

Imagination is the creative use of reality ~ Margaret Mahy.

When Storylines put the call out for tributes to Margaret Mahy, they came in thick and fast - long and short - from all walks of life. From close friends, colleagues, and fans. From people who had worked closely with Margaret, those who had met her once - or a few times - and from those who never met her. But, all of us have been blessed by Margaret's life and work. And, all of us were grateful to share our thoughts. We thank you all. We are sorry that we couldn't share ALL the photos... there were so many!

Herewith - with little editing - are the words of Margaret's friends and fans...

Margaret Mahy is my role model. She inspired me to start writing stories and I haven't stopped since. She opened the gateway to my passion when I met her properly for the first time at a Storylines Festival. I was nervous when I waited in the (very long) queue for her autograph, I was speechless and I didn't know what to say. But soon my nervousness went away when we started talking, she was warm and friendly and she drew a picture of one of her characters next to her eloquent signature. It was one of the greatest opportunities in my life meeting Margaret Mahy.

My admiration for Margaret Mahy formed when I was six. She came to our school wearing a funky, rainbow-coloured wig; she performed a hilarious puppet show that I can still remember. She is a wonderful writer with a unique sense of humour. She has a beautiful way with words and her books are all so different, and full of character. My favourite book by Margaret Mahy would have to be *The Dark Blue 100-Ride Bus Ticket* and her magnificent, witty collection of poems, *The Word Witch*, (my favourite poem out of them all will have to be the funny, alliterative, tongue-twister 'Bubble Trouble'!)

Margaret Mahy is a literary icon and she will live on through her books that have warmed the hearts of people from around New Zealand and the world.

~ Shreya Nair, 12-years-old.

THE QUEEN OF STORY.

Horrapotchkkin! We are discombobulated! We have lost Margaret Mahy but the well of grief is filled with dancing characters who have no intention of leaving us. The lion is still in his meadow, the witch in her cherry tree, and the man still pushes his pirate mother in a wheelbarrow towards a never-ending sea. No sooner do we think, Margaret Mahy has gone, than a great chorus of voices turn it into a lie. All of those voices are Margaret's.



L to r: Robyn Belton, Joy Cowley and Margaret

I can't remember where I first met Margaret. It was some time in the early 1970s when she pointed out to me that we'd been born in the same year 1936 and had our first children's books published in 1969, her *The Lion in the Meadow* and my *The Duck in the Gun*. She observed that the titles were similar and that both books had been published overseas. Over the years, our friendship has been punctuated with other coincidence that amused us. We discovered that we'd had tattoos of a rose done at the same time, both on the upper arm, although for different reasons, and we'd both driven off in our cars with a saucepan of stew on the roof. The difference between us was that Margaret could take these small domestic incidents, breathe her magic into them and turn them into shining story. Her tattoo was woven into a young adult novel. Her pot of stew became a rollicking picture book, *Stop that Stew!*

In the late 1970s, TV1 filmed a Kaleidoscope programme about Margaret and I, at Margaret's house in Governor's Bay. The filming took place over three days of story, laughter and occasional mayhem as Margaret's pet rabbits tried to chew through lighting wiring. At the end of the session, the director asked if one of us could think of a brief statement to round off the interviews. I'm sure if I'd had a pen and paper and an hour, I could have thought of something. But Margaret gave an immediate response: 'When one embarks on a weekend convivial, it can be serious, it can be trivial.'

Margaret's mind worked like a fairy godmother's wand, turning pumpkins into coaches and mice into elegant footmen, with instant touch. A large audience was delighted with her description of a hotel swimming pool. Margaret was on tour. Hot and tired, she got in the pool that had only two other persons in it, a young couple in a passionate embrace. Margaret said, as she watched these lovers, she felt 'all bitter and twisted' and imagined that she was a great white shark attacking them. She went back to her room and the episode turned into the popular picture book about the boy and the shark.

It seemed to me that Margaret was never entirely satisfied with ordinariness. She would pick up a prosaic topic and run with it into new territory, much to everyone's delight. Sometimes, we made story talk together. On one occasion in Christchurch, she picked me up after I'd finished some school visits, and took me back to her house. The drive, however, was complicated. The school was in an unfamiliar part of the city and we got lost because an expected road seemed to have vanished. Now who would want to steal a road? we wondered. The idea seeded a story that grew so fast it became a major preoccupation and we continued to drive down wrong roads and dead end streets. When we finally found our way to Governor's Bay, we had the Road Robber, a giant who stole roads, rolled them up like carpets and then sold them at ridiculous profit for tennis courts and airport runways. Margaret and I looked at each other with the satisfaction of friends who'd completed a piano duet and I told her she should turn the story into a picture book. She said, 'No, you write it because I stole your story.'

She didn't steal my story. That error came from a publisher who had put Margaret's name instead of mine on a picture book *An Elephant in the House*. But Margaret insisted I adopt the road thief, and I still see her word magic and laughter in *The Road Robber*.

Her ability to enlarge the domestic scene is demonstrated poignantly and with much tenderness in my favourite Mahy novel.

Memory - the story of a boy who runs away from home, and his friendship with an elderly woman who has Alzheimers. When I knew Margaret's aunt Francie, she had lost much functional cognition. She lived next door, an elderly, gracious child who sometimes wore her underclothes on top of street wear, and tried to buy food with bus tickets. Margaret's love and respect for Francie, and the care she gave her, blossoms in *Memory*, and the *Wonderful Aunt* books published by Wendy Pye. My own favourite Francie story came in a phone call from Margaret, after the Kaleidoscope programme came to air. Margaret sat with Francie in front of TV. Initially, Francie was not interested; but when there was a close view of Margaret, Francie became very excited. She pointed to the screen, shouting, 'I know her! I know her!'

Our own memories of Margaret are intact. We will all miss her warm hugs, her sly humour, her enthusiasm, her lightning intellect, but her voice in her books will live on and on.

The queen is dead. Long live the queen.

~ Joy Cowley (originally published in *Sunday Star Times*).

I think it was in 1983 that Diana Bassett, then City Librarian for Waitemata Libraries, decided that we should celebrate Margaret Mahy's wonderful books in New Zealand. At that time, Margaret's books were published by Franklin Watts (USA) and Hamish Hamilton (UK) and only brought in to New Zealand at the whim of book distributors.

The late Margaret Wood and I were charged with organising visits to local schools and libraries and an event for adults to which we invited her mother. Margaret had just been awarded the Carnegie Medal for *The Haunting* and her mother at that time had never heard her address an adult audience.

What a memorable time it was! Margaret was tireless in her response to the children, especially appreciative of the stirring powhiri at Pomaria School, her first experience of this traditional greeting from a school. What fun we had driving Margaret around, gossiping and just hanging out with her, always amazed at her facility with language and the formidable breadth of her interests and her ability to just have fun.

In the intervening years, it's been a joy to watch Margaret, patron of Storylines The Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand at our annual Storylines Family Days, and to share moments with her from time to time.

My favourite quote is from the librarian buried in books after an earthquake '...pulverised by literature,' thought Miss Laburnum. 'The ideal way for a librarian to die.' (*The Great Piratical Rumbustification and The Librarian and the Robbers*, Dent, 1978).

From *Nonstop Nonsense*, Dent, 1977 a favourite poem of my son, seven at the time.

'The Dictionary Bird'.

Through my house in sunny weather

Flies the Dictionary Bird

Clear to see on every feather

Is some outlandish word.

"Hugger Mugger" "gimcrack" "guava"

"Waggish" "mizzle" "swashing rain"

Bird – fly back to my kitchen,

Let me read those words again.

For many years I had a plain library catalogue card pinned to my wall with a quote from Margaret 'Imagination is the creative use of reality'. Margaret you have left so many words and worlds for us, and the children in our lives, to share and return to endlessly.

~ Frances Plumpton.

I met the wonderful Margaret Mahy on 30 October 30 1988, my 9th Birthday.

My mother knew how much I loved this tremendous author and she decided to take me to a book signing that was being held in our local book store. It was a secret until I walked through the door and saw her donning her brightly coloured wig. I was ecstatic!

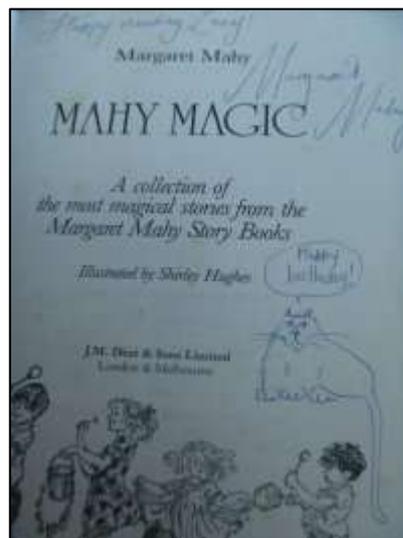


After drawing some clever illustrations on the white board, Margaret allowed us to get our books signed. The book was *Mahy Magic* and it held a collection of beautifully written stories that held me entranced for hours. 'The Boy Who was Followed Home', 'A Lion in the Meadow' and my favourite 'The Witch in the Cherry Tree.'

She was such a friendly lady and she put me at ease straight away. She even drew a quick illustration on my new book and I was beside myself with excitement.

I then followed her all the way down Bank Street (Whangarei) to her car and chattered away about all my favourite books that she had written. But the best part of the day was when she turned around and said 'You could be a writer too'.

From that moment on, I knew what my lifetime ambition was. I now make a living purely as a writer. I thank Ms Mahy for showing interest in a little girl, I will never forget that short walk down Bank Street, she truly inspired me!



I am now 32 years old and as you can see, I still treasure that book.

~ Lucy Mullinger.

Darling Margaret Mahy, the gifted author has died. The literary community, her global fans and followers and the people of New Zealand mourn her loss. The world suddenly seems less, with the passing of a great writer.

I was writing the Epilogue to a current book in progress when my phone flashed a message. It was my daughter texting to tell me she had seen on the Herald website that Margaret Mahy passed away today, Monday 23 July at the age of 76 after a brief illness. Cleo wrote, 'She was an inspiration. I am glad you got to tell her story.'

Feeling shocked and bereft, I went to my study and pulled out my book, *Her Life's Work*, to look at Margaret's portrait taken by New Zealand photographer Marti Friedlander one autumn day in 2008, before the earthquake that changed the world order in Canterbury and when it was a kinder, more benign place. On that day the light was mellow and Marti and Margaret, who were meeting for the first time, were pleased with each other. Margaret was an ideal subject. She graciously moved around her house, into corners, out onto her upstairs decking, lifting her feet carefully over the sprawling leaves and tendrils of a grapevine, at Marti's rapidly issued instructions. She put on a hat at Marti's request. She perched on the back of a sofa in her living room near the light of the tall picture window that reached to the roof, like a window in a church with a view straight up Lyttelton Harbour and in front of the big stone paved wall above her fireplace. Marti, told Margaret to laugh and Margaret let out a most joyous sound that bubbled up from her inner being. We all three smiled and Honey the dog wagged her tail. Marti had her photo.

