

**Keynote speech for Storylines National Children's Writers and
Illustrators' Hui, 6-8 October 2017**

The rise and rise of children's publishing

by Tessa Duder

Once upon a time – about 1978 - a young mother of four was struck in the middle of the night with an idea for a children's novel. A sailing adventure! A family in peril! Would they survive the night?!

This was very odd: she'd never written a word of fiction in her life. Sometime during the four years it took to write the story and get it published, she cut out this cartoon from the *Listener* and filed it away. Miraculously, thirty-five years and about fifty books later, she was able to find it in a musty box file.

Elderly man to non-so-young woman at cocktail party: And what are you falling back on to writing children's books from?

We may laugh at the sub-text of that remark, but actually 'falling back onto children's books' from success as adult writers has some noble exemplars: Leo Tolstoy, Oscar Wilde, Ian Fleming, A.A. Milne. Our own Janet Frame, Joy Cowley, William Taylor, Kate De Goldi, Graeme Lay, Barbara Else.

Though it's more often the reverse: highly skilled children's writers 'falling back' onto writing for adults: think Mandy Hagar, Gaelyn Gordon, David Hill, Bernard Beckett, Fleur Beale, Roald Dahl, John Marsden, J.K. Rowling.

The long path to success of *Under the Mountain*

To consider one such fallen angel of the '*falling back on to children's*' variety, let's recall the New Zealand of 1974.

After the sudden death of Norman Kirk, Bill Rowling is struggling as Prime Minister. Robert Muldoon is about to burst on the scene. Ordinary Kiwis are newly enjoying colour television, reeling from Britain's entry into the Common Market. They are vigorously objecting to French nuclear testing in the Pacific and sending our boys to Vietnam.

And one grey, misty morning in the Auckland suburb of Mt Eden, a 43-year-old teachers' college librarian is walking to work. His eyes are drawn up to that shrouded, looming volcano, Maungawhau. He muses, what sinister forces might lie beneath Auckland's volcanic field?

With his wife's support, he has recently made the hard decision to give up his day job and to 'fall back' onto writing a children's book – in his case from four moderately successful adult novels.

The motivation? Biographer Rachael Barrowman says he wants to write for his two young children, with one now just at reading age. He admires Alan Garner's fantasies, likes the idea of an Auckland setting. And his family needs income; those adult novels have won him awards and attention but not much money.

One or more successful children's books could mean being able to give up the bread-and-butter work of writing scripts for *Close to Home*, one of the earliest TV soaps. This is not 'falling back,' this is a sound commercial decision.

As we know, Maurice Gee went on to a distinguished career as a prolific novelist for adults, young adults and children. But the writing and publication

of *Under the Mountain* provides a cautionary tale for us all, notwithstanding the book's subsequent success, the awards and the movie, the TV and theatre adaptations.

In 1975 he offered the British publisher Faber a hefty manuscript, clumsily titled *The War of the Smiths and the Jones*. Their readers praised the setting and thought the story 'exciting and ingenious' if not entirely credible. The ending, involving the destruction of Lake Pupuke and Takapuna, was pretty bleak.

That's a *no* from them.

Undaunted, Gee approached Hodder & Stoughton, whose Kiwi editor was encouraging. But the London office thought the manuscript much too long, the dialogue unconvincing, and a major re-write necessary.

Stating somewhat defensively that he still thought it was 'an exciting and competent piece of juvenile fiction in its present form', he talked to small but discerning publisher Christine Cole Catley. She began negotiations for a co-publication, but eventually, after further re-writes and much publisher to-and-froing, the manuscript was picked up by Oxford University Press, New Zealand and UK.

A second horrible title *Alias Wilberforce and Jones* was replaced by *Under the Mountain*.

So, in 1979, the book was triumphantly launched at Dorothy Butler's Bookshop, winning almost universally glowing reviews, awards and a devoted readership. The creation of this children's classic, Gee's best-selling title and still in print, had taken five years and involved four publishers, three titles and at least three major re-writes.

A glorious new era

The story behind *Under the Mountain* tells us a good deal about the realities of getting published, then and little different now: the need for self-belief, stamina, willingness to put in the sometimes tedious grind of re-writing, and above all, persistence. I'm put in mind of Tauranga's Sherryl Jordan who over seven years wrote twelve novels (none of them published) and 27 picture books (three published) before she won a Choysa Bursary leading to the publication of the award-winning fantasy *Rocco* in 1991. There's perseverance and self-belief for you.

