

**Storylines Betty Gilderdale Award, Spring Lecture
December 2016**



A Life of Privilege, by Rosemary Tisdall

I was in the Hawke's Bay in early October visiting my nephew, brother and family. My phone rang and I saw it was Libby [Limbrick, Storylines Trust Chair]. I thought, "What's she doing ringing me on a Sunday?"

If it were Congress time, I would have had no surprises about a call from her. And as it was Libby, I thought I'd better answer it.

She told me I'd been selected for the Storylines Betty Gilderdale award. I was stunned into silence, a rarity I know, and as I'm on the selection committee, I said, "But we haven't had the meeting yet." She said, they had and they didn't tell me about it – conflict of interest and all...

I said to Libby, "But you should be receiving it too," and she said, "It's not just for the Congress. It is for outstanding services to children's literature – for all the other contributions you have made."

It's very exciting and I feel incredibly honoured to receive it. I feel doubly blessed to know Betty Gilderdale and have very much enjoyed stimulating discussions with her over the years.

So, why have I called this Spring Lecture *A Life of Privilege*? Well, I feel that I am very lucky, and have lived, and continue to live, a life full of wonderfulness. I was born into a family where love was paramount, and books mattered. I am privileged to have four brothers, and parents who are both relatively well, and still show an interest in all my activities. Dad always called me (and still does) his favourite daughter. Our extended family is growing as is natural, and I have done my best to encourage reading to all my nibblings (did you know that is the collective word for nieces and nephews?) and now great-niece and nephew.

My childhood was a typical one; well, I thought it was, till I was older and discovered that no, not everyone experienced the secure, happy, loving environment that I did. I was born in Adelaide, Australia (sorry!) and we moved to New Zealand when I was two years old. We lived in Kaikoura till I was seven, and have lived in Auckland ever since.

As I know many of you experienced, Friday night was late night, with 9pm closing and that meant, library night. Mum and Dad diligently took us every Friday night after dinner, usually the treat of fish and chips, up to the local library at the Panmure shops.

It was upstairs above the shops (in a different location from where it is now) and I remember a huge room full of books. Mum and Dad would disappear to the adult section and we'd hurry off to the children's section and select our seven books each. (50 books to track down every Friday evening must have been quite a task for Mum!) This type of modelling was not conscious on their part, I don't think, they just believed in the enjoyment of reading.

As an interesting aside, Mum told me that in England before, during and after the war you could only have two books out and tough luck if you discovered you'd already read either of them as you couldn't change books on the same day – the system couldn't cope. As the war went on, books were printed on cheap paper and covered in various colours of library cloth. No pretty covers or blurbs.

Today, I love buying and owning books, but I am always in and out of the library, making use of its service. How can the powers-that-be consider reducing their service and staffing? What an invaluable community facility. I used to take our daughters, Alana and Kelly, to the library regularly, and I can see they will enjoy the benefits it brings now they are young mums. Especially with the extras available today such as 'Wriggle and Rhyme'.

The other way Mum and Dad encouraged reading was through comics – we were allowed to read all the traditional comics such as *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck*, and *Archie* for my older brothers. In the school holidays Mum would retrieve the box of comics she had put away somewhere and we would lie around the lounge floor re-reading them over and over.

Sometimes, we'd go to the second hand bookshop and exchange them. Great system.

Mum and Dad had both always loved comics as children and therefore thought they were fun, and a treat for us. My maternal grandfather used to earn a bit of extra money working for Disney doing drawings in a strip form for cartoons rather than comics, as they all had to be the same with slight differences to create the effect of movement. I missed out on that drawing gene...

Magazines too – my two older brothers, Chris and Andrew, and I were allowed to subscribe to a magazine once a week. (My two younger brothers, Tim and Jonathan were too young at that time, I'm presuming, or just another privilege I had.) Anyway, Mondays were so exciting: after school, Andrew and I would rush to the newsagent across the road from school, collect our magazines (him: *Lion*, me: *Princess Tina*, and we'd get Chris *The Railway Modeller* – older and cleverer brother, had to have a 'boring, intellectual' one! But I remember being very impressed he chose a magazine like that!), and we'd go to our rooms, to do our homework... but of course, the allure of the new stories in my magazine meant I had to be ready to hide it when Mum walked in to see how I was getting on with my homework!