That photo is now on my dining table beside the books I have plucked from my shelves, just a selection from the two hundred stories that have been published and read and loved by parents and children around the world: *A Lion in the Meadow*, *The Boy Who was Followed Home*, *The Great Grumbler and the Wonder Tree*, a 1966 *School Journal*, *The Wind between the Stars*, *Jam: A True Story* (the 1985 tale about the modern father who got carried away with jam making,) and one of my children's all time favourites about Tom *The Three-Legged Cat*, *Keeping House*, *The Great White Man-Eating Shark*, *A Summer Saturday Morning*, *Bubble Trouble*, *Down the Back of the Chair*, *Boom, Baby, Boom, Boom!*, *Dashing Dog!*, *Down the Dragon's Tongue*, *The Five Sisters*, *The Horrendous Hullabaloo*, a book of poems and stories *Wait for Me!*, her books for teenagers: *The Haunting*, *The Tricksters*, *Underrunners*, *The Catalogue of the Universe*, *The Changeover*, *Alchemy*, *Maddigan's Quest*, *Kaitangata Twitch* (recently adapted for a television series and filmed around Governor's Bay and Lyttelton Harbour) and my favourite *Memory* that was based on her aunt, who lived in the cottage next door, where Margaret could keep a gentle watch on her, a book about a relationship between a young male and an elderly woman with dementia into which she poured her love and compassion and her humour.

These books have been illustrated by the most famous of children's book illustrators from New Zealand and overseas. Their covers sing alongside a vase of pink and apricot toned roses picked just now on a wet Auckland winters night from the *Mutabilis* that is still flowering beside the birdbath, full tonight with turquoise crackle glazed water. I have arranged the shiny, droopy, silky blooms in an amber glass vase, beside a candle that is burning for Margaret, to remember a woman who was brilliant and kind, who was blessed with a playful and richly inventive imagination and a fine intelligence,

who turned words into magical lines that remain with us and will keep us company now that Margaret has gone...

The little boy said, "Mother there is a lion in the meadow."

The mother said, "Nonsense, little boy."

The little boy said, "Mother there is a big, yellow lion in the meadow."

The mother said, "Nonsense, little boy."

The little boy said, "Mother, there is a big, roaring, yellow whiskery lion in the meadow!"

When the table was arranged, I phoned my mother who was not yet asleep at her rest home in Merivale and shared the sad news. I had hesitated to phone because my mother was fond of Margaret. I hated being the bearer of such news but knew she would rather hear it from me than on the radio or the television.

When I was a child my mother used to take me to the Canterbury Public Library (a beautiful Venetian Gothic brick building wiped away by the earthquake) to select books, lots of them, to take back home and feast on. Quietly she would tell me to look behind the desk at the 'famous author' Margaret Mahy, who was distributing books in her olive and peachy-toned Sanderson fabric librarian's smock. Over time my mother, who was a teacher, established a relationship with Margaret and she invited Margaret to speak to her students at school on a number of occasions.

In 2009, when my book *Her Life's Work* was published, Margaret was unable to attend the Auckland launch because she had already agreed to attend an event in her hometown Whakatane. So my mother, who has MS and is confined to a wheelchair, yet continues to have a great talent for organising, pulled together a Christchurch book launch where Margaret could be guest of honour, a few weeks later.

It was a wonderful event. The room was packed with our friends and with Margaret Mahy fans. My mother hosted the event and broadcaster Ruth Todd posed questions following the launch speech. Afterwards Margaret signed books and then she drew the lion, from the lion in the meadow, for my goddaughter to illustrate her signature. The book queue suddenly grew longer and longer.



Speaking with my mother this evening was hard. I could feel her sadness and shock. They are the same age. We cried. And then my mother said, 'We must give thanks for knowing Margaret because she was a rare and special person.' There were qualities in Margaret that distinguished her beyond being

a brilliant writer. She was just the nicest, kindest and most warm of human beings.

When the second daylong interview with Margaret concluded in 2008, I had felt reluctant to leave. There was a long drive ahead, over Gebbies Pass around the edges of Lake Ellesmere to stay the night with friends on their farm nearby. It was already 6 o'clock when I switched off the tape recorder. Margaret perhaps sensing my feelings asked:



'Will you have one more cup of tea?' I hesitate. 'I'll put another log on the fire,' says Margaret brightly. 'Oh why not,' I say, 'A quick cup for the road.' Watching the flames leap up the chimney while Margaret prepares tea one last time, I think to myself, 'I could stay on here very easily.'

Out in the lane, the shadows are falling and giant poplars are rustling. Margaret reaches out and hugs me. As I drive away I can see Margaret and Honey and Socks in my rear vision mirror, the three of them watching my car and thinking their individual thoughts.

In my book I asked Margaret about many things and she enjoyed the questions. Right at the end I asked about her life's trajectory using a quotation from a book *Composing a Life* by anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson.

In her book, Composing a Life, Mary Catherine Bateson described the life path of a creative woman as being like 'a middle eastern pastry in which the butter must be layered in by repeated folding' – and how early on one's life might seem like a jumble but later it all made sense. If you were to describe the shape of your life, what would it look like?

I think that's a pretty good description, don't you? Although I think that, on the whole, I have thought of myself as a writer. I didn't particularly think of myself as a mother. On the other hand, I certainly wouldn't have wanted to be left out of that. It seems to me that being a mother is such a basic human experience. And of course I adore my daughters, and they're very fond of me, and we do well.

Are you suggesting then that the single, over-riding identity, that of the writer, has taken you through life?

Well, it's certainly been a very persistent thread that was put in place early and which I have followed through very strongly. And I still have a notable family life, living here as I do with the animals. And I'm a grandparent and all

those other things, but even if I have slowed down a lot, predominantly in my own head I'm a writer.

And then I asked 'Do you think about death and dying?' and she replied: Oh, yes, and I'm not particularly horrified at the thought, no I'm not. Probably like many people I assume that after I die I will somehow know what is going on. She laughs. I have to remind myself that that's not necessarily true. I don't know exactly what death indicates. Some people think it's just a change of individual existence and that we go on in another form. Other people think you stop. And I know that you stop being what you currently are – but I'm not frightened of dying. I think death is one of the fundamental human mysteries.

The following excerpt from *Her Life's Work: Conversations with Five New Zealand Women* (Auckland University Press 2009) contains a brief overview of Margaret Mahy's life and work.

Margaret Mahy is one of New Zealand's greatest living writers, recognised internationally for her books for children and young adults. She began writing as a young child, stitching together her first story at the age of seven and writing her first novel, 'Belle Gray' – about a cowgirl who leads a gang of outlaws – by the time she was 11. Margaret attended Auckland and Canterbury universities, graduating with a BA in philosophy and English in 1955. After completing a library diploma in 1956, she worked for the School Library Service (1967–1976) and then as a children's librarian at Canterbury Public Library (1976–1982).

In 1961 she sent a collection of stories to the *New Zealand School Journal*, which was enthusiastically received by the editors, initiating a working relationship with the journal that lasted over 25 years and resulted in more than 90 stories.

Initially Margaret found it difficult to publish in New Zealand because her stories were not located in a recognisable New Zealand setting. But in 1969, at the age of 32, her writing was discovered by the New York publishers Helen Hoke-Watts and Franklin Watts, who published five of her stories simultaneously, including an all-time favourite, *A Lion in the Meadow*, in New York and England. A further hundred stories were subsequently published with pictures by some of the world's best illustrators – Shirley Hughes, Helen Oxenbury, Quentin Blake and Steven Kellogg.

Today Margaret Mahy's books are read far and wide and have been translated into 15 different languages. Several novels – including *The Haunting of Barney Palmer* (1986), *Cuckooland* (1986), *Typhon's People* (1993) and *Maddigan's Quest* (2005), *Kaitangata Twitch* (2005) – have been

adapted for television. In 1989 animator Euan Frizzell brought five of her best-loved stories to life in the video recording *The Magical World of Margaret Mahy*.

Margaret has probably received more awards and recognition than any other New Zealander. She has won the Esther Glen award six times and the prestigious British Library Association Carnegie Medal twice for her young adult novels *The Haunting* (1982) and *The Changeover* (1984). Her novel *Memory* (1987) won four international prizes including the UK Observer Teenage Fiction Award. She was made a member of the Order of New Zealand and an honorary Doctor of Letters, Canterbury University, in 1993 and in 2005 received the Prime Minister's Award for Literary Achievement. In 2006 she received the Danish Hans Christian Anderson Award in recognition of a 'lasting contribution to children's literature.'

She has been the subject of several biographical investigations, including *Margaret Mahy: a writer's life* (2005) by Tessa Duder, and was recently interviewed by author Elizabeth Knox, for the documentary *A Tall Long Faced Tale* (2007). Margaret lived in Governors Bay, on the edge of Lyttelton Harbour, in a 1970s architecturally designed home with beautiful fruit and flower gardens that she levelled and designed herself. Margaret maintains a close relationship with her two daughters and seven grandchildren. Recently she published a major work, *The Magician of Hoad*, and there is a history of New Zealand, *Awesome Aotearoa: Margaret Mahy's History of New Zealand* in the pipeline.

Deborah Shepard, *Her Life's Work: Conversations with Five New Zealand Women*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2009:253-254

~ Deborah Shepard - originally published on her website
[www.deborahshepardbooks.com].

My 23-year-old daughter emailed from Perth. 'Oh no,' she said. 'That is so sad that Margaret Mahy has died. *The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate*, I loved that book.'

My favourites? *Memory* and *Catalogue of the Universe*.

She was so knowledgeable and bright and no matter who you were, at whatever stage in your writing, she was generous with her encouragement. As a novice, I was so grateful for that.

~ Alison Robertson.

A few years ago, we organised a tour around Northland with Margaret. We tried to take her to places that did not often get the chance to meet a real live writer. One of those places was Moerewa, a freezing works town that has suffered a lot of setbacks in the last couple of decades. He Iwi Kotahi Tatou trust welcomed us to their trust building and their community. There must have been every young person in the town, from babes in arms to teenagers, waiting to present Margaret with their own creation of a picture book on big panels. She was touched and delighted and gave one of her most inspired performances to this almost entirely Māori audience. They loved her, even the would-be-cool teenagers hung on every word. Her performance of *Down the Back of the Chair* (not yet published then) was a special treat. He Iwi's manager, Debbie Davis, took me aside with tears in her eyes and said, 'We have never had anything like this here before. It is just wonderful.'

Wonderful she was, her stories reaching across cultures to find the universal humanity in us all.

~ Janine McVeagh.

'We love the story of *Down the Dragon's Tongue*, lots of fun and a little bit scary...!' Lucy & Millie, 6 yrs & 3 years.

~ Sent in by Denise McLean.

