

From a Trickle to a River

Reflections of a New Zealand Children's Book Publisher

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I consider it a great honour to be offered the Margaret Mahy Award and I thank the New Zealand Children's Book Foundation very much for their generosity. An award that is given by colleagues is a very special award indeed. To be associated in any way with Margaret Mahy is both an honour and a pleasure, for Margaret must surely be the best loved writer in New Zealand and she is certainly one of the most admired writers for children in the world. I need hardly say that it is also daunting to follow on this platform in the footsteps of Margaret Mahy, Dorothy Butler, Joy Cowley, Betty Gilderdale, Elsie Locke and Tessa Duder - all huge names in children's literature and people for whom I have the greatest respect.

I consider publishing for children to be the most important area that a publisher can work in. The ability to read from an early age is vital in a civilised society and publishers are an essential component in the chain of literacy. We have a duty to provide children with a wide variety of books for different tastes and different ages. Computers cannot and never will be able to take the place of books.

Writing for children is not easy. I maintain that it is the most difficult genre of all particularly when writing for the very young, because the book must appeal both to the child and to the adult who will choose it and read it to the child.

First of all I should describe the route which led me to become a children's publisher. In many ways it is a typical New Zealand experience.

My first job in publishing was at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, where in 1961 I obtained a temporary position for six weeks. I had written to them from New Zealand because I had been involved with an international conference here run by the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs.

At the end of the six weeks I was asked if I would be interested in becoming Assistant to the Editor of the two journals published by the Institute, *The World Today* and *International Affairs*. The only stipulation was that I must stay with them for at least two years, as there was a fair amount of training involved. I accepted the offer and had three very interesting years, not least because many world political leaders passed through the building to deliver what was often a very significant lecture.

My main jobs as I remember them were copy editing, which included checking all quotations in the journals, proof-reading and handling production. I recall that nothing was to be quoted in those journals that had not been checked for accuracy and the checking process often involved journeys all over London. Such thoroughness was time-consuming but it gave me good training in the basics of copy preparation.

When I returned to New Zealand in 1965 I was keen to build on that experience so looked for a job in a publishing house. Easier said than done. There was, of course, little commercial publishing in New Zealand in the sixties. Two Wellington companies, A.H. & A.W. Reed and Sweet & Maxwell (NZ) Limited, did express interest in employing me - but not there and then. In one case it was a matter of awaiting the vacancy, in the other of their getting approval from Australia. I decided to wait, and became one of the few unemployed of the sixties. I will never forget walking to the Chief Post Office in Featherston Street and feeling that I was the only person in Wellington who had no purpose in her stride. I did actually have various small jobs but made a point of taking only temporary work.

One of these jobs was selling advertising for two magazines and while I did not particularly enjoy it, it was good experience because the ability to sell is an essential skill in publishing.

After eight months, employment in publishing finally came my way and in April 1966 I became assistant to the editor at Sweet & Maxwell, working on legal books. Sitting proof-reading 600 pages of legal treatise was not exactly what I imagined I would be doing but by that time I desperately needed a job so I didn't complain. I settled down to learning the difference between square and round brackets and between 2NZLR and NZLR2 (no, I am not getting confused with algebra).

I doubt whether I would have remained proof-reading that sort of material for more than a couple of years had there not, after my first year, been a visit from a man from Head Office in London. Now Sweet & Maxwell was, and is, a UK company, and in the sixties seven UK publishing houses merged to become Associated Book Publishers Limited. Companies from around the world who represented any of those seven companies then joined forces with the result that Sweet & Maxwell (NZ) Limited merged with Hicks Smith & Sons and became Associated Book Publishers (NZ) Limited. I was once told that the merger was to try to keep the Americans out of British publishing. How things changed ten years later.

In any event, in 1967 I was asked by a senior member of the London office if I would start an educational list for Hicks Smith and Sons. This was the period when major changes were being introduced into the school curricula. Pauls and Reeds had already entered the educational publishing field; but this was a brand new direction for Hicks Smith, which had practically no experience of publishing other than having published the humorous *From N to Z*, the children's book *Kuma is a Maori Girl* and, in 1966 after amalgamating with Sweet & Maxwell, the first book of someone who was to become a national icon, Alison Holst's *Here's How*.