Then, we'd sometimes get the Annual of our magazine for Christmas. Revisit our favourite characters over the summer in a hard cover book. Bliss! Now, we didn't have a lot of money growing up, so I think these must have been reasonably economical. And I don't remember owning a lot of books, except for presents or prizes from Sunday School.

Mum and Dad read to us, of course. Mum relayed that I would happily listen to any books the boys were having read to them when I was young. When I was about seven, books like the *Narnia* series, *A Hundred and One Dalmatians* were ones that

have been recorded by Mum in the family newsletter as being books enjoyed. Apparently, Chris and I were “avid readers”. Andrew loved being read to more than reading by himself. I am five and seven years older than Tim and Jonathan respectively, and I can remember reading to them *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* and *Are you My Mother?*, and Tim particularly enjoyed *Go, Dog, Go!*

I was trying to remember my reading at school, and what I enjoyed. When I first set eyes on *Boat Day* and *Stars in the Sky* as an adult, years after reading them in school, I had a rush of nostalgia! The pictures and settings took me right back to being a little girl.

I got a certificate in Primer 1 for reading...

Primer 3's certificate shows I was good at reading...

Form 1 – My comprehension was “sound, but vocabulary only average. Needs to extend into areas of more *mature reading*”. Oops, I still read children's books...and hence my talks are not littered with adjectives and words of four syllables like Kate De Goldi's would be!

Form 6: “A conscientious term's work. Rather surprisingly, Rosemary did poorly in her novel question.”

I remember loving the SRA cards in intermediate school. I don't know what you educators thought of them, but I loved moving up the colours.

Here are a few memorable books of influence when I was young:

The Famous Five – I did enjoy the escapism and adventure and being one of five myself (I know in the story there were four humans and a dog, but we had our own Timmy, younger brother Tim) so I did connect with the characters in several ways. Julian and Dick always reminded me of my older brothers, Chris and Andy, and their attributes were similar to my brothers – a character analysis in a series review says: “Julian (replace the word Julian with Chris and you get my oldest brother) is tall, strong and intelligent as well as caring, responsible and kind. He is the leader of the group and is very protective towards Anne” (read Rosemary). Dick (or Andy) “has a cheeky sense of humour, but is also dependable and kind in nature. He is older than his sister, Anne (or Rosemary). Though inclined to tease his sister at times, Dick is, like Julian, very caring towards Anne and does his best to keep her cheered up when she gets upset. He uses his wit...”, and those of us who know Andy, would understand that part about ‘wit’ especially.

I always liked George and wanted to be like her, but I knew that really, I was more like practical Anne (“she sometimes lets her tongue run away with her, but ultimately she is as brave and resourceful as the others. She likes doing the domestic things such as planning, organising and preparing meals, keeping where they are staying clean and tidy”).

I loved stories set in England – of course, Mum and Dad would tell us about life in England so I had developed a real love for the countryside and villages from their stories, and discovering them in books was extra wonderful. In fact, I remember on

our first trip there, to stay with my youngest brother, Jonathan, living there at the time, I felt very much at home and it all felt very comfortable and familiar. Books I remember particularly enjoying:

Susan Pulls the Strings by Jane Shaw

The Family from One End Street by Eve Garnett

Milly Molly Mandy by Joyce Lankester Brisley

Black Beauty by Anna Sewell, to name a few.

My Nana used to take me across the road to feed a horse in the field when we lived in Kaikoura, but I was always in awe of them and their power. I was scared of horses, but surprisingly, I realised I loved horse stories, and I can understand why Stacey Gregg is so popular now. I enjoyed *My Friend Flicka* by Mary O'Hara and, if anyone has a copy of *Bandoleer* by Dorothy Benedict, I'd love to borrow that to read again, please.

Later, I'd read and re-read the *Flambards* series by K.M. Peyton, and later still, Dick Francis' detective novels involving racehorses.

Two other books of significance to me were *Emil and the Detectives* by Erich Kästner, and *The L-Shaped Room* and its sequels by Lynne Reid Banks.

The Runaway Settlers by Elsie Locke was one of the first New Zealand-set books I remember reading and really loving. Having been born in Australia, reading of this pioneering family coming to New Zealand saw me devouring their adventures. Another memorable, stand-out book was *Maori Girl* by Noel Hilliard.