When I was CEO at Learning Media, I enjoyed my occasional time with Margaret Mahy immensely. As well as her indefatigable energy, her warmth and empathy for people, Margaret 'got' that by writing educational books she would reach the teachers and students at all levels of society – including children whose lives weren't otherwise filled with stories. She knew that by contributing hundreds of wonderful titles for classrooms in New Zealand and abroad she was reaching far beyond the bookshop and the 'picture book' into the budding minds of young readers, writers and thinkers. For many children the school is the place where story – fiction and non-fiction – is most-encountered and where teachers with passion for literacy bring those stories alive. Of course no-one could bring a story alive like Margaret. Her theatrical flair, many personas, and most of all her sense of humour and sense of the absurd immediately won children over, and they never forgot their time with her. Neither do I. In this Maori language week, with the passing of Margaret I can't help thinking of the mischievous tūī at the top of my path ... Me he korokoro tūī.

~ Neale Pitches.

I won an International Writers' Workshop NZ children's story the first year I joined IWW (it was entitled 'The Talking Scarecrow'). Margaret Mahy's poem 'Bubble Trouble' is one of the most creative and inventive poems with wonderful original rhyming words having universal appeal –and not exclusively for children either.

It is a long, tongue-twisting poem with a good fairy story happy ending. Her words will continue to enchant children for ever.

~ Barbara Algie.

The five years spent as coordinator for Storylines gave me some memorable moments with Margaret. She had a huge presence and was a delight to work with.

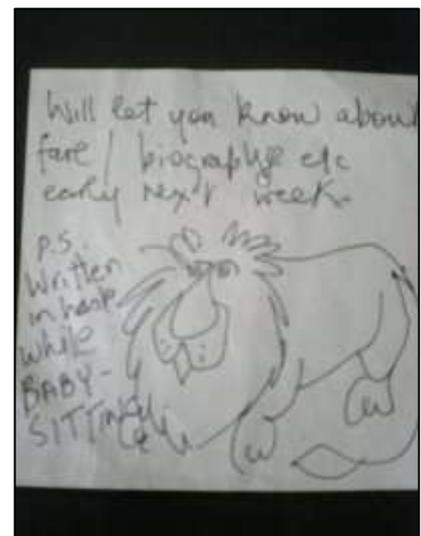
One year she agreed on the date for presenting at Storylines and then put her dog into kennels for the wrong weekend, only discovering the mistake when she arrived to check in at Christchurch airport.

Another year we lost her in Aotea Centre: she was found catching up with her family in a nearby pub.

Whenever she was expected she usually managed to arrive at the last minute but always gave 110% to her audience.

At the launch of *A Writer's Life* she was persuaded to act out *Down the Back of the Chair*, which had not yet been published. Her young grandson, who knew all the words, joined her.

Instead of letters she wrote quick notes and signed off with her lion signature. See attached.



~ Jill Brewis.

I remember Margaret as a mentor. I first met her in the 1980s when she tutored a residential course on Writing for Children at Albany. As a new writer I was impressed by her imagination, sense of fun, brilliant way with words and endless energy. After a morning session when we should have stopped an hour earlier for lunch, Margaret would still be sharing her knowledge, oblivious of the tempting aroma wafting from the kitchen and the chef peering anxiously around the door.

The same energy was apparent in 1988 when she stayed at our home during a visit organised by the South Auckland Children's Literature Association. So many schools wanted to share her time that I'm ashamed to say we hardly gave her time to stop for a break or cup of tea. After a very long day she climbed up onto a top bunk and read bedtime stories to our daughters. Her performance of 'Bubble Trouble' one winter's night in a Papatoetoe school hall packed with spellbound listeners was unforgettable.

In later years at book events I appreciated the way Margaret would purchase the books of fellow writers, giving us support and encouragement.

Dear Margaret, thank you.

~ Jennifer Beck.

My name is Sam Hester and I'm a comics artist and writer in Canada. When I heard the sad news of Margaret Mahy's passing, I wanted to share the story of how her marvellous writing shaped my life and work. Part of this story also exists as a comic book which can be seen on my website [thedrawingbook.com].

My Margaret Mahy Story:

Long ago, I got an English degree from the University of Toronto in Canada. After getting through all those serious works of literature, I decided to take a break and re-read some of the old 'young adult' novels of my childhood. Rediscovering brilliant authors like Diana Wynne Jones, E. L. Konigsburg, and Eleanor Estes, I was hooked, and promptly abandoned the classics as I metamorphosed into a devourer of teenager books. I scoured second-hand stores and once in a while thought of writing reviews or articles full of passionate praise for these wonderful unappreciated authors (this was before Harry Potter). But, somehow, my dreams of becoming a prolific spouter of teenager-book criticism always took a back shelf (I was too busy writing comic books instead!).

In 2001, on a day I'll never forget, my hand fell upon the worn spine of a paperback copy of *The Catalogue of the Universe* in a Calgary second-hand bookstore. I bought the book. As I strolled along the busy street outside the shop, I started reading (I'm still notorious for reading while I walk, although it's trickier now that I have a three-year-old). Within a couple of pages, I knew I was on to something unlike anything I'd ever encountered before. I actually stopped on the sidewalk so that I could deal with the impact of those words. It wasn't just the story... the story that begins with the image of a girl lying in bed with her eyes consciously closed to the magically moonlit world around her. It was the power of the voice telling the tale... a playful, teasing, charming, compelling voice. It was a voice that could sing you to sleep with a pirate shanty (the voice of a 'mad old mother', as the mother in the story is

affectionately referred to by her daughter). But I had the feeling that it was also the voice of a fire-breathing dragon who could treat you to a good strong scorching even as you listened enrapt. And it was the voice of an observer, who, like Tycho (one of the *Catalogue's* protagonists), had watched from the sidelines and collected a lifetime's worth of wisdom. Honestly, what kind of narrator could do all that – and in the first few pages of a teenager book? For some reason (and I still don't know why), I thought incongruously of Ents, Tolkien's age-old tree-people, unshakeable forces of nature possessing wisdom from the roots of the earth, but who also lived in a light-hearted communion with the birds and breezes of the sparkling sky. Who was this author?

Despite the stacks of dog-eared paperbacks that lined my halls, I'd never heard of Mahy. (Even today, ten years later – except for the occasional inexplicable copy of *Maddigan's Fantasia* – you won't find anything by Mahy in a Canadian mainstream bookstore. In a used-book store, you might find *The Changeover* if you're lucky, a leftover token of some happy time in the 1980s when, apparently, it was actually in print here.) So, I looked her up on the internet. And the first thing I saw was: 'Call for Papers on Margaret Mahy.' Two scholars, Elizabeth Hale (then in Boston), and Sarah Fiona Winters, who was (amazingly!) from Canada, were working on a book - the first (and still the only, to my knowledge), to present a scholarly study devoted entirely to Mahy's work as a novelist.

This was clearly a call to put my money where my mouth was. I almost started writing an abstract right then and there. No, wait – better finish reading *The Catalogue*.

By the end of the novel, I was still just as inspired as I'd been at the beginning. I couldn't get over the way Mahy seemed to indulge her narrator – as though the narrator was a real person – allowing him (or her?) to toss observations into the story, sometimes commenting compassionately on the characters' plight, sometimes simply tongue-in-cheek. Tycho had learned (so we're told), as a young boy, about 'the astonishing facts of life.' That was the narrator, mocking Tycho a bit for his astonishment, but doing it tenderly. (Mahy's use of 'astonishing' struck me. Who says 'astonishing' these days? In Canada, not too many.)

It was a while before I figured out that Mahy was from New Zealand (Wikipedia was still in its infancy). *The Catalogue* doesn't place New Zealand front and centre in the story, as Mahy's later works were to do. The clue that tipped me off was the mention of 'a two-cent piece.' This led me to speculate that *The Catalogue* was a British book that had been badly edited for American readers. But that didn't feel quite right, either, and I started digging. I'd later learn how Mahy had documented her struggle with the 'imaginative

displacement' she had initially felt as a New Zealand author, eventually overcoming it to champion local settings in her work. I seem to have come around that particular circle myself, thanks in part to Mahy's pioneering example. For years, I avoided any mention, in my own art and writing, of what I thought of as my 'provincial' Canadian background. But I had been like *The Catalogue's* Angela May: a girl lying in the dark with her eyes closed, shutting out the magical world that was right there all around her. After all, by omitting any mention of your (supposedly) embarrassingly 'culture-less' hometown in your work, you're only reinforcing any such preconception that might exist among your readers. Consciously setting your work in the place you're from, as Mahy was brave enough to do at a time when no one else was doing it, is the only way to combat this.

But, back then, narrowly avoiding collisions with indignant pedestrians as I walked dazedly along Calgary's crowded 17th Avenue with my nose in a book, did it matter whether I knew where the story was set, or whether it was even set anyplace in particular? I didn't know about her children's books. I didn't know about her wig. I didn't know anything about her except that she wrote like a dragon, a mother, a pirate queen. I guess what I'm trying to say is that Margaret Mahy's work leapt out at me, not because she was a famous author. Not because she was a New Zealander. Not because I'd loved her stories as a child. It had for me, if I may paraphrase what Jane Austen wrote of *Persuasion's* hero Captain Wentworth, 'nothing but itself to recommend it.' And really (as Austen implies), what better recommendation could there be?

With that, I dove in to the business of writing about Mahy. I did most of my research and writing at (very noisy!) internet cafes in a small city in Germany where I had sleepy stops between international flights (I worked as a flight attendant!). My work was sent back and forth to the book's editors by email. (I've still never met either of them - I wonder what they thought about this wannabe 'scholar' who appeared out of nowhere? But I wasn't as interested in forging academic liaisons. I was just interested in Mahy.) I did eventually track down and read most of Mahy's other novels. And at the end of all that, I had my first essay, published in the superlative little book *Marvellous Codes: The Fiction of Margaret Mahy*.

Today, my work as an 'independent scholar' is mostly on the back shelf once more, as I'm spending most of my time just being the parent of a toddler. But I can't express how much I'm enjoying, not only reading Mahy's picture books with my son, but the knowledge that he won't have to wait until he's twenty-eight to discover them!

After working on that first essay, I'd come to feel a strong connection with the world of New Zealand Young Adult fiction, although I'd never been to New Zealand. From afar, I followed the suspenseful progress of Tessa Duder's bid

for Mahy to be awarded the Hans Christian Anderson Medal (and stayed up all night reading Duder's *A Writer's Life*, after having waited weeks for it to arrive by mail). When, in 2006, I looked online and saw news of a Margaret Mahy Symposium, I knew that I just had to be there.

The magic of my voyage to New Zealand – putting real faces to names, and seeing places I'd only read about (the Christchurch mall on which *The Changeover's* Gardendale subdivision mall was based: wow!) – is still unforgettable. But meeting Margaret Mahy at the symposium was the part that, five years earlier when my hand touched the spine of *The Catalogue of the Universe* at a shop in my hometown, I could never have imagined. Mahy's writing had indeed created a "looping line" that would lead me around the world, and back again.

'Have you really come all the way from Canada?' Margaret Mahy asked me quite earnestly. And, when I nodded, she observed (to my delight): 'How astonishing!'

As I spoke at the symposium, I noticed Margaret sitting in the front row, with her piercing eyes fixed upon me, curious, intent, bright. And it made me think of something, but I couldn't tell quite what it was. A few days later, though, at the Auckland airport, as I was preparing to return home, I found myself walking into a bookstore and reaching up to a shelf. My hand seemed to know just where it needed to go – to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, to the spot where the hobbits meet Treebeard. The Ent.

