

# Spotlight on: Kyla Bennett

## May 2017

### Biography

After receiving a Ph.D. in Ecology from the University of Connecticut, Kyla Bennett attended Lewis and Clark's Northwestern School of Law, where she obtained a J.D. with a certificate in Natural Resources and Environmental Law. Kyla returned to the east coast in 1989, when she began work at the Boston office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency doing wetlands permitting and enforcement. She soon became EPA's Wetlands Enforcement Coordinator for New England, and stayed in that position until she left EPA in 1999. Kyla then worked as the Deputy Director of Habitat for the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), headquartered on Cape Cod. After two years of protecting wildlife and their habitats around the world, Kyla joined Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), working to protect local, state and federal employees who protect the environment. Kyla is vegan, an avid reader, writer, and theatre-goer, and spends her spare time hiking in Borderland with her husband and two dogs. She also volunteers as a naturalist at Borderland, and lives in a solar house in Easton.

[Find Kyla's work at the Sharon Public Library!](#)

### Interview

**1. As noted in your biography, you have a lot of experience in the fields of environmentalism and naturalism. What led you from that into writing? How has your knowledge of these topics influenced your writing?**

*I have always loved writing fiction, and tried my hand at writing my first book when I was ten years old. As I began working in the environmental field, I realized how little people really knew about biology, the environment, and animals. I also knew the power of books—when my daughter and all her friends were obsessed with the latest vampire book du jour, I decided that it would be a good idea to try to combine a young adult romance with critical environmental issues to raise awareness about our planet. The work that I do today as my job as a scientist and environmental lawyer greatly influenced my novel [No Worse Sin](#). People always advise to “write what you know,” and I did just that. Two of my legal cases involve [pharmaceuticals in water](#) and the critically endangered [North American right whale](#), and both of these issues are highlighted in my plot.*

**2. Has your focus on environmental issues affected your book's reception—in ways you anticipated, or in ways you did not?**

*My focus on environmental issues has not affected its reception, but did cause one reader to tell me there was “too much science” in the book. However, others have told me that they loved the environmental slant, and it made them do more research into the things I wrote about. The environmental themes in my novel did help me get published, though. My publisher, [Harvard Square Editions](#), focuses on publishing environmentally and socially*

conscious literary fiction, particularly things about climate change (i.e., cli-fi). I wish that more publishers focused on these genres, because we can change the world for the better by educating young people through literature.

**3. You are a self-described “avid reader.” Which books have made your “Best 3 Books of All Time” list?**

*It's really hard for me to select my three favorite books because I have so many! One is easy—[Watership Down](#) by Richard Adams has to be my all-time favorite book. I read it as a child when it first came out, and numerous times since then. I recommend it to everyone, children and adults alike—it is timeless and ageless. I'd have to say that two of my other favorite books are [The End of Mr. Y](#) by Scarlett Thomas, and [And Then There Were None](#) by Agatha Christie. But I have so many more! (I would be remiss if I didn't mention that I also adore any book by [Louise Penny](#), [Tana French](#), and [Liane Moriarty](#), three wonderful female mystery writers from Canada, the UK, and Australia, respectively.)*

**4. Who or what do you rely on to give you good recommendations when you are looking for a new book or author to read?**

*I rely on my friends, my mother, and my library to give me good book recommendations! My library has this [cool app](#) where you can type in the name of a book you loved, and it will give you suggestions of other books to read. I love it!*

**5. Is there a particular genre you enjoy reading (or writing)? Why is that?**

*I adore mysteries, particularly British mysteries. I have a hard time reading non-fiction, probably because I get so much of that in my work. Mysteries are my go-to genre, and I can't fall asleep at night unless I read at least a few pages. I think I enjoy mysteries so much because they really take me out of my present life and make me forget any personal struggles I am experiencing. They are all-consuming, and I find that relaxing. As far as writing, I love anything for and about young adults. I'm not sure why I'm drawn to young adult writing... maybe I want to try and change the world through the next generation.*

**6. There's a recent trend, I think, in terms of YA novels being optioned for the big screen. Hypothetically speaking, if your book were adapted, what would your ideal casting list look like?**

*I have actually spent time thinking about a cast for the movie version of No Worse Sin... and, I actually modeled the heroine, Laena, after my daughter (she is an actress). I think Leonardo DiCaprio would make a great father (Ben), and Julia Roberts or Jennifer Garner as the mother (Michelle). Cree is the big unknown... he would have to be a newcomer!*

**7. Are you working on any new novels or stories at the moment?**

*I am working on two books concurrently: one is a sequel to No Worse Sin (I had always anticipated that it would be a trilogy); and the second is a book I can't discuss because*

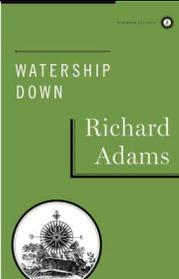
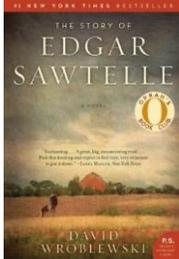
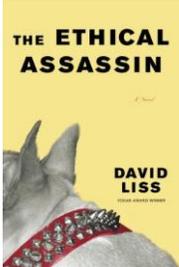
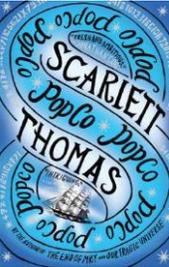
*I will have to use a nom de plume. It will be a little explosive for some people, because it is based on experiences I have had and that my colleagues have had. I wish I could say more, but I'm actually in discussions with a lawyer about how far I can go with this book!*

**8. That sounds exciting! I won't ask you to reveal more about this mysterious book, all things considered, but here's a related question: Are there any local spots that particularly inspire you? Any that have made it into one of your works?**

*There are two local spots that inspire me: [Borderland State Park](#) and the [Hockomock Swamp](#). I have a half-written mystery that takes place in Borderland, and I have a book idea that takes place in the Hock. I love nature, and both of these fabulous places move me... I would love to share them with others.*

### **6 Books That Will Change You (according to Kyla Bennett)**

*All of these books either make the reader care more about animals, the environment, or the world in which we live, or they challenge the commercialism and standards that pervade our society today. I feel that literature has the power to change people, and I think each of these six books do that in one way or another.*

	<p><a href="#">Watership Down</a> by Richard Adams</p>		<p><a href="#">The Dog Stars</a> by Peter Heller</p>
	<p><a href="#">The Story of Edgar Sawtelle</a> by David Wroblewski</p>		<p><a href="#">Nature Girl</a> by Carl Hiaasen</p>
	<p><a href="#">The Ethical Assassin</a> by David Liss</p>		<p><a href="#">PopCo</a> by Scarlett Thomas</p>