I need hardly say that I was apprehensive about the project. I had not been a teacher and I knew very little indeed about commercial publishing. Nevertheless I decided to give it a go, hoping that all would be revealed in Sydney where, I was told, I would receive a month's training. In ABP's Sydney office I was put in a room (with a delightful Englishman who possessed a fund of stories) and given a manuscript to edit. And that was that. After four very pleasant weeks I returned to Wellington with no more idea of how to start an educational list than I had before I left. I suppose in situations like that common sense takes over and I did the obvious - I visited all the curriculum officers at the Department of Education and searched out the areas where new books were needed. To my delight I found that new curricula had just been introduced for history, geography and social studies and that textbooks in these areas were urgently needed. This really gave me something to get my teeth into and I set about finding authors.

I can only say about this period that I had some of the luck which is vital in publishing. I commissioned books in history, geography and social studies, in that order, and the geography books were ready before the history. The geography books sold well, the history ones hardly at all. The social studies books, twelve months later, sold extremely well. Had the history books come out first, as on the schedule they should have, I think that would have been the end of my publishing career.

In 1973 I had promotion and was appointed Publishing Director. By this time the imprint was called Methuen New Zealand, although we still published legal books under the Sweet & Maxwell imprint. Four of us worked in the publishing division and we published a wide range of books - legal, accounting, polytechnic, education for secondary schools and general. Those were the seventies!

One area in which we did not publish was children's books because our parent company, Methuen, had a strong children's division including, among many notable classics, the *Winnie the Pooh* books. Our New Zealand office received a great number of children's manuscripts which we dutifully read; and forwarded to London any we thought worthy of sending.

One manuscript I remember clearly is *Mouse in the Attic* by Gloria Gibson, a charming story of a colonial childhood. Methuen accepted it for publication and in due course it came back to New Zealand as a published book in their Pied Piper series. The trouble was that it went to the sales department who treated it like any other UK title. Only 500 copies were brought into New Zealand. I looked further into this situation and discovered that exactly the same thing had happened to Ruth Dallas's books. Looking back now, I suppose I was in a position to change things there and then, but I had little knowledge of rights and in those days our work was very compartmentalised. I was not involved with books coming in from London

However, this experience remained with me and when, in 1980, David Rendel and I set up Mallinson Rendel Publishers, I had it in mind to work in the children's field if suitable manuscripts came our way.

The breakthrough, I suppose it could be called, came in 1981 when I was taking part in a New Zealand Literary Fund meeting. I was the Book

Publishers Association representative on the Literary Fund at that time. During the coffee break Elizabeth Alley turned to me and said, "Isn't it strange that Lynley Dodd can't find a publisher?" It was indeed and I couldn't wait for this meeting to end so I could ring Lynley up. I had met her a couple of times so she at least knew a little about me. She agreed to submit two manuscripts immediately.

The situation was as follows. Lynley Dodd and Eve Sutton, two cousins, had submitted their first picture book, *My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes*, to Hodder & Stoughton New Zealand Limited and it happened to arrive at the same time that Julia MacRae (that well-known and far-sighted English publisher - I believe she was actually born and educated in Australia) was visiting Hodders in Auckland. Julia was then the children's publisher at Hamish Hamilton. She read *My Cat* and snapped it up. It was a great success. Lynley then decided to both write and illustrate her picture books and submitted *The Nickle Hackle Tree* followed by *Titimus Trim*, both of which were published by Hamish Hamilton. But her next book, *Wake Up, Bear*, was rejected - I suspect because UK publishing was in a downturn and it was easier to reject a New Zealand author than an English one. Lynley then tried a number of other publishers, both in New Zealand and in the UK but was politely turned down. She was tremendously worried by this because she was the first person to have been awarded the Choysa Bursary to do some writing and she could see no way of having the results of her year's work published. So, we were the lucky ones. It was definitely a case of being in the right place at the right time, combined perhaps with publisher's intuition. which can only be gained with experience.