These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light. Often afterwards Pippin tried to describe his first impression of them:

'One felt as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present: like sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree, or on the ripples of a very deep lake...'

Astonishing!

~ *Sam Hester.*

She was a total treasure. What struck me each time I met her was her genuine interest in me (ie whoever she was talking to!) and my writing (ditto!), and that she remained so sweetly innocent and naive with 'all the fuss' about her own writing. Farewell to our Kiwi dreamweaver as she leaves us to write her newest chapter in the heavens. She travels with the love of the worlds she shared.

~ *Clare Scott.*

'Real is what everyone agrees about. True is what you somehow know inside yourself.' ~ Hero

In her YA novel *The Other Side of Silence* (Penguin) Margaret Mahy blurs the line between Reality and Fantasy (Real and True) which is what she does best. It's a feast for the imagination and a fascinating character study.

Twelve-year-old Hero has a chaotic, articulate, argumentative family; so she's chosen not to speak at all. Her silence becomes a double life based on the fairy tales she reads: 'The life I live with my family was my real life but my tree life – the early morning life ... was also my true life.' Hero's literary fantasies take a dangerous turn when she meets an eccentric neighbour in a sinister house. Real life blurs into fairy tale (the novel is even divided into sections labelled True and Real) and builds to a climax that's a fine piece of suspense writing. Mahy taps into psychologist Bruno Bettelheim's thesis that fairy tales speak directly to children's subconscious and somehow help them come to terms with life's struggles. Hero copes with her feelings of rejection by living out fairy tales in which children are abandoned or lost, but then 'they are discovered, or even discover themselves.' This novel is also the story of family life, and how fame can throw relationships off-kilter. Mahy has commented on the pitfalls of fame; that people are less likely to give you direct criticism of your work, for example. My only criticism of this brilliant novel is the ugly cover.

~ *Raymond Huber.*

I remember meeting Margaret Mahy as a six-year-old child in Napier at my school some 30 years ago and I have never forgotten how amazed I was by her.

A few years ago I was able to introduce my six-year-old daughter to her and I told her how I had meet her at the same age. She was so happy to hear that. Funny enough my daughter was just as amazed by her as I was.

What an amazing lady – I was so blessed for my children to have been able to meet her and old enough to never forget her.

She was a saint in the magical world of words.

God Bless her.

~ *Stephanie Meehan.*

Just ten days before Margaret Mahy died, we had just finished a joyous season of our production based on one of her stories, *The Great Piratical Rumbustification* (1978). Over the years it has been a privilege and an honour for our creative, acting and technical teams in bringing her many stories to life on stage:

- *Mahy Magic* 1992, 2004
- *The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate* 2006, 2010.
- *The Dragon of an Ordinary Family* 2008.
- *A Lion in the Meadow and Other Stories* 2011.
- *The Great Piratical Rumbustification* 2012.

I have enjoyed the challenge of faithfully bringing her words to life in my dramatisations. As a company we have relished presenting on stage the magic, warmth and the quirky characters she created for the page with her whimsical imagination. Margaret's stories are rich in their remarkable turns of phrase, playful choice of words and humour, and they are all underpinned by her keen eye for captivating stories. Parents and grandparents as well as children strongly identify with her tales and wisdom and recognise within them a 'truth'.

Margaret was willing to share her stories with us and she rejoiced in seeing her characters alive in the theatre. When she attended, her presence was infectious: she lit up the theatre.

Mystery, enchantment and magic reign supreme in her world; our world is the richer for her offerings.

Her stories and her magic will continue to live on, and we will all remember her with much fondness. Margaret Mahy is a literary treasure and a much-loved New Zealander.

Sadly, her voice is stilled now but her influence on children's imaginations will be a living force in the realm of literature.

~Tim Bray, Theatre Producer, Director and Playwright.



The night Margaret got lost.

In 1999 Margaret was joining the Northland Storytellers for a tour of the Far North. The tour was due to start on 7 April in Kaikohe. On the 5th April it started raining. On the morning of the 6th the rivers were starting to flood. Margaret was meant to be spending the night at my home, but by 10am that morning I had my bagged packed and retreated to the city. We waited at the airport for Margaret's flight that afternoon, but the plane had to turn back to Auckland as the weather was too atrocious for it to land.

We returned to the airport several hours later, knowing that Margaret would be on the bus that the airline sends up in such circumstances. Only Margaret and her two grandchildren weren't on the bus. After some phone calls it was established that Margaret had chosen to hire a car and drive up, thinking she'd arrive sooner.

We sat around drinking coffee waiting for the promised call from the girls other grandparents to say that Margaret had turned up. The only call we got was a query – had we heard from Margaret? By now she was hours overdue – even allowing for driving in the rain.

It was well after midnight when the call came. Margaret had arrived exhausted but safe. She had been diverted in several places where State Highway 1 was flooded and had spent the night driving around back country roads weaving her way north. Finally when she got close to Kerikeri the route she was on was undergoing road-works and she thought she'd taken a wrong turn so turned around and went back.

She'd hired a car with a telephone in it – but this was 1999 and no-one thought to tell her the coverage in Northland was scarce. Needless to say at 8am the next morning the sun was shining and Northland looked beautiful. Margaret was bright and eager to get started. Mind you we all crashed early that night.



The black & white photograph was taken by Michael Cunningham on that tour.

The photograph of Margaret on her own I took but my flash didn't go off and it is out of focus if enlarged. But it is such a neat photograph
~ *Di Menefy*.

I was lucky enough to meet Margaret Mahy at (I think it was) a Storylines event several years ago. I think it was the drinks and nibbles affair where Libby Gieson came over from Australia. As she was one of my favourite authors, I was really excited about meeting her, and hoped I would be scurrying into her group with my copy of *The Princess and the Perfect Dish* for her to sign. (Before the main event, they had us in small groups with an author or illustrator per group who would talk about their work).

As it turned out, I and two other people were grouped with Margaret, and what a lucky thing that was (not being disrespectful to any of the other authors that were there). We were allowed to ask her anything and it was very casual and friendly. She answered our questions, kept us entertained and was just so down to earth and intelligent. In fact I think after the 30 mins or so was up, we were the last group to shut up, they just couldn't stop us, we all felt like old friends! It was such a great ice-breaker for the main event, and spending that little bit of time with Margaret was truly a privilege. I think half of Christchurch/New Zealand has had these kind of experiences with meeting her, we really are fortunate to have had her here. My favourites of her stories are *A Summery Saturday Morning* and *The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate*.

~ Julianne Pearce.

Celebration of Margaret Mahy's Life

Geo Dome, Hagley Park, Christchurch 1 August 2012

The celebration was held on a cold winter's day in a large geodesic dome in Hagley, an unlikely (but comfortable) setting which would have greatly amused Margaret Mahy. I arrived very early with my daughter Ruth, which meant that we not only got good seats but also heard the school choirs singing some of Margaret's poems beautifully, at their final rehearsal.

Soon the tent was full and we had to move our chairs to let a man in a wheelchair past. On his lap he held a marvellous box, about the size of a large shoe-box, with pictures from some of Margaret's books pasted on it. We recognised the lion and Norbert the great white man-eating shark. 'What a fabulous box,' Ruth said, and the man nodded and wheeled on up the aisle. Louise Deans welcomed everyone, 'Aren't we lucky that we had Margaret Mahy living among us, and we all knew her and loved her?' We all sang Blake's 'Jerusalem'.

Tessa Duder gave a marvellous, witty, succinct summary of Margaret's life (beginning 'Once upon a time...') and moved many to tears by concluding with a reading of Margaret's poem 'When I Grow Old'.

Two of Margaret's older grandchildren, Poppy and Alice, spoke and read from *Notes from a Bag Lady*. They noted that 'Margaret often broke out in a can-can in the school playground.' One read from a little boy's sympathy card on Margaret's death: 'No more summery Saturday mornings for you, my friend.' Jack Lasenby once said that 'Wonderful Me' by Margaret Mahy was one of the most perfect poems ever written. The highlight of the service was Margaret's granddaughters, the twins Julia and Bidy, giving a perfect reading of 'Wonderful Me'.

Rosie Belton gave a tribute to Margaret on behalf of her fellow Governors Bay residents. She spoke of Margaret's part in the life of the bay, as well as the walks, the scenery and the filming of Kaitangata Twitch, 'where fact and fiction merged and Margaret watched her characters come to life – the wonder of it all.' Rosie mentioned Hallowe'en at Governors Bay, when Margaret would dress up as a witch and give the visiting children gifts. 'And a nip for their parents.'

Today the school sign at Governors Bay reads 'Thanks Margaret. Rest in peace.'

(The people of Governors Bay made and served the afternoon tea, which included splendid club sandwiches, afghans, lemon curds and Neenish tarts. One lady remarked she was thinking of moving to Governors Bay just for the food.)

Rosie recounted an exchange between Margaret and a granddaughter as they drove over the Port Hills. A serious question was seriously considered and seriously answered.

Lily: 'Margaret, have you read all of your books?'

Margaret: 'Well, Lily, I have read all of my books, and some of them do take quite a time to read.'

Lorain Day, the publisher, said, 'My friend Margaret was, quite simply, a genius...a genius real and true.' She gave the example of a friend saying, 'That's a Margaret Mahy sort of word. 'She told of taking Margaret to Weta Workshops to meet Sir Richard Taylor, with whom she got on very well, and with the Weta designers who thanked Margaret for showing that fantasy was valid and imagination was to be treasured.

Gavin Bishop, slightly embarrassed at having been described by Margaret as 'a Sicilian bandit in a Savile Row suit,' read from the *The Pirate's Mixed-Up Voyage*. 'Who cares if we can't read – we're pirates, not pedants.' He pointed out the cute little touches, such as 'a seedy-looking little business called Rent-a-Librarian.'

Kate di Goldi spoke of re-reading many of Margaret's books in preparation for a filmed interview. 'For Margaret, language was an intoxicant, a spell, an enchantment. It was her food – a special nourishment.' Kate spoke of *Bubble Trouble* as a metaphor for Margaret's life, 'wafting along, creating wondrous merry hell' and drawing us out of our mundane lives to enjoy the fun. 'She dug around in her consciousness and pulled amazing things out, much as Dad does down the back of the chair.'

They then screened Yvonne Mackay's film of Margaret reading *Down the Back of the Chair* to the twins, with animated additions (lion, snake, elephant, taxi) by Euan Frizzell.

A children's choir then sang some of Margaret's poems, set to music by Philip Norman. It was beautifully done.

Sue Colyer and Louise Easter, wearing multi-hued wigs, spoke lovingly of Margaret's time with them at the School Library Service of the National Library and at Canterbury Public Library. 'Margaret would sing sea-shanties as she shelved. Sometimes she would dance a hornpipe.' Her lunch-time 'power-naps' were remembered, as well as her work as Children's Librarian. Christchurch City Libraries' reference collection of New Zealand children's books is named the Margaret Mahy Collection, in her honour.