One special book I received one Christmas when I was 14 from Mum and Dad was *The Young Visitors* by Daisy Ashford. This charming book was written when the author was nine years old, but she found it years later and submitted it to a publisher. It was published with spelling mistakes intact and is a delightful, fresh look at society from actually a quite sophisticated young girl who seemed to have a unique worldly view on adult behaviour. Some extracts (punctuation and spelling printed, as per the original):

I don't know why you should turn against me Ethel said Mr Salteena in a low tone. Ethel patted her hair and looked very sneery. Well I call it very mystearious you going off and getting a title said Ethel and I think our friendship had better stop as no doubt you will soon be marrying a duchess or something.

Not at all said Mr Salteena you must know Ethel he said blushing a deep red I always wished to marry you some fine day.

This is news to me cried Ethel still peevish.

But not to me murmured Mr Salteena and his voice trembled in his chest. I may add that I have always loved you and now I seem to do so madly he added passionately.

But I don't love you responded Ethel.

But if you married me you might get to said Mr Salteena.

I think not replied Ethel and all the same it is very kind of you to ask me and she smiled more nicely at him.

This is agony cried Mr Salteena clutching hold of a table my life will be sour grapes and ashes without you.

Be a man said Ethel in a gentle whisper and I shall always think of you in a warm manner.

Well half a loaf is better than no bread responded Mr Salteena in a gloomy voice..."

Then later with the suitor she preferred:

"Let us bask under the spreading trees said Bernard in a passionate tone.

Oh yes lets said Ethel and she opened her dainty parasole and sank down in the long green grass... Words fail me ejaculated Bernard horsly my passion for you is intense he added fervently. It has grown day and night since I first beheld you.

Oh said Ethel in supprise I am not prepared for this and she lent back against the trunk of the tree. Bernard placed one arm tightly round her. When will you marry me Ethel he uttered you must be my wife it has come to that I love you so intensely that if you say no I shall perforce dash my body to the brink of yon muddy river he panted wildly.

Oh don't do that implored Ethel breathing rather hard. Then say you love me he cried. Oh Bernard she sighed fervently I certainly love you madly you are to me like a Heathen god she cried looking at his manly form and handsome flashing face I will indeed marry you.

(Remember, the author was nine!!)

As an intermediate school teacher, in the early 1980s, I created a Reading Corner – I blew up a beach ball, painted it white, hung white tulle over it, added two black circles for eyes and suspended it from the ceiling – a ghost image came to your head, didn't it? – which invited the students to get into the *The Spirit of Reading* with books I bought. I created Mrs Tisdall library cards, which the students filled in whenever they took a book out. Of course, I read aloud to the students regularly.

Then I became a Mum and read to Alana and Kelly from birth. It was always a last thing to do before being put into the bassinette and continued till they asked us to stop (or they started going to bed later than us, whichever came first!).

Both girls had different preferences at times and I had to be creative to find books that Kelly liked that Alana didn't and vice versa. Kelly went through a phase when she particularly liked poetry, which sadly wasn't a favourite genre of mine, but it made me read and source good poetry books.

Books were a constant and if we were out or travelling, there would always be a book in my handbag or car, or suitcase to entertain with.

In the late 1980s, I worked with a four year old at the local kindergarten, who had Asperger's. One of the things he enjoyed most was being read to, and when I re-connected with him when he was a teenager, he recalled the time we spent reading books, which surprised and pleased me.

Another privilege I have is our small bach at Opoutere on the Coromandel. The extended family come every summer and bring their tents, including Mum and Dad –

who were still in their tent last year at 86. Internet and a cell phone signal is unreliable, so, young people especially had to learn to entertain themselves away from devices. We are a family that has always played board and card games, so this wasn't a problem – it was usually the youngsters' friends who quickly would ask if they could go into Whangamata as they needed to check texts... But reading, of course, became the default, and with all ages reading (modelling) it has not been an issue.

I try to take a supply of broad reading matter so there is always something there for friends of daughters and niblings. I love recalling that for several summers, two of my nephews, one in his teens, one in his forties, my son-in-law in his twenties, plus Mike in his fifties, were all reaching for the pile of Robert Muchamore and Anthony Horowitz books I had taken down for them, and subsequent discussions about the books!

How does all this relate to receiving an award for service? When I was doing my reflecting after Libby said it wasn't just for the IBBY Congress this year, I reflected on my life of children's literature and realised much had gone into the broad and privileged life I lead.