The first two books of Lynley's that we published were *The Apple Tree* and *The Smallest Turtle*, the books she had worked on during her Choysa Bursary year. Both are good books but we did not expect them to have massive sales, although in terms of popularity in schools *The Smallest Turtle* continues to do well. In fact, in 1996, we gave the book a new lease of life by republishing it as a trade paperback and found ourselves reprinting it within six months. I would expect it to sit on our list for some years to come.

The next book of Lynley's we planned to publish was *Wake Up, Bear*. We were well advanced with it and had roughs with publishers in the UK and in

Australia when we received a worried telephone call from the Frankfurt Book Fair. Spindlewood's Michael Holloway, the UK publisher who had the roughs, had seen a children's picture book at Frankfurt entitled *Wake Up, Bear, It's Christmas* and Michael felt we would be foolish to try to compete with it. In retrospect I'm not sure that we need have worried but back in 1983 our fledgling company was pretty concerned. We suggested to Lynley that we postpone publication of *Wake Up, Bear* and asked if she could come up with something else rather quickly. I must say this was a tall order because Lynley, although a superb writer, is not a fast one. However, she agreed to try and six weeks later came into my office with the text for *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*. Rarely have I been so excited. It was instantly clear to me that it was a winner - and international, too.

By the time a publisher is ready to launch a book - this is my experience anyway - the publisher has a pretty good idea of how that book is likely to fare in the market-place. (I hope, however, that no author of mine has ever had, or ever will have, an inkling of my opinion in cases where I have realised that international success may not follow.) On this occasion I was very sure of the future success of *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy*. Sitting in Bruce Morris's small specialist children's bookshop in Wellington awaiting the arrival of Alison Grant to launch it, I was sufficiently confident to say to David "I have a feeling that this book is going to become a classic - it's good to be here for the launch."

And shortly afterwards the anecdotes came rolling in. One of my favourites is the five-year-old who said to her mother, "Mum, is that dog really called Bottomley Potts?" and her mother said, "Yes". The little girl's face lit up. "How rude!" she said with great delight.

Hairy Maclary very soon became a major component of my life. I feel myself privileged to be in this position and fortunate to have such a wonderful author and such a friendly, bouncing, bustly little dog to work with.

I won't say it has all been plain sailing. My first task was to try to sell him to an international publishing company and to do this David and I decided that I should attend the Bologna Children's Book Fair. The previous year Beverley Price, one of the founders of that highly successful New Zealand

publishing company, Price Milburn, had been there and had agreed to try and find a publisher for *The Apple Tree* and *The Smallest Turtle*.

Many publishers turned her down but Beverley knew that the books were good and through sheer determination found two small companies, Spindlewood in Devon and Era Publications in Adelaide, who took the books in hardback and who still co-publish Lynley's books today.

The vast size of the Bologna Children's Book Fair is hard to imagine until you have been there and numerous paperback imprints are represented. The Penguin list seemed to be the strongest, with the highest quality, and I therefore haunted the Penguin stand with the aim of getting an appointment with Liz Attenborough, their children's publisher. I finally managed this and although she seemed unimpressed with *Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy* (I didn't at the time know that Graham Beattie, then managing director of Penguin New Zealand, had already sent it over and that she had rejected it) Liz absolutely loved *Hairy Maclary's Bone*, which I had at Bologna at proof stage, and there and then took both books for the Puffin list. Lynley's books have been published in paperback by Penguin UK, or rather Puffin, ever since.

The Hairy Maclary books quickly became well-known in New Zealand. Four of them won the Picture Book of the Year Award and within five years it was difficult to find a New Zealand child who was not familiar with Hairy Maclary, Bitzer Maloney, Bottomley Potts and the rest of the gang. This success brought with it a large number of requests to use the book, or the character Hairy Maclary, most of which were too amateurish to contemplate. I still have the re-drawn jig-saw puzzles that were submitted to us in all seriousness. Even had that company reproduced Lynley's work in a professional manner they would have been unlikely to market them properly. Just last year Holdsworths produced four excellent jig-saw puzzles and we are relieved that we waited for the right company.