A recording made by Yvonne Mackay of Margaret reading her poem 'Ghosts' was played – the same recording broadcast as part of the tribute by Tessa Duder and John McIntyre on Radio NZ National the day after Margaret's death. Choir boys sang 'Pie Jesu' beautifully as Margaret's family left the tent. With them they took Margaret's ashes, which had been in the tent with them throughout the celebration.

Ruth and I were flabbergasted to realise that the lovely box we had seen carried in by Margaret's son-in-law, was in fact the box holding Margaret's ashes. It was a perfect Margaret Mahy ending to a perfect Margaret Mahy celebration.

~ Trevor Agnew. 2 August 2012.

I remember getting a letter from her about 13 years ago, when I was about eight (I think) after sending her what must have been a fan letter. Totally amazed to get a response from someone as busy as she must have been. Have still got it in a safe place. What topped it off for me was the inclusion of a drawing of a cat which I think she had done on her computer but looked so much like she had drawn it by hand. I can still visualise her recitation of 'Down the Back of the Chair' with her energetic enthusiasm and sense of humour. She will be greatly missed by all.

~ Amy Luxton-Esler.

I remember one night when we had a Storylines gathering and my daughter and I were driving Margaret to her daughter's house where she was staying. We chatted about all sorts on the way including me mentioning that I used to sing in an Irish pub. Margaret was thrilled to bits to hear this and insisted that we had to sing some Irish songs there and then. There was no persuading her otherwise and the three of us sang our way (not very tunefully) home.

Margaret was always extremely encouraging to me, particularly when I was working on the Storylines Festival. It was always a thrill to hear her voice on the other end of the phone and she always expressed delight for whatever events we had planned for her to take part in. Her cleverness in discussing the serious side of writing was also a great blessing and every discussion provided me with a greater understanding.

~ *Crissi Blair.*

Years ago I recognised Margaret who was having a coffee on her own at South City Mall. I cheekily introduced myself and from then on she always remembered me and said hello when we bumped into each other there. When I wrote my one and only book a few years ago (*Magpie Mischief*) Margaret attended the launch at Storylines Day 2010 and was complimentary, supportive and encouraging. I purchased a copy of her *Down the Back of the Chair* for my granddaughter Ebony on that same day, and Margaret adorned it with a little sketch and poem. This lives in the 'special objects' trunk at Ebony's family home in Lesmurdie, Western Australia. Our family will miss Margaret such a lot.

~ June Peka (Christchurch.)

Because Memory deals with both the sadness and the comic situations created by Alzheimers, it is my favourite Mahy novel. My enjoyment of it was greatly increased when Margaret told me the story of her aunt who lived in the cottage next door to Margaret's house. Aunt had Alzheimers and could remember very little of what happened each day. Margaret would bring her aunt breakfast each morning. When Margaret won the Carnegie Medal, she was under a strict confidentiality clause, unable to tell anyone about it until the official announcement. Margaret, undaunted, would go into her aunt each morning and declare, 'Good news, auntie, I've won the Carnegie!'

'Oh, isn't that wonderful dear.'

And next morning, Margaret would go into her aunt and declare, 'Good news, auntie, I've won the Carnegie!'

And her aunt would say, 'Oh, isn't that wonderful dear.'

This joyous and ever-fresh exchange went on for weeks.

~ *Trevor Agnew.*

In a previous life I was a teacher and loved reading her books to the children - who loved them also. I met her several times. Once in the early 80s (after my days of school teaching and in another job) I drove from Tauranga to Rotorua, where she was reading her stories at a school and wearing her wonderful coloured wig. I took her back to the airport and we had big talks about writing. After I was married and living in a remote area of the North Island, I travelled to a Writers' Summer School at Otago (Margaret being the drawcard) and was fortunate to do a writing workshop with her. I had an idea for a story and she told me if I didn't use it, she would! What an honour. It is to my regret that I never did write that story - although now I may have to!

The wacky wordsmith that she was is truly memorable, but the way she encouraged others to write and to see life her way was inspirational. The possibility and wonder she saw in the everyday will stay with me always.

I look forward to sharing the memories of many others at the Memorial Service in Auckland.

~ Pamela (Binky) Collier.

I met Margaret a few years ago in the writers' room at the Storylines family day in Auckland. I was desperate to tell her how much that beautiful, wild imagination has given to New Zealanders – not just to the children and their grown-ups, but also to her fellow writers. She has not just raised the bar, she has given us Freedom. Because of what she has done, we as writers feel that anything is possible. Anything! But Margaret was not interested in praise. All she wanted to do was to talk about kids' books, and of course to read them. And if we want to honour her memory, that's exactly what we should all keep doing.

~ Sally Sutton.

Margaret Mahy felt like one of the family to many including her readers, fellow writers, and the wider children's literature community. She was a New Zealand icon, officially, and in our hearts.

Her support for her fellow authors has been shared since news of her recent death was made public.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the New Zealand writing family joined with librarians to celebrate our shared love of Margaret Mahy and her writing in a Margaret Mahy Nationwide Read on Saturday 11 August.

Margaret's faultless and flawless use of rhyme and rhythm, magic and myth won her fans, and awards, around the world. But, Margaret will always be ours.

For authors, she was their figurehead and a subject of wistful envy, and overwhelming thanks for her support.

For librarians, she had really been one of us, once upon a time.

It is, therefore, fitting that these two literary-minded communities gathered together to honour 'our' Margaret.

I was lucky enough to meet Margaret a few times, through my involvement with Storylines: the Children's Literature Charitable Trust of New Zealand. On Storylines Festival Family Days, Margaret was supplied extra security, such was her following and popularity. At the Gala Dinner to celebrate her 70th birthday, Margaret held us spellbound, as did her grandson Harry, with his rendition of 'Down the Back of the Chair'. As part of the celebration, Storylines called for memories to include in a scrapbook. As the compiler of the book, I was overwhelmed by the responses. Now, six years later, I am again touched by people's connections with Margaret, as I compiled this newsletter dedicated to Margaret.



As I reader, I am always enchanted and entranced by Margaret's imagination and use of language. I will be forever grateful that these will remain with us. For one of my work's blogs, I posted my Top 5 Margaret Mahy books [top5goodies.blogspot.co.nz] - my list and memories is republished here: My Margaret books and memories... in order of the memory:

The Lion in the Meadow: How appropriate that my first Margaret Mahy memory is also my first library memory. And my first real book memory... My mother bought me a withdrawn library copy of this book when I was about 3 or 4. I still have it. Although Margaret supposedly wasn't that well known in New Zealand in the early days – this book was trashed. Considering it was first published in 1969, and it would have been '74 or '75 when I got the book – it was definitely loved among the reading children of Te Atatu South Library.

Memory: I think I was actually a teenager when I read this one! It was published in 1987, so it must have been around then that I read it. This is one of those very-rare Mahy books without an element of fantasy. Instead, it is the portrayal of a friendship between a young boy and an older woman, who is

suffering from dementia – which does make the story seem surreal, as Johnny connects with Sophie.

The Changeover: I couldn't believe it when this wee number turned up on my required reading list for a Masters' paper! Score! So, my copy of this, *The Tricksters*, and *The Catalogue of the Universe* all have post-it notes sticking out of them, with comments, as I wrote my essays... That said, I had read and loved it for years before then.

Down the Back of the Chair: A few years ago, Storylines hosted its annual Margaret Mahy Day in Christchurch. A close friend had just announced that he and his partner were expecting their first baby. He is renowned for losing keys (phones / everything really...), so I bought a copy of *Down the Back of the Chair* for his future baby... and asked Margaret to sign it. As it was too early to find out the sex of the baby – it is signed 'Happy reading, Dear Whoever You Turn Out to Be.' The baby is now 2½ - and I think that Margaret's words were more a directive than a wish, as little Monkey (as we call her) LOVES books and wants to be able to read for herself NOW... none of this waiting around for school business.



The Librarian and the Robbers: I have entertained myself, and others, by reading extracts of this story. It is definitely a story written by a librarian, with lots of in-jokes only librarians would fully appreciate. First published in 1978, it's poignant that it is an earthquake which prompts the Robber Chief to propose to the librarian, Miss Serena Laburmum. I also wonder if Margaret loved Elizabeth Goudge's *The Little White Horse* as much as I do... Serena is the name of Maria's pet hare in this book, and Loveday (the surname of the Robber Chief) is the name of Maria's mother-of-her-heart.

~ Annie Coppell.

We were both in Auckland for the Margaret Mahy Day 2008 - I, to receive the Joy Cowley Award and Margaret, as the guest of honour, but it was the following day that we met on the beach at Devonport where we had both gone to relax with our families. This photo is very special to me as I remember Margaret Mahy from when I was a child and I was delighted that I got the chance to meet and chat with her.



Margaret was such an inspirational lady.

~ Michelle Osment.

Messages from the IBBY community worldwide:

The death of Margaret Mahy is a huge loss, not just to New Zealand, but to the world. She received the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the Carnegie Medal (twice) and numerous other awards. From *The Lion in the Meadow*, *The Great White Man-Eating Shark* and other picture book texts, she went on to write young novels such as *The Librarian and the Robbers*, and YA novels such as *Memory* and *The Underrunners*. Themes of magic and transformation run through her work, as does a mastery of language and delight in its power and quirkiness.

As well as admiring her clever and moving books, I was convinced that Margaret was one of the few people of true genius I would ever have the pleasure of meeting. Her frequent visits to our bookshop were a great joy. On a memorable occasion when Margaret was billed to speak to children's literature fans in Sydney, she arrived breathlessly announcing that she had left her notes in the taxi. So she performed for us the amazing poem which was to be published as *Bubble Trouble*.

At the presentation of the Andersen Awards in 2006, Jury President Jeff Garrett said, 'In awarding the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for Writing to Margaret Mahy, the jury has recognised one of the world's most original re-inventers of language. Mahy's language is rich in poetic imagery, magic, and supernatural elements. Her oeuvre provides a vast, numinous, but intensely personal metaphorical arena for the expression and experience of childhood and adolescence. Equally important, however, are her rhymes and poems for children. Mahy's works are known to children and young adults all over the world.'

When New Zealand hosts the IBBY International Congress in 2016, it is sad that Margaret will not be present, but surely she will be there in spirit.
~ from the *IBBY newsletter*.

Ibby Chile is sad to hear the news about Margaret Mahy. Thank you and I will resend this message to our members.
~Valerie Moir. *IBBY Chile*.

I'm so sorry to hear about her death. It is a real loss and many would miss her.
~ Wafa Thabet Mezghani, *IBBY Tunisia*.

What a tragedy. I remember her well from Macau. She seemed so vital for her age at that time.
~ Ellis Vance, *USBBY and IBBY Treasurer*.

Oh dear Margaret! I like her books so much!
~ Tilka Jamnik, *IBBY Slovenia*.

Oh, what a loss. I will never forget her joy and enthusiastic recitation of *Down the Back of the Chair*. Such an oversized personality.