More modelling on my amazing parents' part was their active involvement with the community from when I was little to today, either helping out at Church, or helping neighbours, community groups or becoming a Guide leader when mine left, or regularly going to an old lady friend's house to do her garden for her. Many a Sunday afternoon would see us bundled into the car, drive to Bucklands Beach, where Mum and Dad would spend the afternoon clearing overgrown shrubs, mow the lawn, prune this bush, cut back that one, and generally help her. We would sometimes help, or play softball in the front yard, which had a square lawn surrounded by shrubbery, ideal for four bases.

I considered Bridget like a grandmother as mine lived in England so I didn't see lots of Nana. Bridget had never had children but she knew how to treat them – one of us would be sent down under the house, where there would be a bottle of something there for us – lemonade or Fanta, what a treat! It wasn't till years later I worked out that the old lady, Bridget, must have been only in her 60s when Mum and Dad were doing her garden!

Mum and Dad had a huge garden of their own, plus five children to manage, yet they always found time for others.

You can see the influence my parents had, and continue to have, on me. I have been very privileged to have their love, support and interest in my life for so long. The interesting thing is many people here today will know them because they see them at events I am a part of, to which they come along to support me.

In Standard four I was a prefect and on School Road Patrol.

I was privileged to go to a very good secondary school, Epsom Girls' Grammar School. (I was accepted out-of-zone, living in Panmure at the time. I am forever

grateful to the Headmistress, Ailsa Blakey for accepting me.) Opportunities for service and participating in school activities were huge.

Form 7: Miss Blakey added this comment to my report: "Rosemary gives outstanding service in the school."

I was involved in the Scouting movement as a youngster and part of Baden-Powell's philosophy was service to the community. In my late teens as a Rover (adult section of Scouting), I particularly recall the myriad days spent digging gardens for the elderly, painting community halls, working on Telethon all night, a huge range of opportunities that broadened my young view on life. I met my one-in-a-trillion husband, Mike, through Rovers, and I would not be standing here today if it weren't for his love, support, and understanding of the drive in me to give up my time to contribute to things I am passionate about. He has never asked me to stop saying yes, he has been my sounding board (because yes, even though I'm passionate doesn't mean some things don't frustrate the heck out of me!), and kept me going.

This year, particularly, with the Congress, I think he decided after not having me available in the evenings after we had come home from work, seeing me at my desk till all hours of the night and every weekend, he decided to join me. He became the Congress signage and branding manager-extraordinaire; the entire PowerPoint, signage, screens, display you saw at the Aotea centre, were all thanks to him, supporting me. So we had something in common to talk about and he would be at his desk opposite me sharing those late nights!

He has not only given his time over the years but done so much in the way of design, helping morph the Storylines logo and website branding as required.

See, told you I was privileged.

Mike is also a reader, so you can understand how that has made things easier as he also gets the importance of reading. He is a typical male in that he reads much non-fiction: business magazines, design, architecture, but he will gobble up books avidly, when I find some for him – and not only children's or young adult books either.

While Alana and Kelly were at primary school, I was asked to take over the reading club they held. It was called *Blue Whalers* (I have no idea what the name referred to), and we had book-related activities and discussions about books, and goal-setting charts about their reading. I ran it for four years from 1994 and we had loads of fun. Alana reminded me of trips we had to publishers and printers.

By now, I had met fellow mother, Sally Simpson (or you may know her as Gallagher). I very much enjoyed time with Sally; our children were in the same classes. Sally invited me to join the Storylines Management Committee, which at that stage was called the CLA, or Children's Literature Association. According to the 1997 President's report, written by Sally about the 1996 year: "Four new people have been a welcome addition to the committee, each bringing fresh ideas and a wealth of experience and knowledge. Carol Ardern, Helen Beckingsale, Lindsay Dobbison and [me]." That was the beginning! Many of these committee meetings were, in fact,

held in Betty's lounge. Very sadly, Sally died last year so I can't thank her for the proper introduction to this privileged life I now lead in children's literature.

I went on to many sub-committees over the years, including awards and festival, and latterly IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), before being part of the Steering Committee in 1999 to merge with the Children's Book Foundation. Through this merger I met a range of new children's literature nuts including Wayne Mills, who I immediately connected with. I began helping him with his Kids' Lit Quiz, marking at the two Auckland heats as well as driving to the Waikato and Northland heats each year with him to be a marker in the days when he was short of help.