But I think Maurice Gee did more than produce a winner, the first of fourteen notable works of fiction for young readers.

As someone whose debut novel appeared three years later, I believe *Under the Mountain* triggered a glorious new era in New Zealand's children's publishing. Not so much a renaissance as an explosion, a coming of age.

Those who know their literary history already have their hands up! Excuse me, in 1982 did not historian Betty Gilderdale publish *A Sea Change*, a comprehensive account extolling *145 years* of New Zealand children's publishing? What about those fine writers and illustrators already loved by many young readers: Elsie Locke, Ruth Dallas, Ron Bacon, Pamela Allen, Beverley Dunlop, Joan de Hamel, Anne De Roo, Eve Sutton, Phyllis Johnston; before them, Esther Glen, Russell Clark, Brian Sutton-Smith?

What about all those authors and illustrators producing material for the *School Journal* since 1907? And by 1980 weren't the picture books of Joy Cowley, Lynley Dodd and in particular Margaret Mahy already achieving international success?

All true! But in the 1970s Mahy and Cowley, and a few others like Anne de Roo, were being published in UK and USA, with scant *local* promotion and not yet any writers' festivals to showcase popular authors. There were no children's book awards other than the librarians' low-key Esther Glen for writing and Russell Clark for illustration, and no 'creative writing' courses or manuscript assessment services on offer.

Adult fiction with the likes of Gee, Janet Frame, Maurice Shadbolt, Keri Hulme, Marilyn Duckworth, Witi Ihimaera, C.K. Stead and Fiona Kidman was flowering, but in 1978 so few children's books were being published for the redoubtable Elsie Locke, author of the 1965 classic *The Runaway Settlers*, to write a long piece for the *Listener*, boldly urging Kiwi publishers to do something about it.

A fairy godmother

Enter the fairy godmother of New Zealand children's publishing. *Under the Mountain* was no flash in the pan.

Editor Wendy Harrex, returned from six years' working with Oxford's legendary children's editor, Ron Heapy, saw Gee's novel as only the first of an expanding OUP local children's list.

In the five years that followed came Gee's *Half Men of O* series, Gavin Bishop's *Mrs McGinty and the Bizarre Plant*, *Bidibidi* and *Mr Fox*, my own *Night Race to Kawau*, *Jellybean* and *Alex*, the first of the Alex Quartet. There were also Joanna Orwin's two fine *Ihaka* novels and Jack Lasenby's controversial YA book *The Lake*. All meticulously edited, hardback, and taken to overseas markets.

Regrettably, OUP's commitment to picture books and serious fiction for children's and YA didn't last much beyond the decade, but a bright, new torch had been lit.

Wendy Harrex, later the publisher at Otago University Press, was also a vocal advocate for establishing children's book awards. The Esther Glen Medal, Wendy argued in 1980, is not enough! The challenge was taken up in 1982 by the Government Printing Office, later by AIM (on the basis that books and toothpaste are both good for children's health) and then until 2014, New Zealand Post.

Awards energised publishers and booksellers, provoked media coverage, reviews, academic attention and of course increased sales, to families, libraries and schools.

For the first time, as local publishers responded to the increasing emphasis during the 1980s on New Zealand content in the school curriculum and teachers' college courses, booksellers could display significant numbers of local titles on their shelves.

And for schools and the teaching of literacy, growth during this period was spectacular.

For a while in the 80s and 90s it was confidently repeated that the exports of educational books exceeded that of New Zealand wine. (Not true now, methinks!) The radical new reading programmes pioneered by Wendy Pye's Sunshine Books and Avelyn Davidson at Shortland were providing primary classrooms with the small but perfectly formed stories of Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley, June Melser, Pauline Cartwright and a host of others.

As international interest and offshore sales boomed, so did the potential for versatile and hard-working children's writers and illustrators to actually make a sustainable living.

The growth of powerful supporters

Helpful income from elsewhere was also forthcoming. In 1978 Lynley Dodd had been the first recipient of the Choysa Bursary, \$5000 going to a writer or illustrator, the sole grant then on offer.

By mid-eighties, children's authors, illustrators and publishers were able to apply to the QE2 Arts Council Literature Programme for two major and other lesser grants.