~ *Linda Pavonetti, USBBY, IBBY EC.*

We, at AWIC, are grieved to learn about Margaret Mahy's sudden demise. We pray to God to give peace to her soul. We extend our heartfelt condolences to the family.

~ *Manorama Jafa, Secretary General, AWIC – Indian IBBY.*

How sad. She was such a crazy, colorful character. I shall never forget her Joseph multi coloured coat she had in Vancouver. And her antics in Groningen. She was a wonderful writer. I always wanted to publish her in Spanish, when I discovered her through that other dear Margaret (McElderry).

~ *Carmen Diana Dearden, Venezuela, former IBBY President.*

On behalf of the UAE National Section of the IBBY, we extend our sadness at the demise of Margaret Mahy, recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Ms Mahy had a long history of 'bringing books and children together', first as a Librarian and later as a prolific writer of delightful stories, many of which have, deservedly become classics and translated into numerous languages. The world of children's literature will greatly miss her.

Please convey our heartfelt condolences to the family of Margaret Mahy and the IBBY.

~ *Bodour Bing Sultan Al Qasimi, The UAE Board on Books for Young People.*

You cannot imagine how sad the information about Margaret Mahy was for me...and for all of us... our IBBY Section's people... We always had the feeling Margaret would live forever and ever... And may be she will!!

I enjoyed her work a lot and I could widespread her lovely stories among Uruguayan kids and even school teachers.

Her *The Librarian and the Robbers*, illustrated by Quentin Blake was so great, so funny and humorous that it become a classic in our readings for children.

Two or three years ago our librarianship students acted that story as a play in the Theatre and many school children were invited to see the play. It was a wonderful day!!

Margaret really contributed to children's literature and we never forget her!!

All our love to you and our New Zealand-IBBY Colleagues. Please, let them know the feeling we have.

~ *Adriana and Susy IBBY-Uruguay.*

This news makes me so sad, though at the same time it gives me an opportunity to remember all the joy that her books brought me over the years – starting with *The Haunting*, which Diana Moorhead gave me in the early

1980s. It blew me away. For what it's worth, I just read my laudatio to her from 2006 in Macau, and I still believe every word that I said about her during that speech. What an honor to have been able to give her that prize and to extol her works – with her in the audience. What a privilege to have met her in person.

With great respect and sadness,
~ Jeff Garrett (in a mail sent to Bill Nagelkerke),
USA, Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury
President 2006.

[Jeff's laudatio can be read online at
www.ibby.org/index.php?id=697].



Margaret Mahy brought years of pleasure to young readers with her books and she will continue to do so for many many years.

Her poem 'Bubble Trouble' is one of my favorite poems of all time. The skill and ease with which she handles the language in the poem is done with the aplomb of a real genius.

I once met Margaret Mahy when I was with my two young daughters. With natural unforced ease Margaret became best friends with them in a couple of seconds simply through her understanding and ability to enter a world which the children loved. I've never seen any thing like this before or since. This was part of her genius as a truly great writer.

She had a marvellous talent and more importantly to me she was a good person.

We shall live eternally thankful for Margaret Mahy.

Margaret be sure to keep writing for all the littlies in heaven.

arohanui,
~ *Apirana Taylor*.

My first memory of Margaret was at Petone Public Library (not where it is now but in a rather shonky old wooden building down nearer the sea front) where she had gone to work after her time at library school in the mid 1950s. I had called in to see the librarian, Winifred Oldham, who had been my Karitane Nurse when I was a baby! When Margaret was told this she thought it was so funny and I remember her really laughing and laughing. However, although the idea of a Karitane Nurse turned Librarian was a good one I don't think she ever used it in a story.

I kept in touch with Margaret over the next decade or so as we were both involved in the National Library of New Zealand and in public library work. I was also part of an organisation that had its headquarters in Christchurch which meant much flying down there for weekend meetings so we would often meet for coffee on a Friday night if she was staying in town. About 15 years ago I had a wonderful weekend at a writers' course run by Margaret deep in the Waitakeri Ranges. There were only six of us there on a brilliantly sunny weekend and the lodge where we were staying was surrounded by bush. Margaret would talk to us for a while and then say 'go out and write' – and we did. When we met up later we all agreed that in those 48 hours plus we felt we had been inspired to do the very best writing we were capable of. In the later years, although I saw Margaret often, it was from more of a distance but she was a person with such generosity of spirit and such a steel trap memory it didn't really matter as it was always possible to take up exactly where one had left off at the last meeting.

I feel privileged indeed to have such happy memories.

~ *Barbara Murison, Wellington.*

Ever since Margaret Mahy first stayed with us in the 1970s when the Hawke's Bay branch of the Children's Literature Association was newly established, she delighted us with her wit and humour, her imaginative powers, her wisdom finely grounded in reality, her encyclopaedic mind, her warmth, generosity, and friendship. Her picture books became part of our family lore. We always looked for hairy brigands in the 'damp and dripping hills' on the Napier-Taupo road. We felt 'sustained', like the witch in the cherry tree, after a good meal. We rejoiced, like the man with a piratical mother, in the music of experiencing the sea: 'the drift and the dream of it, the weave and the wave of it, the fume and the foam of it'. Later came her marvellous novels with their exploration of truth and illusion, and two Carnegie medals, and the international top award of all, the Hans Christian Andersen medal. I cherish many memories in her company on literary and social occasions, such as sitting together in a conference and sharing the anxiety of waiting for news of the birth of our respective grandchildren. And I am deeply indebted to her because her brilliance enabled me to complete the first New Zealand doctorate in children's literature. Through her genius she will live for ever.

~ *Diane Hebley.*

MAY YOU REST PEACEFULLY MARGARET MAHY -MY TRIBUTE TO AN AMAZING SOUL.

Yesterday New Zealand was rocked by the news that Margaret Mahy has died at age 76.

For those of you who do not know of her, Margaret Mahy was one of the worlds greatest children's authors and also one of my country's most important literary figures. When it came to literary success she was an over achiever, with awards spanning decades! One of these was the Carnegie Medal which she won in 1982 and again in 1984, but it was the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2006, the award considered the noble prize of writing that made a really big statement for just how important and influential she was to the writing world internationally.

But no matter how important she was as a writer to New Zealand and the world, she meant more locally here in Christchurch than anywhere else, here she was a Superstar! The city even was proved this to her in 2009, when they presented a bust of her among 11 other great figures on Worcester Boulevard outside the Christchurch Art Centre. YES! you heard me! A bust! They don't made those for just anyone!

Margaret Mahy in her life time wrote more than 100 picture books, 40 novels and 20 collections of short stories, her first Children's book was published in 1969 and in the 1980s she became a full time author! She also wrote some television shows, most notable was the television series *Maddigan's Fantasia* which was renamed to *Maddigan's Quest* and was bought by the BBC and aired 13 episodes in 2006.

Her career was not just limited to writing, she also spent a tremendous amount of time promoting literacy in New Zealand, visiting libraries and giving talks. It was at one of these that I had the joy and pleasure of meeting her, here in my city and her city to, the great city of Christchurch. I only ever met her once, I think that will be something I regret later in life? But then again... once may have been enough? That's just the kind of person she was, a few minutes in her presence could inspire you to do great things or change the course of your life.

My conversation with her was about writing and to be more precise... about Pirate Zebras! She told me how much she loved pirates, she even said she had a tattoo of one! Though what were probably the most important words from the whole short conversation we had were:

'If you ever get a book published, I would get a copy because it sounds like you have a lot of stories to tell.'

I will never forget those words, because of how much of an impact they had on me that very night. I went home and wrote, I mean I really wrote! I think I wrote 15 or so poems and two stories. I was so inspired! One of the greatest literary figures of the world and one of the most influential children's literary figures of all time had told me, that if I had a book published... she would read it! I remember how excited I was that night. It changed my life.

I did send her a letter after that conversation saying thank you for helping me and inspiring me to keep writing, but I never got a reply... so I am not sure if she did ever manage to receive and read it... I kind of hope she did though, because I am sure it would have made her smile and she did tell me she loved getting mail.

I do admit though... that even though I feel so privileged that I had the chance to meet her while she was alive, I do feel a little sad and disappointed in myself that I never did manage to get a book published during her lifetime... but then again... I also feel that her passing is more the reason to keep at it.

To make sure that the legacy of all she taught the writers of New Zealand and the world, as well as children and parents continued... She taught us that being creative isn't wrong, that its not a waste of time. That you shouldn't be afraid to take a step into the unknown and follow your dreams! But most important, if there is anything from the wonderful magnificent life of Margaret Mahy that I learned, its that it doesn't matter where you are from, you can still achieve amazing things.

Here is a quote I think fits this post, from her autobiography, written by Tessa Duder.

We are not changed by experiences as common wisdom has it. What changes us are the stories we tell about our experiences. 'Unless we have formed our lives into story, structured it with words, we can't contemplate the meaning of our lived experience' This is done by turning the raw material of our life into stories, and in the process, 'it can be creatively transformed and given meaning'.

May you rest so ever peacefully and may you live eternally through your work
Love from just one of many changed lives.

~ Matty Angel. Originally published on her website [/www.mattyangel.com].

We first came across *The Wind Between the Stars* when we lived in England. We were captivated, and thrilled that the writer of this story lived in our soon-to-be new home of Christchurch. She expressed so beautifully and simply some of our deepest-held beliefs and attitudes to life and its meaning.

Later on, when we became performing pirates, we were inspired repeatedly by such great romps as *The Great Piratical Rumbustification* and *The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate*. *The Librarian and the Robbers* was also a great favourite of ours.

Every time we met Margaret she was such a good sport. We met up with her when we on tour on the West Coast with a life-sized Moa puppet, made by The Flying Hat Company. She responded with playful enthusiasm and joined us for a walk along the tracks at the Pancake Rocks.

Another time she was guest of honour at a 'Rumbustification' we staged in the Great Hall of the Christchurch Arts Centre. On the way in to the hall, she slipped and cracked a front tooth: but she still came in and was slid about in the middle of our rainbow parachute, gap and all!

~ *Captain Long John Knickers and Nudger of the Natural Magic Pirates (alias Mary and Kerry McCammon).*

The first time I heard of Margaret Mahy was in the early 70s when I was a playcentre mum with two small children. A NZ story *A Lion in the Meadow* had just been published. Someone in America had found it in *Our School Journal*.

Jan Farr was also at playcentre with me and was publishing her stories in the NZ School Journal. Maybe we too could publish something - Jan Farr's words with Pamela Allen drawings.

Since then I have many memories of the person Margaret Mahy.
Reciting *Down the Back of the Chair* with her grandson.
Sometimes with blue hair.
Sometimes eating flowers.
We will miss you Margaret.

~ *Pamela Allen.*

One of my favourite Margaret Mahy stories has to be *Bubble Trouble*. I first heard Margaret recite this by heart at a conference in Australia many years ago, before it had found its way into print. Not only is a remarkable piece of writing, but I was amazed and awed by her flawless rendition of it – most of us couldn't even do that if we had the text in front of us! Funnily enough, at

that time she was insisting that it would remain an oral story, as its delight was in the sound of the words. I couldn't agree more, Margaret; it's a story that begs to be read aloud ... but I doubt I could memorise it and deliver it with such flair, so I am thrilled that she eventually agreed to let it be published so that we can all continue to enjoy and share it.