In 1990 we received a request that seemed worth careful consideration. Jan Bolton, an experienced music teacher, wrote to us and asked permission to use the Hairy Maclary stories in a musical production she was directing for Hutt Valley primary schools. She said that she had produced *Cats* for them the previous year and promised not to call this show *Dogs*. Now this

was not the first such request we had received - we had received a couple of other similar requests but we were not confident that these proposals would work. Jan Bolton's proposal, however, seemed thoroughly professional and we did not see that much harm could come to Hairy by the type of production she had in mind. We therefore gave her permission to proceed and eagerly awaited her invitation to hear, and comment on, the music. Jan was as good as her word and Lynley, David and I went to her studio whenever a couple of new songs were completed. On every occasion we were bowled over by her imagination and the freshness of her music. She captured the spirit of Hairy in music perfectly. We very much looked forward to the show.

One day early in May, Lynley, who by this time had moved to live in Tauranga, flew down for this very special event. The show was good and we enjoyed the enthusiastic acting of the children, but over breakfast the next morning Lynley and I analysed it. What, we agreed, was not right, was that there was too much talking. We loved the music and came to the conclusion that we should see if the Royal New Zealand Ballet would be interested in turning the stories, with Jan's music, into a children's ballet.

You will all know how good ideas often crop up in two quite separate places at the same time. While we were dreaming in this way, the New Zealand School of Dance was asking a prominent Wellington choreographer, Paul Ienden, if he would choreograph and direct a New Zealand children's picture book for the end of year production the First Year students perform to primary schools at the State Opera House. Paul went to Ann Hunt, a librarian and also the Dominion's dance critic, for her advice and she recommended the Hairy Maclary books. You can imagine our delight when he rang us to ask permission to use the series. We put him in touch with Jan Bolton and a whole new dimension in the life of Hairy was about to start.

I think a number of you have seen *The Hairy Maclary Show*. It has been extraordinarily successful and we are very proud of it. In fact when Jan Bolton, Paul Ienden, David Rendel and I decided to form a small company to handle theatrical work for children we called the company Maclary Theatre Productions since we felt sure that *The Hairy Maclary Show* would

always be the flagship show of the company. *The Hairy Maclary Show* has now been seen by thousands of children in New Zealand and Australia and we are wondering how to give UK children the chance to enjoy it, too. I am giving this problem my attention.

Maclary Theatre Productions now have four 50-minute shows in their repertoire, the latest of which, *The Nickle Nackle Tree*, we will be presenting (if you'll forgive the commercial) at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland next week.

Maclary Theatre Productions, which combines three art forms - those of literature, music and dance - is very close to my heart, not least because Paul Ienden and Jan Bolton believe, as we do, in presenting children with work of the highest standard. In the past children have frequently been offered theatrical entertainment which simply was not of the same standard as that expected by and offered to adults. I am pleased to say that there are signs that things are changing in New Zealand, and groups are being formed, such as the Wellington Young People's Theatre Network, whose aims include "raising awareness among the professional community and the general public and striving for excellence in theatre both for and by young people.

Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy was first published in September 1983 and so has been around for thirteen and a half years. The Hairy Maclary books are now published in three editions (hardback, limp and mini) and are available in most parts of the English-speaking world. There are also four audio-cassette tapes of these stories (the BBC tape is narrated by Tom Conti), animated videos, jigsaw puzzles, calendars, postcards, and other projects are under consideration. After only ten years the Hairy Maclary books behaved, in Liz Attenborough's words, as a classic. The books are continually in the top-selling titles on the Puffin list in the UK, Australia and New Zealand and we have hopes that they may finally spread through Europe, because last September a Swedish edition was published. It would be good if that could happen. However, I am not unrealistic in my expectations. Not so very long ago I was told in no uncertain terms by a French publisher that Lynley Dodd's books are "trop rosibif". I have to admit that there is a smidgeon of truth in that because her books do sell best in

New Zealand, Australia, Britain and Canada - which probably shows that the Commonwealth countries share a very similar sense of humour. They sell well in US schools as well - but I should tell you that the US publisher is a Welshman.