As one of the judging panel for seven years, allocating a considerable sum of money 'ring-fenced' for the children and YA writers, I loved those days of decision-making, the robust debates with sometimes quite surprising outcomes.

I believe we made good and fair decisions. Those grants accelerated the careers of important rising stars like William Taylor, Pauline Cartwright, Gaelyn Gordon, Sherryl Jordan and Martin Baynton.

Controversially, the arrival of Creative New Zealand in 1994 with its uncompromising neoliberal emphasis on 'contestability', saw these ring-fenced grants and our panel disestablished. Children's writers and illustrators were now pitted against adult writers, dancers, potters, composers, playwrights, painters and theatre companies. All 'artforms' were now one, the complicated judging based on peers marking check sheets. Their processes have been modified over the years but anecdotal evidence from applicants in recent years indicates a reluctance to apply, and not many are successful.

As the 1980s drew to a close, the genius of Margaret Mahy, with her astonishing outpouring of award-winning novels and wacky picture books, was at last being recognised in her own country. As was the equally prolific Joy

Cowley, author since about 1970 of some fine novels and more 'school readers' than she or anyone can actually count. (Last tally, 800? 900?)

Others were also carving out good careers: besides the seemingly inexhaustible Maurice Gee, Gavin Bishop and Jack Lasenby, there were Lynley Dodd with Hairy Maclary and friends, Robyn Belton with the equally iconic Greedy Cat, along with Elizabeth Fuller's delightful Mrs Wishy-Washy. William Taylor with his ground-breaking comic novels, Sherryl Jordon and Gaelyn Gordon with a steady stream of original and haunting fantasies.

By 1993 there were a hundred authors and illustrators well-known enough for Ashton Scholastic to ask Tom Fitzgibbon and Barbara Spiers to put together the volume they called *Beneath Southern Skies*, each entry afforded a short biography and critical appraisal of their work.

As the millennium approached, we writers and illustrators for the young had become a professional force to be reckoned with, attracting powerful and devoted supporters.

Thirty-five of us had gathered at Joy Cowley's home in the Marlborough Sounds over the glorious Easter of 1992. From that first hui arose two more similar events in Wellington, along with the national Storylines Festival. Featuring family days and story tours, this annual festival was run by Storylines from 1993 for the next 23 years, bringing literally hundreds of authors together with tens of thousands of children in six major centres. Generous funding from Creative New Zealand, philanthropic trusts, local councils and others ensured that these events remained free.

Storylines also instituted awards for achievement and for new writers, along with its annual listing of Notable Books in four genres. The New Zealand Post

awards, expertly run and hotly contested, were now firmly in place, raising profiles and promoting sales.

New expectations

Expectations have correspondingly risen. Publicists now want writers to be good talkers too, good interviewees, have backstories that will interest journalists.

Those happy to stand in front of large groups of children and teenagers are in demand to visit schools through the Book Council's admirable Writers in Schools programme, begun in 1972 and its outreach, largely thanks to us, growing year by year.

Leading authors are now getting invitations to give serious talks on children's literature to adult groups and to appear in the writers' festivals being established across New Zealand, Australia and beyond.

And our torch bearer, the magical and marvellous Margaret Mahy, has received the country's ultimate civil honour: membership of the elite Order of New Zealand, alongside prime ministers, opera singers, captains of industry and Maori leaders.

Come the millennium, fast forward to about 2012.

By now Margaret Mahy has achieved the world's pinnacle: IBBY's Hans Christian Andersen Medal, awarded to her in Macau in 2006 for 'her lasting contribution to world children's literature'.

Our book awards are featuring exciting newcomers like Kyle Mewburn, Brian Falkner, Bernard Beckett, Sally Sutton, Melinda Syzmanik, Leonie Agnew, Donovan Bixley and Anna Mackenzie as well as those in confident mid-career

like Fleur Beale, David Elliot, Gwenda Turner, Ken Catran, Kate De Goldi, Mandy Hagar, Barbara Else.

And not forgetting the hardy perennials like Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley, David Hill, Pamela Allen and Jack Lasenby. Some years, the supreme 'Book of the Year' award is going to beautifully written and designed works of non-fiction, books on penguins and other birds, painting, history and Maori myths and legends.

Reality check: Part One

But come the Global Financial Crash of 2007 and the tsunami of new digital technology - e-books, Kindles, interactive educational texts, blogs and websites. Together they generate massive changes to the whole publishing industry.

