



Picture: Matt Turner

FIRST PERSON

AUTHOR

Zoe Morrison

The Adelaide-raised writer talks to Deborah Bogle about family, scholarship and the creative impulse behind her award-winning debut novel *Music and Freedom*

BITTER FRUIT My maternal grandmother grew up on an orange block in NSW. An only child, she was sent to boarding school in the north of England, to a similar sort of place that my character, Alice, in *Music and Freedom* went to. From there she won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London to study theatre direction but her father ordered her to come home. She spent the rest of her life growing citrus, raising her five children and writing and directing plays for the CWA. When I won a Rhodes scholarship she stayed up all night looking up Rhodes Scholars in the encyclopaedia.

LANDSCAPE OF MEMORY As kids, we went to my grandmother's for holidays and when we moved to Adelaide we kept going back, so it really remained a constant in our lives, that landscape, and it's very striking. And its symbolism was very interesting to me when I was writing *Music and Freedom*. People are trying to grow something, in their case citrus, in an environment that is fundamentally hostile to them. And no matter how much water, manure, urine, blood and bone you pour on it, those orange trees don't flourish. So it's a broader metaphor for what happens when someone finds themselves in a hostile environment, and the importance of finding your way home, wherever or whatever that might be.

FAMILY VALUES There was always an emphasis on social justice in the house I grew up in. Dad was a GP, still practising here in Adelaide, and Mum was a nurse. We went to church regularly, I went to Walford, a Christian school, and my faith has been very important to me. At Adelaide University I was doing my AMus and LMus with Clemens Leske Sr at the Con. I also did two years of Law then I did honours in Human Geography, and it was then that I fell in love

with these feminist theories of social justice, and that was what took me to Oxford.

THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC I have played music all my life. I learned the Suzuki violin method at three, then piano at five. We were out in the country and there wasn't much to do and Mum was a great, active mother. There was a Suzuki violin teacher around, and I had two older sisters and they were learning, so it was one of those younger sibling things, "she may as well do it, too". Once I got to Oxford, I wasn't really sure where to take it because it just wasn't making sense to me, that art form. I don't think I was ever good enough to be a concert pianist, as Alice was. And because I had done it so long — this is going to sound really funny — but I don't think I ever really thought about it. It was just how I lived.

CALLING TO ACCOUNT In 2005, I had just got off the plane, and I was based in Melbourne but I took a job working on an independent investigation for the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide on reporting child sexual abuse and responding to adult sexual assault. So I spoke to a lot of priests and church workers. It was an intense six months. But even before I went to Oxford, I did have this sense that "well, look, I think I'd really, really like to write". It was surprising, and actually doing that seemed a very long way off.

THE CREATIVE SPARK Alice just walked on to the page. I don't know where she came from. It's just how creativity works. She's not at all like my grandmother and not at all like me. She's a completely separate individual. But she was incredibly persistent as a character, which was fortunate because I was very bad at it to begin with — it took me a long time to teach myself how to write.

***Music and Freedom*, Zoe Morrison, Vintage Australia, \$32.99**