a clash between the words trying to get out of my head and the words trying to get in.

I am a bit obsessed with music and there is always popular or classical music playing at home. I tried to personalise my space in the ED by introducing a small speaker and a vase of flowers from the garden, but it just didn't work. Rather, I get immersed in the ED with all the chaos around me. For some reason I find the energy soothing and not distracting.

You don't live in the city: what do you see when you look up from your desk and out the window.

The farm where I live has an amazing view over the Cradle of Humankind; the light is magical but when I am at home during daylight hours, there is always outside work to be done.

When did inspiration strike? And can you remember where you were, when you decided to write a book about your experience as an emergency room doctor?

My inspiration to become a writer definitely comes from my mother, who was an English teacher and was truly passionate about literature.

*I started writing *Saving a Stranger's Life* during a very difficult time, as I had made a decision to leave the ED where I had worked for more than twenty years. I moved to another unit and, although my new team was amazing, I missed my home and all my colleagues. My need to tell their stories, and the feeling of being in exile, gave rise to the need to write it all down.*

Give us a list of the books and their authors that are currently on your bedside table?

*In the evenings, it is time for music and reading. My 'books waiting' are too numerous for the bedside table; they have their own bookshelf. I read mostly popular fiction like Harlan Coben, Karen Slaughter, Lisa Gardener and Greg Iles. I usually run a more 'serious' book in parallel; I have just started *12 Rules for Life*.*

Who do you write for? For yourself or the reader? And why do you think that is?

I most certainly write for the reader. I already know the story; I want to share it with you.

What are the items that you absolutely have to have with you when you sit down to write?

The only thing I need in order to write is my laptop. But, as soon as patients arrive, I abandon all distractions and pay attention to them. Some days I don't even get to take my laptop out of the bag; but other days it is not too busy early in the morning or late at night. Those are the times that I write, with the inspiring view of the wall and floor – and the red phone.

Tea, coffee or something more strengthening while you write?

I write only when I am at work. So, no music, no view and very seldom anything to eat or drink. I do make tea periodically, but I hardly ever get to drink it.

Do you have any lucky charms that you keep on your desk?

There are, sadly, no lucky charms in the ED.

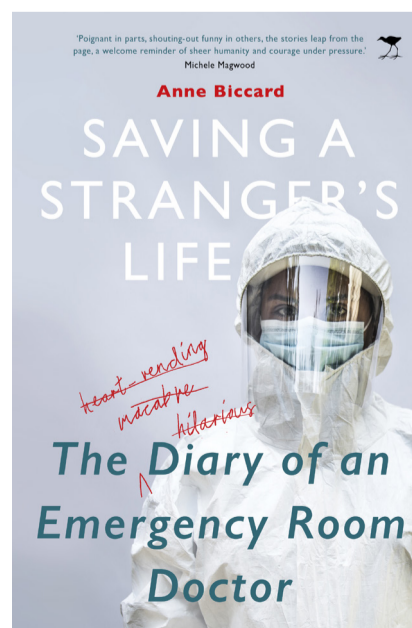
Any plans for a second book?

The hospital staff regularly asks if I am still writing a book. They are incredibly supportive and often ask to read what I have written, which can be a bit awkward. One particularly charming fellow doctor sometimes shushes the staff if the environment gets too noisy, telling them that 'Hemingway is at work here'. He has never asked to read the manuscript, which is a good thing, because sometimes I am writing about him!

Poignant in parts, shouting-out funny in others, the stories leap from the page, a welcome reminder of sheer humanity and courage under pressure.
– Michele Magwood, book critic and former contributing books editor of the *Sunday Times*.

A rare and intimate insight into the thoughts and experiences of an ED doctor and her responses to the idiosyncratic cast of characters that she meets. A deeply ironic, humorous and yet compassionate and informative book. A must read.

– Professor Gillian Straker, clinical professor, University of Sydney and co-author of *The Talking Cure*



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