In 2013 the unthinkable merger of giants Penguin and Random House is announced. A third, HarperCollins, seriously downsizes the New Zealand office and with it, the children's list. Other respected publishers like Reed Publishing, Hachette, Longacre, Mallinson Rendel, Pearson Education and Learning Media either emigrate offshore or disappear altogether.

Authors hear horror stories of downturns in sales, of booksellers big and small struggling or even closing.

The biggest, Whitcoulls, is reportedly concentrating more on gifts, stationary, puzzles and toys. Schools and parents are increasingly said to prefer—misguidedly in my opinion - information books over stories.

One mainstream publisher curtly rejects new manuscripts by three of their long-standing, award-winning children's authors with hardly a backward glance – I know, I was one of them.

Just where does our community sit in these years of turmoil, we compulsive storytellers, doggedly toiling away at home, full-time or with our writing hours fitted in around family or necessary day jobs?

Fewer publishers and imprints mean fewer avenues open to authors, right? Publishers seem less interested in fostering an author's career, yes? Are we now being seen more 'contractors', one manuscript at a time? Not as respectful partners with careers to develop? Or even as a publisher's good investment?

Consider the media, reviewing and academic attention paid to Man Booker winner Eleanor Catton and other luminaries like Witi Ihimaera, Karl Stead, Elizabeth Knox, Jenny Patrick and Emily Perkins.

Should the scarcity of *children's* book reviewing, interviews and commentary (except around awards time) be taken as a clear sign that children's publishing in this country doesn't count for much?

Therefore can be disparaged or ignored as 'the junior arm', confined to the literary margins?

Any serious debate on children's literature as a *substantial and autonomous genre in its own right* needn't be included in writers' festivals?

Reality check: Part Two

Figures and opinions obtained from various industry sources gainsay this perception.

Apart from romance writing which has surged both here and globally, largely on the tidal wave of online e-books, *the reality is exactly the opposite*: publishing for children, trade and educational together, is a major player in

New Zealand publishing overall, and has been for many years. Take out the educational publishers, children's trade books still dominate.

As far back as 2008, writing as the Society of Authors' President of Honour, leading short story writer Owen Marshall declared that while there'd been a splendid flowering of commercial non-fiction, the genre of writing for children and young people has had

'perhaps the most spectacular growth and success.' His A-list of writers and illustrators 'are all among our most successful writers artistically and financially, and some have established international reputations.'

Nine years on, he is backed up even more strongly by latest Nielsen BookScan figures for locally-published children's trade book sales. Over the past five years, while total sales volume of all New Zealand-published books has dropped by around 4%, local children's books have gone up around 3 %.

In 2016 children's books accounted for over a third of all New Zealand-published sales by volume. Measured by actual dollar value, they were nearly a quarter of all sales.

In 2009 when Nielsen began recording figures, there were 153 publishers (trade and educational) selling New Zealand-published children's titles. In 2016, incredibly, there were 304.

Note also: of the current top 20 children's publishers measured by value, eleven are small independents or self-publishers. Evidence of their commitment and success can be seen in individual growth percentages over the past two years, ranging from a modest 51%, to 130%, to 588% and in one case, an astounding 2547%.

A more global view is provided by the 2015 report on *The Economic Contribution of the New Zealand book publishing industry*, compiled for Copyright Licensing New Zealand Limited.

In 2015 sales of books through traditional channels, that is bookshops, were at their highest for four years; two years on, the figures are likely to be similarly upbeat.

Sales of e-books have grown at a similar rate. Book publishing in New Zealand directly contributes \$167 million to national GDP, employing nearly 3000 across the country.

And to the general air of positivity, *educational* publishing remains an important contributor, exporting to over 60 countries.

The one shadow over this cheering landscape is local publishing for young adults. Nielsen's figures show little growth, despite some fine YA books in the last five years by Mandy Hagar, Brian Falkner, Fleur Beale, Kate De Goldi, David Hill, Bernard Beckett and (right back from retirement) Maurice Gee.

Reasons are debatable, but I'd venture the surprising lack of vigorous publisher marketing into their target market of intermediate and high schools, with corresponding lack of teacher and student awareness. There's little serious YA reviewing in either mainstream or specialist media; and behold those global bestsellers with movie tie-ins, huge promotional budgets and starring roles on booksellers' display stands.