In the early days, I was a school librarian at Remuera Primary School, so I would arrange for a couple of parents to take a car load each of Year 6 students to the Town Hall, where the heats used to be held. They could observe from the balcony, to help prepare them for when they went to Intermediate the following year and hopefully join a team. Year 6s weren't included in the Quiz in those days. I have gone on to assist Wayne and the committee in the New Zealand finals, and two World Finals when they were hosted in New Zealand. Some members of that committee are here today and I feel privileged to work with such enthusiastic and fun people. Wayne has blind faith and has asked me to adjudicate on a number of occasions. I have had to make some difficult calls and I find that part of the involvement quite stressful, as so often, one point can separate the winning teams!

But, what a privilege to work with this man, who has such passion to encourage children from around the world to read broadly, from nursery rhymes, to myths and legends to Classics to award winning-fiction. Any book published, basically. And is now in eight countries.

Participating in this quiz has been in my own time, making up the time at work when needed. And contrary to popular belief, the committee do not get paid and we pay our own flights and any accommodation requirements in Wellington for the New Zealand finals.

There was a wonderful time in the '90s, where I was paid to read books by Scholastic and write lesson plan ideas across the curriculum for teachers to use with books promoted by their School Book Club, in a section called *Classroom Clips*. My teaching background came into its own here. Soon after that, I enjoyed being a manuscript assessor for them, reading about 600 picture book and fiction scripts per month, and meeting to discuss whether I think they should go to the next round of decision making about whether they should be published or not. I won't go into details here as these two jobs weren't service, but they both provided me with knowledge and skills that have helped me along my way in the world of children's literature. I loved both of those jobs very much; they gave me much confidence for other opportunities that came my way I will share with you...

In the meantime, I was helping with the annual Storylines Festival and one of the main jobs I was keen to do, and still am, is to drive for the Story Tour. It can be

difficult to find drivers, who are safe, have the time and are good at 'hosting'. There are not usually people queuing for the job, so I have had the privilege of driving four to eight authors to schools around Auckland for five days, visiting thousands of children. I have loved spending time with the different authors, really getting to know them, and seeing them in action.

Children today are so lucky to have this opportunity to meet the writers and illustrators of the books they read. And I am constantly impressed with their ability to be able to present so interestingly to groups of children. Just because they can write or draw doesn't mean they are good at public speaking.

I either take the week as annual leave or make up the days, depending on where I have been working at the time. As a consequence, I began to think about how writers and illustrators are undervalued and not paid enough, as they have so much to offer. I wanted to do something about it.

After mulling the problem for about five years, I decided to go for it, as my oldest brother, Chris, a marketing genius, had asked me, "What is your point of difference?" I realised that I knew dozens of writers and illustrators first hand, enough to be able to email or ring them and say hi, and was aware of their skills in front of children. They had different things to offer, not just 'how to write'. I talked to Catriona Ferguson from the Book Council, as one of my worries was that New Zealand is a small country and I didn't want to tread on toes. We agreed that what I was offering was different from their *Writers in Schools* programme and my fees for the author/illustrator would be higher, so I would be a complementary service. Also, I wanted my business to be specifically curriculum-focused so I would work closely with each school, helping them select which author would suit their needs, unless of course, they had a specific author they wanted, which happens a lot.

I set up my little business, *Getting Kids Into Books*, contacted authors and invited them to be 'on my books', then contacted schools, initially in Auckland, set a fee structure and my talented husband made a website for me. I was in business!

Darling author, Brian Falkner had championed me from the beginning when I first mooted the idea to him. He really encouraged me to go for it, and promised to be my first author. Sure enough, despite the fact he'd moved to Australia by then, he was the first one to reply to my email I had sent out, saying, "I'm in"! I do manage visits for him in New Zealand still.

My problem is the business is still small, and cannot give every author/illustrator work every week, but I can say that business is growing. Last year it was very quiet and I thought I'd have to close it down; the fees were too high for schools obviously. I was secretly quite pleased as Libby and I were starting to get very busy with the Congress.

This year however, I was incredibly busy, AND I had the Congress, typical! Apart from Auckland schools, I have managed visits to Taupo, Wellington, Christchurch, Darfield, Invercargill and had requests from Hamilton, Te Kuiti, Palmerston North, Katikati, Ashburton, Cromwell, Northland...

I'm not sure it'll ever make enough money for me to have as my main job, but if I can raise the profile and expected income level of our writers and illustrators, and have enabled children the opportunities to be inspired to write, read and/or draw, I'll be happy.