I have recounted the highlights of the history of Hairy Maclary at some length because I believe that Lynley's achievement is huge, and one of which New Zealand can be extremely proud. Lynley is one of a very small band of people who both write and illustrate their own picture books. Her books entertain, educate and challenge young children. I love the story of the three year old in England who was trying to watch his favourite television programme while his mother was beating eggs in the kitchen. He was a mild mannered fellow and eventually called out to his mother in desperation, "Mummy, don't make such a cacophony".

Lynley demands of herself the highest standards, believing that an author is only as good as his or her next book, and our company endeavours to match these standards. Our company would not be where it is today if we did not have the privilege of publishing Lynley Dodd's books, but these books are only one aspect of our work and I would now like to refer to some issues affecting us all, and to other highlights of the last fifteen years.

As I mentioned earlier, Mallinson Rendel Publishers opened their doors on 1 January 1980. We started small - just David and me - and are still small, although our company now employs an office manager, an editor and a distribution manager. We are proud of the fact that we handle the whole publishing process, from manuscript until the book's despatch to the bookshop.

In the early eighties we published a variety of general trade books but it soon became clear that the strength of our list was in children's books. Since 1990 we have concentrated exclusively on publishing books for children. Such specialisation brings its own rewards, because the publishing house gets better at what it is doing. We all enjoy concentrating our energies in this area, even if the small New Zealand market and the difficulties of export are a continuing challenge.

By the end of the eighties nearly all New Zealand publishers had their area of specialisation and this has brought about significantly higher standards of publishing overall.

Our company has always felt strongly about the quality of a children's book. While there are times when we do not always reach our own goals, we do set our standards high. Tessa Duder spoke last year about the threat to a writer's integrity when editors alter or cut a writer's work without their consent. An editor has a huge responsibility to the author and to the reader and in our company the editor's role is of major importance. Our publishing is not market-driven but editorially driven. Let me enlarge on that statement or it will be misunderstood. We judge manuscripts on the quality of the plot, of the characterisation and of the ideas, and of course on the quality of the writing. It is our editorial team that decides whether or not the book will sell in sufficient quantity to make publication economically viable, rather than a team of sales people and accountants. I know that this is a hopelessly old-fashioned way of going about the publishing business but I believe it is the time-honoured way and that market-driven publishing, which has been so prevalent since the eighties, is simply not working. Indeed the large publishing conglomerates led by accountants are already beginning to break up.

In our publishing house the editor has a key role but is there primarily to help the author. I consider it the editor's duty to make suggestions if the narrative is not flowing well, if the opening pages could be improved, if there is a lack of clarity, but they are suggestions only. In our opinion, the book belongs to the author and I would rather not publish a book than publish one with which the author was not happy.

I have to say that editors who work in large publishing houses have my sympathy. I believe that the importance of their profession has been grossly overlooked by the financial controllers who took over the major publishing houses in the eighties. Linear methods were introduced whereby a book, instead of having one architect, the editor, was passed from one person to another so that the author was not clear with whom he or she was dealing. Editorial departments were reduced in size and editors were expected to handle a greater number of manuscripts. Such matters as littorals in the

published book were not considered problems worth worrying about. I know of a young British author whose second book - always a challenge after a successful literary debut - was cut ruthlessly at a two-day session with the editor. Needless to say, although there was some good writing in it, the second book was a disappointment. Unfortunately many successful children's writers in Britain have similar stories to tell. Since a number of New Zealand publishing houses are subsidiaries of UK publishing houses, it was inevitable that these trends would travel here.

I know that artists too have suffered in recent years and have problems with publishing houses, in particular with the use of their artwork on jackets and covers. The problems can usually be described quite simply - lack of consultation. Writers and illustrators are quite right to protest quite vigorously when any attempt is made to compromise their artistic integrity.

Having stated my belief that editorial and artistic integrity is of prime importance in publishing, let me stress that the quality of the marketing that follows must have the same integrity and be just as thorough. I am certainly not belittling the role of the marketing team, which is of equal importance. When an editor and marketer work well together, incredible results are attainable.