In the wider scheme of things

YA apart, there are other measurements showing the contribution of children's writers and illustrators to publishing prosperity and the nation's cultural vitality - but not widely known.

Consider the health of the awards, measured by the number of submissions. The tally of trade books entered for the Book Trust's national children's awards and Storylines Notable Book lists has been maintained for some years now at around 110 to 125 – a far cry from the ten or so being published when Betty Gilderdale published *A Sea Change* in 1982.

Public Lending Right figures are another measure. This \$2 million government fund provides for registered New Zealand authors, illustrators and editors to receive annual payments in recognition of their books being available in libraries. Amounts are calculated on the number of copies of a book of 24 pages or more held in libraries, determined by regular surveys.

The latest available figures show that nearly half of all payments go to adult non-fiction, 15% to adult fiction, and 35% to children's fiction and non-fiction. But the majority of the top twenty authors, earning from \$10,000 to nearly \$35,000, are children's writers, those with 35 or more books in the system.

Adding up the eligible titles of this top twenty, 76% were children's fiction and non-fiction.

Numbers, however positive, of course never tell the whole story - not even in the neoliberal world we've lived in for the past forty years, which puts such strenuous ideological emphasis on competition, self-interest, measurement and accountability. More than ever, as the neoliberal star fades, the human stories need to be told.

Here's one not often mentioned. I suggest our community plays a disproportionately large role in the country's overall literary scene: in the last two decades three of us, Kyle Mewburn, William Taylor and earlier, myself,

have served three or more challenging years as Society of Authors' National President. Believe me, the job was highly political, unpaid, and no sinecure.

The Society's President of Honour tribute has been awarded to Joan de Hamel, Elsie Locke, Maurice Gee, Joy Cowley, William Taylor and Gavin Bishop. Hard-working regional office-holders include Diana Menefy, Philippa Werry, Anna Mackenzie.

And for some there's been the achievement of winning university residencies and other major literary awards against 'grownup' writers – besides Mahy of course, Jack Lasenby, William Taylor, Joanna Orwin, Vince Ford, Mandy Hagar, Kate De Goldi, Bernard Beckett, Paula Green, Gavin Bishop among others.

Three of our friends have published critically acclaimed memoirs: Dorothy Butler, Joy Cowley and William Taylor; two, Margaret Mahy and Lynley Dodd, have had serious adult books written about their international careers.

A goodly number of A-listers already mentioned have won honorary doctorates and high civil honours.

A supportive community

In my 35 years as a published author, I've often heard it said that the country's writers and illustrators for the young are notably, even unusually collegial and supportive of each other.

I'm told only the poets, along with the authors of romance and sci-fi, organise regular national gatherings like ours. KiwiWrite4Kids, in its time providing workshops and upbeat encouragement for newcomers, was a terrific writers' initiative. These days Facebook communities are profitably sharing news, views and helpful information.

By and large, we do don't feuds, the sort like the prolonged and bitter stoush between literary heavyweights that broke out in 1990 over the ill-advised purchase of a writers' flat in Bloomsbury. Unsurprisingly, for a while, damaging headlines served only to convince the public that writers were generally a disputatious and thoroughly ungrateful bunch of people.

But we've had our headlines and dramas over award winners. Maurice Gee's powerful story of bullying and revenge, *The Fat Man*, 1995 book of the year, prompted veteran bookseller and author Dorothy Butler to roundly declare in the *Listener* that it stood to 'rob children of their childhood.'

In 1998 Paula Boock's *Dare, Truth or Promise*, the first New Zealand YA novel about a lesbian relationship, caused an outcry from religious extremists who got themselves as far as primetime television to complain. And more recently, Ted Dawe's infamous *Into the River* was subject to a right-wing legal challenge and for a while, until sense prevailed, actually banned.

Common to all three cases was a noticeable lack of informed commentary on the quality of the actual writing. The public debate swirled for weeks around the subject matter, the swearing, the sex, the drugs, in two cases the bleak endings; few questioned whether these were actually *outstanding works of literature*.

Surely, before any praise for a teen novel as being ground-breakingly 'gritty' and 'tough', 'gutsy' and 'bravely pushing the limits' should first come the fundamental requirement that it is 'well-written'.