I am a trustee for the Operating Theatre Trust that manages Tim Bray Productions. Nepotism? I like to think of it as supporting my very talented brother, 25 years keeping a children's theatre company going! That's impressive. I am constantly in discussion with Tim suggesting books that he could consider staging, introducing him to books he may not know, as well as discussing the merits of known titles. Often it's about getting the rights, or what will bring the audiences, as the arts is such a fickle industry. He spends hours accessing funding for low decile schools to attend in term time and I write resource guides for teachers based on the curriculum, so they can gain extra educational benefits by bringing the children.

In the early 2000s, Nestlé used to sponsor a story-writing award for intermediate aged children, in conjunction with the Auckland libraries. How fabulous that was! They provided author workshops and activities around it, and then they needed judges who would read the short listed entries. Once again, this was not a paid job, but I put my hand up. What another amazing experience! Meeting with several other judges, discussing, debating, then attending the awards evening, which Nestlé presented well.

I have been a reviewer for *Magpies* magazine since 2004, an Australasian children's literature magazine that comes out quarterly, and I enjoy the challenge of writing an objective comment. It's a great opportunity to meet new books through the ones I am sent to write about, and the magazine itself is full of articles, information and reviews.

A few years later, 2008, I was asked to be a judge for the LIANZA Awards (Library and Information Association of New Zealand, Aotearoa). This was another incredible experience, reading every book published in New Zealand that year, and working with two knowledgeable people, Belynda Smith and Bill Docherty.

The following year, 2009, I was rung and asked to be a judge for the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards (and LIANZA again, but I had to turn it down; I couldn't do both). I was so excited! I had to keep it confidential for a couple of months and I found that hard. I had attended these awards for years, always in awe of the judges and wondered what it must be like to be that respected in the industry to be asked. And now, obviously their standards had dropped...!

I worked with Jenni Keestra and Bill Nagelkerke. I can remember the enormity of the task, the responsibility and the difficulty of making decisions. Booksellers New Zealand had a very good adjudicator who was completely neutral and helped us stay focussed on the criteria. I can also remember solid advice given by Julie Harper, who had been a judge, when I said people may criticise our decisions: "Remember, you are the only ones who have read all the books all at the same time, so comparing

them all in one time frame, and following a set of criteria.” I remember that advice now, if I don’t always agree with the judges’ decisions.

I loved the process, so was delighted to accept the offer the following year, still to be a judge, but also to be the co-ordinator with Booksellers New Zealand. I knew what I was getting into – hours upon hours of reading and re-reading and note taking over my summer break. The family had teased me about not going for swims the year before as they all headed off to the beach at Opoutere, while I sat surrounded by my piles of books. They did enjoy having a mini-library set up in the spare bedroom however, as there were, of course, some interesting reads with about 130 books.

During this time, in 2007, an opportunity came for someone from IBBY NZ (Storylines) to attend a Children’s Book Festival on Nami Island in South Korea, about an hour out of Seoul. They would pay for a one-way airfare and accommodation. I put my hand up, and as no one else could, or wanted to, go, I went. There is another whole hour’s talk just on the beauty and inspirational island that is Nami. Children’s books are a real focus here and after this visit, I was invited back twice, 2009 and 2010, as part of a team to create an anthology of stories about peace. Jennifer Beck and Lindy Fisher were the New Zealand author/illustrator representatives with their magnificent story, *Remember that November* and accompanied me in 2010. Last year, out of the blue, I received another invitation to go, all expenses paid again (I know!), to participate in the Children’s Book Festival, but this time it was as part of the Nami Concours Illustration competition (not to be confused with the Noma Concours). Wow, they know how to mount a fabulous exhibition and celebrate winners and place getters with a week’s fêteing, and workshops for children, plus a two-day visit to Jeju Island at the bottom of Korea to see Mr Kang’s new project. To blow my own trumpet, I asked why I was invited, as I wasn’t a part of the competition. Apparently it was because Mr Kang had grown to like me from previous visits and wanted me there. Nice eh?

I made many friends from around the world on these visits, a few I was able to catch up with at the Congress. So you can see, that last part of my story was definitely about being privileged!

For the past four years since 2012, I have been judge for the Remuera Public Library story writing competition for intermediate children, called *Win with Words*. They sought sponsorship from the Community Board and Westpac to pay Kate De Goldi to run workshops, and to provide monetary prizes for the students. I was happy to be the Grand Judge (they call me) as part of my community work, and very much enjoy the process.