~ Penny Scown.

The most common question all writers are asked is 'where do you get your ideas from?' I suspect Margaret knew the answer to this universal question. Being the literary magician she was - rather than spoiling the spell - she chose to use her generosity of spirit, kindness, laughter and genius to guide her prodigies along the path to discovering this answer for themselves.

Any writer who reaches her level of achievement and brilliance will no doubt be able to prove to the world that they know the source of all story ideas by the generosity they show to the authors following in their footsteps.

~ Peter Millett.

Margaret Mahy is unique and irreplaceable.

With an international reputation, she chose to live on in Lyttleton, while writing books that were universal, intriguing and successful with children and grownups. Her loyalties were rock-solid.

Her qualities were diverse; an icon and a friend, an actor and a clown, a perfectionist and a rule-breaker, a loner and a joiner, a grown-up with the heart of a child, a tittler of windmills and a conformer, a woman apart and a woman supporter, a dreamer and a writer, a librarian and a reader, serious and effervescent, a challenger and a fellow-worker. She spread her light through our islands and for readers young and older around the world,

~ Ray Richards, Richards Literary Agency.

MARGARET (Mahy, that is).

In response to her Christmas greetings a couple of years back, I wrote to Margaret as follows:

The star of my family for the moment is my granddaughter, Isla, 2 and a half. Isla is an avid and indiscriminate reader. She is particularly fond of the 'New Yorker', quite enjoys 'Time' and is devoted to 'Spot', a canine with a peculiar collection of friends . . . And, above all, (wait for it!) 'Down the Back of the Chair'. Isla is your greatest fan. She tramps around reciting large chunks of your immortal verse. I am sick to death of reading it to her because she

corrects me on the spot if I get a line wrong or have the temerity to add an individual touch of my own. But above all, Margaret Mahy, Isla is MY granddaughter. Until DTBOTC I had been Grandpa Bill to her. 9 times out of 10 these days she addresses me as Uncle Bill, and yes, she has checked various chairs to see what treasure trove may be hidden. I have told her the my will is in the hands of my solicitors and she'll bloody well have to wait!

It must be around 35 years ago that I first met Margaret. The old Department of Education, in the hope of dragooning writers into service for Ready to Read had assembled a group of writers. Margaret, Joy Cowley and I ended up as a small sub-group within the larger group and we wrote stuff and tried it out on each other. I wrote a splendid poem about a spider and read it out to M&J (I think both were knitting at the time). I expected a rapturous reception. Margaret, generous soul that she always was, smiled and murmured, 'Hmm, very interesting Bill.' Joy was more bluntly, perceptively and accurately honest, 'Stick to writing books, Bill.'

And, enduring legacy apart, Margaret was a truly generous soul on so many levels. I remember her at a relatively recent book awards function (one of the few she didn't win!) lugging around a book bag - no, she wasn't touting her own fine product; they were the books she had bought of other writers and illustrators present on the same occasion and she had them there with her to get them signed.

She was a loyal and long-serving member of the NZSA. Around a decade ago now when I was President of the Society we asked Margaret to be our President of Honour for a year. 'It sounds lovely, Bill' she said when I phoned her. 'What would I have to do.' 'Nothing at all,' I replied. 'Well, other than be decorative.' 'I can certainly manage that,' she said, firmly. She did - plus delivering a witty and erudite after dinner speech at the Society's AGM.

A consummate entertainer she even volunteered her services when Tessa, Martin Baynton, Gaelyn Gordon and I - performing as Metaphor were booked to do a performance in Christchurch during their arts' festival. It was near the end of Gaelyn's life and she unable to appear. With scant, well, next-to-no, preparation, Margaret stepped into the breach, performed with enormous plomb, significant assurance, and once or twice even got a line right. Skills, or lack of them, notwithstanding, her presence alone was sufficient . . . although I did advise her afterwards that maybe it wouldn't be wise to give up her day job.

Over the years, Margaret's advice to me as a writer was, if not crucial, at least invaluable at a fundamental level. On the matter of speaking engagements; 'Accept them all Bill . . . But check beforehand that you will be paid!'

On reviews: 'You never remember the good ones. The bad ones? They remain engraved on your mind for a very long time.' How true. I remember saying to her; 'But you've never had a bad review.' She just laughed. Years later she wrote to me; 'Got a poor review in the NY Times. Got a copy of their review last night. By tomorrow I will have stopped thinking about it, mind you - but this is still today!'

On translation and foreign rights: 'You'll get one cheque - and generally not a very big one . . . And after that you'll be lucky to ever get any more.'

Phone calls with Margaret were generally lengthy and always eclectic in the range of topics covered. Quite often about what we were reading or viewing on television. I'm sure she is the only person I have known who read the 'New Scientist' and could launch into the substance of some article she had just devoured and then, in almost the next breath be extolling the wonders of a professional wrestling programme she was avidly following. On another occasion she told me with significant conviction she knew far more about plumbing and water supply problems than obviously I did (I believed her!) and what a pity we didn't live nearer otherwise she would come and give me a hand with the problem I was facing. And, of course, we talked about our families and our mutual friends within the wonderful world of writing for the young.

Two generations, and very soon more, have grown up with the marvellous stories of Margaret Mahy. That she was in all truth and sincerity a living treasure in her time, and ours, the legacy she has left us, young and old, that she will live on in our minds and our hearts into the foreseeable future . . . and probably beyond. Thank you, Margaret, and thank you also to your daughters and your grandchildren for sharing you with us.

~ *William Taylor.*

I arrived in New Zealand as a young Mum of 22, all the way from the other side of the planet. Reading Margaret's books (particularly *The Man Whose Mother Was a Pirate*) showed me how being respectful of children and refusing to patronise them can enhance one's whole experience of raising a family. Margaret's books were full of humour and intelligence, a great use of language, with always that twist of the unexpected. I am sad that we have lost her, but happy to think I can share her through her books with my grandchildren! But who will we rely on now to show up at the library unannounced in full costume and funny wig???

~ *Melissa Anderson Scott.*

I have a very vivid memory of Margaret Mahy from a Storylines Festival family day in Auckland several years ago. I was working as a volunteer and was lucky enough to be assigned to be Margaret's 'minder'.

Everywhere we went she was simply swamped by adoring crowds. Long lines of children gathered whenever she was scheduled to do a book signing. 'Scheduling' was not a concept very close to her heart. She spoke at length to each child, sometimes reciting a poem or drawing a little picture. Officials with watches hovered anxiously. Margaret was completely oblivious to them as she spoke, often at length, to every last child in the queue. Mothers hovered taking photographs, the children were transfixed.



There must be generations of New Zealand children who remember, and treasure, such an encounter with our greatest children's author ever.

~ *Sher Foley.*

It is a sad day indeed for all of Margaret Mahy's thousands of fans and the country generally.

As a former teacher and now grandmother, a member of two poetry groups and a former member of the NZ Women Writers I have seen/read so much of Margaret's work over many years. She truly was a National treasure.

When the beautiful book *A Nest Of Singing Birds* was launched to celebrate 100 years of the School Journal in 2006, I received an invitation as I have written/write for the journals. The book was launched by Helen Clark.

Margaret Mahy was a special guest. When I spoke to her and told how much our four grandchildren loved her books, I mentioned that 13-year-old Nicholas had recently broken his leg right at the start of his first year at college, she was so lovely and gracious and in spite of a long line of people waiting she not only signed a book for Nicholas but also drew a little sketch!

Margaret Mahy will long be remembered with much pleasure and affection.

~ *Jocelyn Kerlake.*

Whatever one said about Margaret Mahy it could never be enough...so thank goodness we have the vast and wonderful treasure chest of her work to say it all for us.

I cannot imagine that any other recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen award - surely the nearest equivalent we have to a Nobel Prize for Children's Literature - would have matched her for the range and scope of her work. This makes it hard to pick a favourite, or even, as I have done, four...

Two of her picture books, *The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate* (originally published in 1973) and *The Moon and Farmer McPhee*, last year's New Zealand Post Children's Picture Book award winner, both express the wonder of one person's being totally overwhelmed by something that transformed them forever - Farmer McPhee by the magic of moonlight, and the 'little man in the brown suit' by his first sight of the ocean - and convey that quite complex transforming moment in a way that even the youngest child can understand.

The Changeover, winner of the 1984 Carnegie Medal (which she had also won two years previously for *The Haunting*), broke new ground in two important ways, being both Margaret's first young adult novel and her first to use a recognisably New Zealand setting. You don't have to live in Christchurch to know that it has always had a darker side beneath the vaunted 'Garden City, English city, staid, old-fashioned city' tags. This sinister shadowy aspect, Gothic in more ways than the architecture we (used to) have, is conveyed in *The Changeover* with the subtlety of a master.

Like *The Changeover*, her 1995 book *The other side of silence* draws on the elements of folktale, but this time in a more direct way. Cinderella, recently succeeded by Snow White, has long been a favourite subject for adult and young adult versions of fairy tales, but Margaret was, as always, more original. Her book is a variant of the lesser-known Grimm story Jorinda and Joringel, skilfully worked into a modern-day thriller with a female hero. Like she was herself in so many ways.

But perhaps what will be remembered most is her faultless touch with rhyme and rhythm. There are an embarrassing number of recent picture books written in often clumsy rhyme, presumably with the idea that this will make them good read-alouds. Margaret, and Lynley Dodd as well, are both brilliant exponents of the rhyming picture book genre, and this should make us proud - it isn't easy to do well.

But Margaret, always modest, pretended that it was.

One of my most memorable Margaret Mahy Moments will always be when she demonstrated this at National Library School Services in Christchurch in 2006, at an evening event to celebrate the just-published *Down the Back of the Chair*. After performing the whole book, from memory of course, she said 'You know, you can make a poem out of anything if you get the rhythm right' and proceeded to do just that, with the Periodic Table.

And in Margaret's hands it did indeed become a poem.

The world was lucky to have Margaret Mahy. And we in New Zealand were even luckier, because we had her close by.

~ Cecily Fisher.

Four different people emailed me of the sad news of Margaret's passing. I am here in London visiting the two very English grand daughters. When I told them the news, they both (ages 5 & 9) knew of Margaret, they have several favourites in their home library and chose *The Great White Man-eating Shark* for the bedtime story.....a tribute to a writer we all, in this family will remember with affection.

~ Lesley Clark.

'The World's Highest Tray Cloth' in *Out of the Deep and Other Stories From New Zealand and the Pacific*. Edited by Tessa Duder and Lorraine Orman. Reed Publishing/Storylines Children's Literature Trust 2007.