For the families and librarians who shell out good money, for the young people who are beyond question influenced by *everything* they read, there needs to

be more reviewing, commentary and analysis of what is being published and what is winning awards – and not just when the gatekeepers rise up.

Other worlds, e.g. our own

What else is needed, what can we collectively and individually do to ensure that New Zealand's young are being entertained and inspired by our own narratives from our own diverse cultures and history - so that they grow up knowing that there is an exciting world close at hand beside those of Harry Potter, the Wimpy Kid, Captain Underpants, Clarice Bean or Katniss Everdeen?

Let's not forget: all of these multi-million-dollar triumphs began with a writer in an office or café, or at a kitchen table, typing experimental words onto a screen, compelled by some wisp of an idea, an oddity of situation, a quirk of character, something curious overheard, some historical titbit stumbled upon, to begin fashioning a poem, a short story, even a seven-book epic. It will take months, more often years of solid work to produce a manuscript.

That's just the beginning: now, how to find a publisher, get your labour of love out there, onto the shelves of your local bookshop and into the hands of parents and teachers and children.

I suggest there are good reasons to be cautiously optimistic. Some I've given already: new publishers opening up, reports from here and overseas of young people turning away from their screens and back to books, and that booksellers are doing steady even excellent business.

Has it always been 'so hard to get published' as now? If we agree that our young people need the best books we can provide, as ideally with everything else, should it not be 'hard to get published'?

When my sailing adventure appeared in 1982, I was a literary debutante, naive and ignorant of the ways of publishers, booksellers, marketing. Early in those four years of writing I'd asked Dorothy Butler if I had any talent at all – she said 'yes, but this is a sailing story, you've written 30,000 words and you haven't even got your family on the boat!' Stop preaching, start again!

Quietly studying novelists currently popular like K.M. Peyton, Katherine Paterson and Susan Cooper, and posing as a young mum ostensibly just wanting to know about good books for my four daughters, I attended meetings and day schools of the Children's Literature Association, forerunner of Storylines. The greatly over-written manuscript I eventually presented to Oxford was accepted immediately, but boy, it needed work! Together Wendy Harrex and I trimmed it back from 90,000 to 60,000 words. Up until the time of submission, I'd had no help at all.

Consider the options

Now, what is different? There are the 'writing for children' courses run by accomplished authors at universities and polytechs, also by private 'creative writing' schools. At writers' festivals invited luminaries share their stories and techniques.

The Internet offers the platform for zillions of websites, blogs and Facebook pages imparting knowledge, hints and structured courses.

And there are multiple 'how to' books; Joy Cowley's *Writing from the Heart*, published by Storylines, offers some of the wisest and most practical advice you'll find anywhere.

With a draft finished, or even only partially complete, you can seek expert help, more available now than ever before. One positive consequence of the

publisher downturn of five years ago has been highly trained and experienced in-house editors, made redundant and now offering their skills as manuscript assessors, editors, proof-readers, counsellors, for reasonable fees. It could be the best money you ever spend.

The New Zealand Society of Authors runs manuscript assessment and mentoring schemes, for illustrators as well as writers, and you don't even have to be a member. (Though professionally, of course, you should!) A few publishers also offer mentoring opportunities.

Storylines' three awards for unpublished manuscripts – the Joy Cowley award for a picture book text, the Tom Fitzgibbon award for a junior novel and the Tessa Duder award for a YA manuscript - include monetary prizes and publication offers.

And down in Dunedin, the University of Otago provides an annual residency, the only one specifically for children's writers. A welcome new and lively website, *The Sapling*, presents news and views on New Zealand children's publishing.

For aspiring illustrators, well-established courses are run at various tertiary institutions in the major centres. The Storylines Gavin Bishop award for illustration offers the unpublished winner critical advice as well as likelihood of publication. For those already published, the Sandra Morris Illustration Agency is on hand with advice and publisher contacts.

Christchurch's Painted Stories group organises exhibitions in South Island centres. And every two years a leading illustrator wins the Arts Foundation's Mallinson Rendel award, a \$10,000 prize instituted by publisher Ann Mallinson in memory of her husband.

Numerous options

Thanks to the wonders of technology, we writers and illustrators now have publishing options undreamt of twenty, even ten years ago. Whether approaching mainstream, small independents or indie publishers, or first trying to find an agent here or overseas, the options are now more numerous than they ever were.

