

## Creating a Peace Story

By Rosemary Tisdall

Life takes us on interesting journeys sometimes, doesn't it?

Putting my hand up four years ago in a committee meeting to attend a children's book festival in South Korea, has opened up a new world for me. I have now been there three times, become part of an international committee and have helped to create an anthology of stories about peace from 22 countries.

Let me begin from the beginning:

IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) is an international organisation. Storylines is the New Zealand section of IBBY. Korean IBBY invited one person from every member country around the world, of which there are about 70, to attend their annual Children's Book Festival in May 2007. All expenses were paid for the week, except for a one-way ticket on my flight. Lucky!

22 countries accepted the offer and we were treated like royalty all week. The festival is held on idyllic Nami Island on the Han River, idyllic because it is full of trees and not cars, and is a relaxing haven for Koreans to visit for holidays or day visits. We had an incredible amount of fun, as well as spending time in a seminar session discussing ways to encourage reading and books around the world.

A memorable tour of the National Library for Children and Young Adults in Seoul allowed us to view a current display of information and works by English illustrators such as Michael Foreman, Quentin Blake, John Burningham and Lauren Child.

Culturally enlightened through the Opening Ceremony where Korean children danced and sang, many traditional meals and a visit to the National Museum, a stunning architectural work of art in itself, I felt privileged to be there, representing New Zealand. Meeting delegates from so many interesting countries: Moldova, Lithuania, Brazil, Bolivia, Iran, Palestine, Turkey to name a few, who all spoke English, made me feel very fortunate. Today, many of these I can now call friends as we have spent so much time together since then and shared so much.

Two years later, November 2009, the same 22 people were invited back to help KBBY plan the 2010 festival as it was now to be a biennial event (all expenses paid this time!). This time, we saw Nami Island in glorious colours of autumn, absolutely stunning. A lot colder this time, -2° one evening, but breathtakingly beautiful in its coat of reds, golds and yellows.

What a week: two full days of meetings shared between the National Library for Children and Young Adults and in the Hans Christian Andersen Hall on Nami Island. Our mission was how we could create a book about peace each country could participate in. What format would it take, what age level would it be for, would it be illustrated? The outcome was to develop an anthology of illustrated stories suitable for 9-12 year olds.

There was to be a set number of words and maximum pages. Our mission on our return home was to select an author and illustrator from our country to create a story about peace in "our" village.

As our theme was peace, an eye-opening tour of the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) between North and South Korea seemed a logical place for them to take us. Here we could look across the barbed wire to North Korea, 4kms away, and to venture underground into one of the four tunnels found after the armistice, dug by North Korea with secret plans of invasion. We walked down about 70m (and later, back up!), it was over 1km long, only 2m wide by 2m high, perfect for an army of soldiers to run through in an hour apparently. This visit certainly brought home the tension that still exists between the two countries.

An interesting visit to Paju Book City, a publishing industrial complex about 30 km out from Seoul, captivated our attention. Here all the publishing houses, printers and distribution centres are based, with many authors now coming to live in the precinct.

New Zealand IBBY, managed by Storylines, had already selected Jennifer Beck through a competition we held for any children's author. We received many entries with the judges choosing the story on its merits; they did not know who the writer was. A large number of illustrators had also expressed interest in participating in this wonderful opportunity. Lindy Fisher was chosen.

Their combined work *Remember that November* is a beautiful portrayal of the peaceful resistance of the Parihaka people in 1881 when the soldiers came to attack.

Much work was done by Lindy, Jennifer and the Storylines team in early 2010 to get the completed story finished and sent to Korea.

The reward came in October when Jennifer, Lindy and I all flew to Korea, and believe it or not, all expenses were paid for all three of us and for the 21 other contributing countries' representatives!

We had an astounding week beginning with the Opening Ceremony of the Children's Book Festival on Nami Island. How will we ever forget how we manhandled the rope of rice cake, a real delicacy, into a long snake stretching many, many metres! A fairytale dinner under the trees that night was truly magical, complete with fairy lights through the trees, a string quartet, traditional Korean pipe music and fireworks.

The anthology, *Peace Story*, was launched the following day and we were all thrilled with the final product.

Dotted among the trees on Nami Island, every single story had been enlarged and was displayed on big panels, complete with illustrations, for all visitors to the island to read. They looked amazing. To see *Remember that November* in giant format was fantastic. Of course, we took lots of photos.

Lindy had created a craft activity relevant to the story for children to participate in at the festival. We held two workshop sessions where Korean children made a Peace marker each, a bookmark with a white feather included. The white feather became a symbol of Lindy's during the week as she drew them on books, ceramics, scarves and even our host's studio toilet wall, at his request!

Back in Seoul, we spent time at the National Library for Children and Young Adults listening to authors and illustrators from twelve countries share their journey of creating the Peace Story. Jennifer and Lindy's touching recount of their visit to Parihaka, staying on the Marae and gaining approval from the chief to tell *their* story, moved everyone in the room. Allowing a white feather to drift down to the floor during their narration, added beautifully to the atmosphere.

Korean IBBY certainly spoilt us, and taking us on tours was one such example. We visited the Secret Garden of Changdeok Palace, more a park than garden! Huge. Wonderful.

We split into two groups and while most visited the DMZ where I had visited last year, the rest of us were taken on a special visit to the JSA (Joint Security Area), and to Camp Bonifas, the army camp where the American and South Korean soldiers control the border. We were right inside the DMZ and could see the North Korean soldiers closely watching our every move. It was quite scary and we felt very vulnerable, but the experience of being there and seeing the very real threat the two Koreas live with daily is hard to describe. Coming from safe New Zealand, it really got to me.

What fun Jennifer, Lindy and I had on our last full day together, after our official time with our hosts was over and our sad goodbyes had been said. We spent the day visiting the markets at Insadong, finding dozens of art shops with beautiful papers and hundreds of brushes. I wish I could paint!

A memorable trip, a constructive trip with many memories and photos to share with our family and friends.