

Vanessa Edwards, Writer (London/Brussels, Corporate/Dispute Resolution/Knowledge & Learning 1982-1993)



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“I was an accidental philosophy undergraduate,” Vanessa Edwards admits. “English literature was always my passion – I had written poems and short stories from an early age, the odd one of which even got published – and I expected to study English at UCL.

Unfortunately, I didn’t particularly like the course or the department so I rather fell into philosophy, which doesn’t have much practical, real-world application once you have left university. So I went for a job in publishing and worked for a while as an editorial assistant, proof-reading the Law Reports for the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting, and realised that the legal profession might be the place for me.”

Having passed her law exams at the College of Law, Vanessa was ready for articles with Linklaters at a time when the profession bore only a passing resemblance to the global machine that exists today. “Yes, there certainly weren’t many female lawyers around at the time and quite a few silly rules about what we could wear,” she notes. “I remember going for my interview at Linklaters with Henry Pickthorn and finding that Gillian Holding and I were the only two women in sight. Gillian is still a friend of mine after all this time – in fact it was thanks to her that I became part of the Linklaters alumni community!”

Vanessa’s eleven year stint at Linklaters featured a notable variety of work while she was based in the firm’s offices in London and Brussels. She qualified into litigation but also gained wide experience of the transactional world, primarily on the corporate side but also on the occasional competition law matter. “The competition matter that stands out came when I was roped into the Harrods/House of Fraser takeover battle,” she remembers. “David Hall, who was always a most encouraging presence, was the leader on that one. Another big influence for me was Steven Turnbull, both as a lawyer and because he became a pioneer in law firm knowhow, which eventually became my own world at Linklaters.”

Vanessa's transition from fee-earner to knowhow specialist happened, she thinks, at the behest of Linklaters' future Managing Partner, Chris Gorman. "It was now understood that knowhow had become a necessary and valuable tool for law firms and Chris suggested that what we needed was clear, analytical and easily digestible packets of information that would keep the corporate team up to speed with relevant developments," Vanessa explains.

"It suited me; research and analysis were always what I enjoyed most about law and because knowhow was such a new concept, I was almost able to form my role as I went along," she continues. "As we became more widely known within the firm, we would field all sorts of queries from partners and in the end I became responsible for writing a new corporate newsletter that went out regularly to the lawyers and our clients. That was good practice in the art of writing with clarity."

Vanessa's combined legal knowledge and writing skills were also at the heart of her work when she moved from Linklaters. She left London for Luxembourg, where she would serve the EU's Court of Justice for the next 15 years, initially as a translator of court documents and then as a *référéndaire* charged with the task of researching and drafting opinions covering many areas of EU law. Vanessa had found her true *métier*.

"As I look back, Luxembourg was where I really found my feet as a lawyer because that's where I discovered EU law, which was new to me and different from anything else I had worked on in a legal context," she says. "I liked the involvement with a legal system that had a less rigid, granular approach to interpreting legislation and case-law and I also enjoyed my life in Luxembourg, which was a lovely, convivial place where we made a wide circle of friends."

Not until 2008 did Vanessa return to the UK, at which point she accepted an offer to become a partner in the EU regulatory practice at the newly-merged firm of K&L Gates. "The timing was particularly fortunate – just after the merger and just before the global financial crisis made new partner hires so problematic," she says. "I enjoyed the challenge at a place that still seemed to possess a very English ethos in London, despite the overall American influence on the firm. That possibly changed over the years as strings were increasing pulled with greater regularity from Pittsburgh."

By the end of 2014, a series of meetings and anniversary parties with friends who had recently retired were starting to convince Vanessa that the time to end her own legal career was close at hand. Retirement would also afford her the time and space to scratch

the old itch that had never gone away – writing. “Getting a book of my own down on the page had been in my mind for a while but it was only after a winter’s worth of lengthy dog walks that the plot for what eventually became *The Grass Widow* began to take shape,” she says. “It took a while, a number of re-writes and ultimately an amicable parting of the ways with my agent, but I’m very pleased with the result, particularly the look and feel of the printed book.”

Published by Troubador, *The Grass Widow*, which revolves around a woman who finds more than she bargained for when she tries to get even with her ex-lover, saw the light of day in the summer of 2023 to heart-warmingly positive reviews. “I’m pleased that it’s finally out there after I’d parked it for at least a year at one point,” she says. “I have a second book on the go, a completely different read from *The Grass Widow*, which I need to finish off, and then the bare bones of a third are starting to form in my mind. Essentially I’m leading a thoroughly enjoyable, slightly indulgent life these days and I would like to continue writing for my own pleasure for as long as possible.”