Some high-flying Kiwi authors - for instance Brian Falkner, Bernard Beckett and Stacy Gregg – have found mainstream publishers in UK and America. Others have signed up with Australian companies like Walker Books and Text. There are several New Zealand literary agents, and more than a few writers now have offshore literary agents.

And then there's the phenomenon of 'indie' or self-publishing. While it's true that most awards' shortlists and Notable Book listings are still dominated by the books coming from traditional publishers, a significant impact is being made by those choosing to self-publish – like Mark Sommerset, Kate De Goldi, Bruce Potter, David Riley, Stu Duvall, Des Hunt, Sue Copsey.

Professional services are now being offered by indie publishers as partnership deals, from manuscript assessment right through the editing, design and production process even to distribution and promotion.

We can choose to self-publish our stories online as e-books, although many appear to have found this an unrewarding experience, after a substantial expenditure of time, energy and money. For the huge pleasure of holding your book in your hand, you can request hard copies, with print runs of several hundred, or thousands if you're brave, with further printing available on demand.

Admittedly, standards vary enormously, with booksellers wary of accepting for sale the more amateurish though well-intentioned efforts, but if done with integrity and care, with the best advice that money can buy, self-publishing is now for some a genuine alternative.

It may be the only book you ever do. Conceivably, it may lead on to an offer from a mainstream publisher, and a good career as a regional writer or illustrator earning good money.

Or for a minority, those talented hard-working folk sprinkled with a dusting of good luck, it could lead to offers from the other side of the globe, world rights, translations, invitations to writers' festivals, screen rights, fame and fortune. We can all dream.

Salutations!

But whatever the future holds for each one, what we should all cherish is this very gathering, more than a hundred of us united in our desire to be better writers or illustrators, to get published and tell our stories.

To share in a wealth of professional experience and knowledge, storing away information and wisdom which can be learnt in a weekend what it took old-timers like me five or more years to find out by trial and error.

The very existence of these hui, so excellently brought back to life in 2009 by the Wellington Children's Book Association, to rotate biennially with Auckland and Christchurch, is testament to our collective determination to lift our game and realize our secret ambitions. We all belong to a proud tradition that has contributed, mostly since about 1980, a great deal to our country's cultural life.

Together we'll exchange views and techniques and strategies, and explore how to address the more urgent needs, like many more works published in *te reo* and Pasifika languages, and a renewed commitment to fiction for young adults.

Our commitment to the best writing, the finest artwork, the highest standards should be beyond question. 'You must write for children', said the Russian novelist Maxim Gorky, 'in the same way as you do for adults, only better.'

And E.B. White, author of the classic *Charlotte's Web*, wrote: 'Anybody who shifts gears when he writes for children is likely to wind up stripping his gears ... Anyone who writes *down* to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down. Children are demanding. They are the most attentive, curious, eager, observant, sensitive, quick, and generally congenial readers on earth. They accept, almost without question, anything you present them with, as long as it is presented honestly, fearlessly, and clearly.'

Personal rewards

To finish, can I share personal examples of the special rewards in store for children's writers and illustrators? A teacher telling me that my first book, that sailing adventure, finally and permanently unlocked the world of books for a 14-year-old boy who knew about boats but hitherto, had not been a reader.

A professional musician confiding that it was my novella *Jellybean* that convinced her 13-year-old self to pursue a career as an orchestral player.

Teenagers emailing to say that they've read and re-read *Alex* for inspiration before a big race, or to get through their grieving for a lost friend.

Many of you published folk will have experienced similar moments: a parent's warm thanks for a favourite bedtime book. A teacher's appreciation for a story that has enthralled a classroom, or a non-fiction book that's proved a terrific

resource. The 40-year-old mother of two telling you that as a child she just loved your book.

But best of all, from children: the shy ‘thank you for coming to our school’. The torn-off bits of paper proffered for your signature, and the original cover artwork they want you to admire. The dog-eared book they’ve remembered to bring from home for you to sign. The hand-written card arriving in the mail, brightly decorated with hearts and stars. The earnest little faces at writers’ festivals asking authors, ‘Where do you get your ideas?’ ‘How long does it take to write a book?’

And the heartening thought that somewhere in the world a literate child is reading your book under the bedclothes, by the light of a torch. Or an illiterate child is sitting on a stranger’s lap, enjoying perhaps their first ever encounter with printed stories. The book might even be yours.

That, in the end, is why we’re all here.

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