Marketing departments in Britain were not very strong until the 1970s. It was the editors who held sway. Now the pendulum has swung too far, in my opinion, in the other direction. I hope that a proper balance will soon come into being.

One of the problems of publishing children's books in New Zealand is the very small market. For a population of just three and a half million a book must not only be marketed carefully and thoroughly within New Zealand (and this is getting steadily more and more difficult with the reduction of review space for children's books in the media) but every effort must be made to sell the book overseas. This is why I have attended the Bologna Children's Book Fair regularly since 1983 - indeed this occasion today is the first time that I have considered an event in New Zealand to be more important than the Book Fair. This year our editor, Rochelle Joseph, will represent our company there.

What has been encouraging for me has been the very positive way in which much of our writers' work has been received in Europe. The first junior novel I took to Europe was Eve Sutton's *Surgeon's Boy*. Eve wrote about nineteenth century New Zealand in a very immediate way and her work is accessible not only to the New Zealand child but to European children as well. We accepted *Surgeon's Boy* in the hope that we would be able to sell an edition to the UK and we did - even though historical fiction was on the point of becoming unfashionable. We also sold editions to Denmark and Germany. I wonder if the fashion is again changing - just last year we sold to an Italian publisher, Mondadori, the rights to publish Eve's *Kidnapped by Blackbirders* (1984) in Italian and their edition has just appeared on the market. We have had considerable success in Europe and Australia with our junior novels and, while the royalties on translations are not very large, I am sure it is good for New Zealand to have Scandinavian, Dutch or German children reading our stories.

We were fortunate enough to start our publishing company at a time when it was widely recognised that children's literature, if it was to grow, required financial assistance in the same way as did literature for adults. If there is small likelihood that a book will be accepted for publication when it is completed, serious writers are hesitant to work in that genre. The establishment of the Children's Publication Fund in 1979, under the umbrella of the New Zealand Literary Fund, was the trigger that set things off. Of course there had always been a trickle of children's books prior to that date, but if you look at the situation ten years later the trickle had grown into a veritable river. The first committee charged with the running of this fund met on 5 May 1980. It was chaired by Roger Hall with Dorothy Butler and Alison Grant committee members (an excellent geographical spread!). It is interesting to find that after just two years sixteen books had been assisted and by 1982 the NZ Literary Fund was asking the Lotteries Board if they would replenish the Children's Publication Fund. They declined, and in 1983 I was a member of a small delegation which discussed this matter, along with many other topics, with the Minister for the Arts, Alan Highet. By 1985 additional funding had been granted to the CPF and the results are there for everyone to see.

What is of concern at the present time is the changed circumstances of funding by Creative New Zealand. The overall amount given to publishers has diminished considerably over the last two years and all publishers, particularly children's publishers, have suffered. I cannot help regretting the demise of the Literature Committee of the Arts Council, where literary policy was discussed in tandem with funding applications. Without informed discussion around the funding table I fail to see, to take one example, any hope of the early classics in New Zealand children's literature being republished because such publishing undertakings quite clearly require financial assistance - and such assistance is unlikely to come from anywhere other than Creative New Zealand.

I wish I had more experience in Maori publishing to discuss with you but only rarely are we offered Maori books and we have published just two - *Ko Annie Raua Ko Mamma (Annie & Moon)* by Miriam Smith, illustrated by Lesley Moyes and *Mamma Tangiweto (Cry-Baby Moon)* by Katerina Mataira and Terewai Kemp, illustrated by Hone Ihi-o-te-rangi Ngata. Miriam Smith made two requests when she offered us the English text of *Annie & Moon*: that it be simultaneously published in Maori and that both editions have the same binding, preferably hardback. We gladly agreed to her requests. She said that she did not want Maori books to look inferior to Pakeha books and of course she is right. Well-used paperbacks do not last as well as hardbacks and it is discouraging to a reader to find a shelf of books that are tattered and dirty. *Ko Annie Raua Ko Mamma (Annie & Moon)* went on to win the AIM Picture of the Year Award in 1990 and was successful both in New Zealand and overseas - indeed it has what all good picture books should have, a story that is universal.