When Tessa and I planned this anthology we were determined to include a story by Margaret Mahy. At that time Margaret was very busy so she left it up to us to find a story. Nothing seemed quite right. Then Jo Noble suggested a little-known story from *The Chewing Gum Rescue and Other Stories* written by Margaret and published by Puffin. The story's distinctive New Zealand tone was just what we were looking for – combined with Margaret's trademark whimsy. Based on an incident from her own childhood in Whakatane, it tells how a hated and badly-sewn tray cloth ended up flying bravely at the top of an enormous pine tree. This is the final sentence: 'But it did not matter because by then Helen had worked out that the world was full of tall trees and that she was the one who was going to hang flags on top of them all.' Margaret Mahy certainly went on to hang flags on the top of many, many tall trees.

Margaret found magic in everything and everyone - and then shared it with the world. We must try to carry a fragment of her magic with us always.

~ Lorraine Orman.

Margaret was a huge inspiration to me as a writer. She also powered up the imagination of my children throughout their childhood with her books. I'll never forget when my daughter was four years old and we waited in a long queue to get a book signed. As soon as we handed over our book, my daughter who usually was very shy in front of people she did not know, leaned on the table and told Margaret all about Sparky, our mongrel cat. Margaret drew her a cat and told her all about her pets. She engaged with my daughter like she was the only person in the queue. She made each child feel special. She will be missed world wide.

~ Maria Gill.

Lots of great memories. Margaret drew a picture of a lion in my daughter's copy of *Down the Back of the Chair*, and she was so lovely, and hearing I was a librarian and would-be writer she encouraged me to write down my stories too. The book that went down so well in our family was *The Librarian and the Robbers*.

~ Helen O'Carroll.

Whenever I met Margaret – and I'll digress immediately to say how often one met her; she was so generous with her time; if she were able to get to a book festival, a Storylines, a school she'd been invited to, she would do so willingly and happily – whenever I met her, I was struck by the enthusiasm with she greeted people. You felt that she was delighted to see you; that she'd been waiting to carry on with the particularly illuminating and fascinating discussion she'd been having with you last time. You instantly felt valued and validated.

Her pleasure in seeing you was so genuine: there was never any affectation. She simply – although (second digression) I'm chary of applying the words 'simple' or 'simply' to someone as multi-faceted as her – let's say she totally genuinely was pleased to meet a fellow-writer.

And that leads straight to another quality, which I'm sure others have mentioned or will mention. She lifted your sense of self-worth. You came away from five or 55 minutes with Margaret feeling buoyant and worthwhile. She always spoke to you as someone whose opinion mattered; someone who was worth listening to. I read a definition of love somewhere that said it was the quality of making things flourish, and you left (unwillingly) Margaret's company, with a sense that the world and you were both more flourishing than when you began speaking to her. It was another aspect of that

generosity, that love for people and ideas and language which were among her glorious strengths.

You could also leave Margaret's company healthily chastened. I've long been fascinated by astronomy. I belong to the local astronomical society; I've tried to write fiction and non-fiction about it; I love buttonholing hapless victims and lecturing them about it. Once when I was with Margaret, she mentioned she'd been reading about the exotic, mysterious Dark Matter that makes up so much of our Universe. I smiled condescendingly: 'Well, Margaret,' I began, 'There's still a lot of controversy about the exact nature of the beast.'

Margaret nodded: 'Yes, and I'm fascinated by the Sloan Digital Sky Survey project, and the way it's using galaxy formation to determine whether Hot Dark Matter or Cold Dark Matter is the more likely candidate.....' By the time our conversation ended, I'd learned a lot more about astronomy.

And of course this also contained absolutely no affectation. She was so modest; too absorbed in the rest of the world to pay any heed to her own reputation.

I've said on many occasions that Margaret was the only writer I know whom I'd call a genius. I mean that word in its original sense of a spirit that breathes into someone or something; that infuses someone with a power that can't be defined. There was something magic about her. Like everyone else here, I feel privileged and elevated from having known her. To her family and the rest of her friends, my very best wishes, and my thanks for your love to her.

~ *David Hill.*

My favourite memories are of reading books like *The Three-Legged Cat* to children at library storytimes and *The Great White Man-Eating Shark* to classes that walked to the library from Birkenhead Primary School. In holiday programmes we made masks, collages, and murals of her quirky fun-filled characters. And when I taught writing classes at the Continuing Education Dept at Auckland Uni, I regularly used Margaret's books as examples of 'what works' in children's books. There's an almost cheeky Dahlesque quality to her writing that makes everyone chuckle. There's also sunshine and goodness. Perhaps that last point is the reason I will never tire of reading her stories.

~ *Kathy White.*

It's a long story, but I'll try to keep it within my allotted time.

Years ago I was trying to introduce my husband John to all the great writers I knew and loved and I gave him a copy of Margaret's book, *The Catalogue of the Universe*. Now he is a loyal husband and still maintains that Katherine Paterson is his favourite writer, but I couldn't help but notice his overwhelming passion for Margaret's story. I mean he'd never bought twelve copies of one of my books at one time, and pressed them upon friends and almost complete strangers, demanding that they read it. But, fortunately, unlike ordinary writers, I completely lack a sense of envy. I was very pleased that he was so singularly devoted to such a fine book as *The Catalogue of the Universe*. Since he discovered her writing he got to know Margaret herself, and joy oh joy for any ardent fan, he visited her in New Zealand and entertained her in our Vermont home, in the company, of course, of his loving, loyal and understanding spouse.

Looking forward to the Millennium, The Horn Book Magazine asked a number of writers to say what 20th century book each of them most wanted to be available for children in the twenty-first century. I thought John might be interested in the book that Margaret had selected. *The Flint Heart?* Neither of us had ever heard of it, but John, being John, was bound and determined to remedy that profound ignorance on our part. This was the book that Margaret Mahy thought should last for another hundred years, and it was on the brink of extinction. He tried to get the book republished with no success, so in the end we 'freely abridged it.' When I emailed Margaret to tell her what we had done, I got the most gracious, most Margaret like reply. She was so pleased, she said, that another generation would be able to read this wonderful story.

Among the endearing characters in *The Flint Heart* is five-year-old Unity, who like any proper five-year-old is perpetually surprised. She begins almost every sentence with the words: 'I wonder.'

I think our dear friend Margaret must have been a lot like Unity when she was a child. In a lecture she gave back in 1989 she tells that when she was very young she read in a family encyclopaedia the then 'scientific fact' that the world had once dropped off the sun and that it would someday come to an end. She pompously asserted this fact in the schoolyard, only to find herself chased home by unbelieving, irate schoolmates who were intent on drawing blood.

'Yet,' she says, 'though the scientist who advised the editors of *Arthur Mee's Encyclopedia* about the beginning of the world had made what I now take to be a genuine mistake, it was a mistake that fixed my attention in childhood, and (it is even tempting to think) enabled me to see something true which stayed true, even when the information turned out to be false. If so, the true

thing was wonder . . . and so I have come to think wonder must be a part of truth, but a part which our physical systems are anxious to conceal. A perpetual state of wonder and desire (which seems to me the truest state to be in, confronted with the universe) is certainly not the most practical state to live in. We are biologically engineered to have the wonder filtered out of our lives, to learn to take astonishing things for granted so that we don't waste too much energy on being surprised but get on with the eating and mating, gardening, feeding cats, complaining about taxes, and so on.'

But as we all know, the wonder was never really filtered out of Margaret which is why we loved her and admired her and why today we look at the world in ways we never did before we met her. We shall always be grateful for having known the wonder-filled and wonderful Margaret. And how singularly blessed we are that we were able to call her our friend.

~ *Katherine Paterson.*

During my years as a relieving teacher, I carried a collection of Margaret Mahy short stories in my reliever's box of tricks. I could walk into a classroom as a complete stranger and no matter how difficult or unsettled the class, if I could just get them to begin to listen to one of those stories, I would have the class in the palm of my hand. This was the genius of Margaret Mahy. Although she herself never knew it, she was my close ally through many years of relief teaching in dozens of schools in the Waikato and Auckland.

~ *Tui Allen.*

I remember reading Margaret's *The Changeover* many years ago, without really knowing very much about who she was, and was completely blown away by it. I was reading purely for pleasure and it was nothing to do with my work in publishing but I never forgot *The Changeover* and followed her astonishing career on the sidelines while I got on with everyday life. I knew she was published all over the world and I knew she already had a literary agent. End of story, or so I thought. I never dreamed I'd ever get to handle her work, work with her.

When the day arrived for me to represent Margaret's literary work it was with considerable humility and some trepidation that I began to try to get head round the enormity of her output and take stock of where she was in her career, what should she be doing. The first thing to do was to read a typescript she'd been working on for some 25 years and which her previous agent didn't like, didn't think would sell. I thought it would sell if certain changes were made to it to fit the then market, and I could find an editor who would understand what she was about, but how to tell Margaret Mahy that she'd need to revise? I'd been told by various people that this particular book

was very important to her so that made it even more difficult. I chose my words with care but I basically said she should do some initial revision, possibly more when the book was under contract to a publisher, but that the writing was quite wonderful. Was that all right? Back came the reply that she was thrilled I liked it, would be happy to work on revision and, as far as the writing was concerned, no amount of flattery was too gross! That book became *The Magician of Hoad* over here.

That email sealed the author-agent relationship, as you can imagine, but emails are never as good as talking to someone in person and I realised that Margaret wasn't going to come to the UK in the foreseeable future, if ever again, so I decided to come to see her and I got on a plane to New Zealand, meeting her for the first time at Christchurch airport and staying in the bach in the garden so we could talk every day during the visit.

It was autumn and I can see the leaves falling about the house and bach, with the water at the bottom of the garden, can remember walking with Margaret and her then dog Baxter, while she talked. She talked of many things, so often spiced up with some humour or a little wickedness, but she seemed so absolutely at one with the land, the water – and the dog. We shared a love of animals, dogs in particular.

Margaret was generous with her time with me, taking me to places she knew I wouldn't have seen but for her and I loved it. And driving about, she would suddenly start quoting, in particular, the famous 'Down the Back of the Chair' – perfectly, of course! Her sense of rhythm was immaculate.

My visit to Margaret will stay with me always and it was just great. Above all, it made me understand – just a little – how she ticked, and that made it easier for me to work with her in a way which suited her. She was the most appreciative of clients, always thanked anyone in our office who sent her contracts to sign or a form to complete, sending a little drawing usually, to accompany the return letter. The drawings were nearly always of animals, often her own dog or cat, and always a little bit witty.

But what Margaret liked doing more than anything was writing. She had views on editing and illustration but she was most likely to agree with what was suggested and anything she didn't like she'd let you know in the mildest of terms. But the business side of writing she was more than happy to leave to someone else and that someone is currently me. It's my job now to keep as much of her work available as possible so that future generations of children can be fired up by her words. The magic and imagination live on. It has been an enormous privilege to work with Margaret – and, above all, it's been fun – as she was.

We`ll be having our own memorial to Margaret shortly, which is going to take the form of a party for all her friends in publishing here, which includes various people involved on the international side of her work too and there will be readings too.

~ Mandy Little, Margaret's London agent.

Your rainbow personality brings sunshine to our school.
We will remember you by your wonderful stories.
Thank you for your books.
New Zealand cries because of your death.... wishing you were here.
Rest in Peace.
R.I.P.

~Tauhei Combined School Students.