It all happens in the first part of August so this year proved a bit more challenging with the Congress being mid August!

Two years ago in 2014, St Heliers Public Library decided that Remuera’s model was proving so successful. They found support to fund a competition of their own and flattered me into saying yes to be their judge. I think my husband must despair sometimes. So this year, in particular, it was rather busy, with *two* consecutive

award nights where I present a report and give feedback on the stories as well as hand out certificates, a week out from Congress!

But, what a privilege to read young people's stories and be permitted an insight to their thoughts and feelings.

In 2013, Gavin Bishop invited me onto the Te Tai Tamariki Trust, (now called Painted Stories). They meet monthly in Christchurch with a teleconference to Auckland board members – illustrator Sandra Morris and I enjoy the opportunity to meet up for a cuppa in time for the phone to ring from Christchurch. We both enjoy participating in this unique organisation focussed on archiving and promoting children's book illustrations. A stunning exhibition of 21 New Zealand illustrators' work was a focus in the Aotea Centre's main floor during the Congress.

This year was the culmination of six years' preparation and planning for the IBBY Congress. In September 2010, I had written a letter, as IBBY NZ Chairperson (at that time) on behalf of the IBBY committee, suggesting we should pitch for the 2016 Congress. The following month, in South Korea, I asked many IBBY members from a variety of countries, would they come if we hosted it. The results in August this year far exceeded our expectations, (budgeted initially for 350 delegates, and ended with 530 from 60+ countries) and Libby and I feel quite satisfied that we, with an incredible team supporting us, showed just what New Zealand can do! The wonderfully positive feedback we have received, and continue to receive, has been really exciting and made all our efforts, late and sleepless nights worthwhile.

Another privilege was working with Libby; she's a real gem. She has very high work ethics and is an energizer bunny in disguise; actually not even in disguise, I'm sure you've all witnessed it! I learnt a lot from seeing her astute brain in action and her positivity and warm, engaging personality around people.

As well as Mike being a trooper, I was proud to see how my daughters also rallied through this time. They were always there running around for me on errands, or asking how I was and what could they do to help. How lucky, privileged, am I to have such beautiful girls?

I have mentioned the influence of my family. I can't stress enough how privileged I am to be surrounded by so many people who have had a huge impact on my life. We have a lot of fun together. Many of you will know the influence my brother, Andrew/Andy, in particular, has had on my life – in fact, all our lives. His health issues since he was 20, losing his kidneys through illness, the limitations of dialysis, to failed transplants, a stroke, cancer, and then the tragic loss of his daughter, Natasha in the Mangatepopo school tragedy, had ripple effects on us all. For me, it's been his incredibly positive attitude and I have nothing but admiration for him. I tell you this to give you an understanding of how things like this impact – his attitude to his health issues have always given me a reality check for what's important, keep things in balance, give a perspective. People are, and time is precious too, so I keep that in mind when accepting another opportunity or if I'm not

feeling great with a headache or something; it's nothing compared to what he has gone through.

And books are so valuable. Michael Rosen's *The Sad Book*, and Gillian Torckler's *Your Heart will Sing Again* are a couple of books I remember reading after Natasha died. I know Nikki and others read books at that time too. One in particular really helped me. I just happened to be reading a book I had seen on the new books library shelf and it was simply another children/young adult book to read as I always do, *Right Behind You*, by Gail Giles. (I didn't read it with grief in mind).

This book was about a teen's struggle with a terrible thing he had done as a nine year old, and how he struggled with the very difficult life he led as a result of his actions. Counsellors tried to help him, of course, and although the event was different from what happened to me, I can still remember the blow to my chest, the sense of final understanding of how to deal with the pain of losing my niece, when, towards the end of the book, the character said, "I've been waiting to *forget* that I murdered Bobby Clarke. Or forgive myself. That's not ever going to happen...I figured that I can't forget.... But I can live. *Live* with it. Like you live with a scar or limp or whatever. You always know it's there..."

Books – so powerful, so essential.

I remember a principal of a South Auckland school telling me that she had had her office renovated and one day when a five year old came in, his mouth gaped open, he looked around and said: "Wow, Miss, your office is like a ballroom!" She asked him, "How do you know what a ballroom looks like?" He replied, "I've heard about them in books."