Marama Tangiweto (Cry-Baby Moon) was even more of a Maori production in that it was not only written and illustrated by Maori but also designed by a Maori, Karen Walmsley of Wenitia Publications in Hamilton. We sold an edition of this picture book to Hawaii, in their language. The book then went on to win in June 1996 the inaugural NZLIA Te Kura Pounamu Award, being judged the most outstanding publication written in Te Reo Maori for children and young people published between 1980 and

1995. We are very proud of this book - but of course its success is due to Katerina Mataira, who led the team with a very sure hand.

The question of whether or not to publish a new book in hardback or in paperback is often debated. It does depend of course on the nature of the subject matter but in my opinion there is every reason to originate in hardback in New Zealand. A first edition of a book is always going to be expensive to produce, because of the uncertainty of the market and of the need to start with a cautious print-run. The difference between the pricing of hardback and paperback (not a mass paperback) on a run of two or three thousand copies is not very great.

We therefore tend to opt for hardback because they look nicer, last longer and authors nearly always prefer them.

It is sometimes said that children nowadays will read only paperbacks. I am not so sure of that. On a visit to a Wellington school in December I asked two groups, one of five to seven year olds and the other of nine to eleven year olds, whether they preferred to read hardbacks or paperbacks. The number of hands that went up for paperbacks was equalled by the number of hands that went up for hardbacks, in both groups.

In conclusion, I would like to mention one more special moment in my publishing career, and that was the day in September 1991 when we received the manuscript of David Hill's *See Ya, Simon*. It is my practice to read the first two pages of every manuscript that comes into our office the day it arrives so that I can fast track any that would seem to require a quick decision. I should explain that our small company receives about three or four hundred manuscripts a year, and at some times our editor has a fairly large pile on her desk. She is nevertheless extremely conscientious, and reads them all. I read the first two pages of *See Ya, Simon* and didn't leave my chair until I had finished the book. I took it in to David and suggested that he read it as soon as possible, which he did over the next two hours. I then asked Rochelle to read it that afternoon. By the evening we were all agreed that we wanted to publish it, but we needed outside opinion. I sent it to one of our regular readers the next morning and received her favourable report seven days later. I think David Hill was quite surprised at the speed with which we reached a publishing decision.

Publication was planned for May 1991 and in April 1991 I took proofs to the Bologna Children's Book Fair where I sold editions to the UK, US, Denmark, Holland and Germany.

See Ya, Simon didn't win the AIM Children's Story Book of the Year in 1992 because that award quite rightly went to Tessa Duder for *Songs for Alex*, the last book in her marvellous Alex series. But it was shortlisted for both the New Zealand children book awards, for awards in the UK and the USA and it won the Banks Street College Children's Book of the Year award in the US and the Times Educational Supplement Nasen Award in the UK.

See Ya, Simon has sold most strongly in the US, Germany and New Zealand. My suspicion is that we three publishers have been more committed to the book than have the others - personal commitment on the part of the publisher is a very important component of success. And interestingly enough, our hardback sales in New Zealand did not drop when the Penguin mass paperback appeared on the market. *See Ya, Simon* continues to sell well in hardback, confirming for me the view that there is still a real demand for hardback publishing in New Zealand.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to be working in the field of children's literature. I have always found it, and continue to find it, the most co-operative area of publishing. We are all driven to do our very best for children.

It is, of course, very competitive. Apart from healthy competition within New Zealand, our writers are always competing with overseas children's writers - one only has to look around one's local children's bookshop to see the extent of the competition. But I have no hesitation in saying that our best writers are equal to the best writers from anywhere in the world. We can all be proud of the part we have played to build up and strengthen New Zealand children's literature. Writers and publishers are only one strand in this fabric - parents, teachers and librarians are equally important. When one surveys the last fifteen years and sees the wealth of books written by New Zealanders for New Zealand children, one can only look forward with excitement to the next fifteen years. There is every reason to believe that they will be even better.

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