The power and importance of reading. I'm enjoying anew the pleasure of reading to little ones. This year has been an incredibly rewarding year for me – the success of the Congress, two grandbabies born within two months of each other, and this award!

I read Parker and Zoe (new grandbabies) their first books on day one on this planet, and continue to read to them whenever I get an opportunity. It still astounds me how much they take in, how aware they are, and already Parker is trying to turn the pages (and eat them!). I have enjoyed re-reading Dorothy Butler's *Babies Need Books* and noticing what books are still around that she recommended back then, nearly 40 years ago. Oldies but still goodies.

Storylines has been the foundation of much of my service.

I had been on the Storylines Management Committee for nearly 20 years, being Chair for a couple of terms at different times, but finally resigned from the MC last year, as the Congress loomed.

I am still a Trustee, and on several sub-committees. I have complete admiration for the people on the Management Committee. Many have served longer than me, and should be up on the podium with me. Their cheerful and unwavering service to the cause of children's literature constantly trying to discover how can we offer the

children of New Zealand the best opportunities regarding children's books, as well as to improve the lot for our talented writers and illustrators, keeps us all going, the common cause of the pleasure and value of children reading.

Betty Gilderdale has been an influence on my life since I met her when I joined the CLA. I remember attending a Continuing Education series of lectures she delivered at Auckland University on children's literature in New Zealand, based on her book *A Sea Change: 145 Years of New Zealand Children's Fiction*.

I remember discussing with her what I should do, to further my knowledge. She recommended I do my Masters in Children's literature; I haven't forgotten that, have many times been close to actioning it, but life, circumstances, timing have all got in the way. It's not too late, I tell myself; my Mum started her degree at age 63 and completed it years later at age 78, after some stop/starts with family issues etc; so there's still hope for me, Betty!

A flyer in the Congress delegate bags was to promote a book called *The Boy and the Lemon*, by James Hurman and Juliet Burton. This book talks about luck and how some people seem to go through life with lots of luck. I am one of those. Look at the rich life I have led (and I haven't told you half of it re my children, my amazing friends, work and travel ...).

At the end of the book it explains how the book came about, "inspired by a study by Professor Richard Wiseman, a British Psychology Professor who undertook a major study of luck in the 1990s, he discovered that lucky people exhibit certain attitudes and behaviours that can be learned by anybody to improve their own luck."

It got me thinking, especially as I prepared for this talk, and realised that my life of privilege was about the family and circumstance I was born into. But also, it was about taking opportunities, making sacrifices and giving things a go. (I do think though, luck happens e.g. winning Lotto!).

Storylines Management Committee – thank you. I know I have caused you grief at times, challenging and questioning. I hope you know it wasn't easy, but always, it was with the best of intentions.

I am so grateful you picked me for this award. Again, I have been in awe of those in receipt before me, as I have attended these Spring Lectures for so long now. I can't recall each winner's specific words but I do remember most, if not all, have been quite intellectual, quite thought-provoking and leaving one with a message about the state of children's literature or future directives or academic research.... I haven't been able to deliver a speech quite like that. But, I did want to share how I have come to be standing on this stage today.

I feel that I may be standing here under false pretences however. Betty Gilderdale, says in her autobiography, *A Life in Two Halves*: "The award is given every year to someone who has given real service to the cause of children's literature for no personal gain."

I have had HUGE personal gain. I have been the winner in all this, the people I have met in New Zealand and around the world, those with status and the ordinary, and can call friends, the experiences I have had, the richness of all these making for a very satisfying time. To have it rewarded with this honour is quite unbelievable, and very humbling.

One just muddles along, making mistakes, causing upset at times, being frustrating to live with, but the incredible, kind and generous words I have received by card and email from so many people on the news of this award has brought tears to my eyes. Those who couldn't attend, especially some wonderful authors and illustrators from around the country, have sent me sincere and heartfelt apologies, that I have been quite overwhelmed.

Today it's been all about me, something I am not used to talking about.... but I'll go on doing what I love, working with children's books, encouraging children to read for pleasure and I'll do it in the same myriad of ways I have till now. What further opportunities are there to grasp to enrich my life and add to the privileged life I already have?

This has been a year like no other and I feel truly privileged in so many ways, I hope I have given you a mere glimpse into why I am.

Thank you to you all for coming. This close to Christmas is a challenge I know, and giving up your Sunday afternoon is very much appreciated.