



# STORYLINES BETTY GILDERDALE AWARD

*Past to present: Navigating New Zealand Children's  
Literature*

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## **Storylines Betty Gilderdale Award**

### ***Past to present: Navigating New Zealand Children's Literature***

Kia ora koutou.

What an honour it is to be presented with the **Storylines Betty Gilderdale Award** for 2015. Thank you to Dr. Libby Limbrick and Storylines for making this possible and to Sandy McKay and Storylines for organising this lovely event. Storylines provides a unique advocacy role in New Zealand by promoting author events up and down the country and helping children develop a love of literature. Furthermore, as a representative of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People), Storylines is hosting the 35<sup>th</sup> IBBY International Congress in Auckland from 18-21 August 2016. Well done to Libby and her team. It is wonderful to have so many family, friends and colleagues here tonight so thank you very much for coming along. Receiving this award means a lot to me and I would especially like to thank my fabulous family – Tom, Rachel and Chris, Peter and Morgana, and especially our junior book worms, Zac, Orla and Felix, for enthusiastic support.

What a week we have had with the All Blacks, the Silver Ferns and a New Zealand horse winning the Melbourne Cup. I was one who rose early on the morning of the rugby World Cup final so I can claim to be a sports fan, yet I look forward to the day when we equally celebrate cultural success, and in particular, the literary successes of our esteemed New Zealand children's writers and illustrators, who I believe, are deserving of similar accolades. As Wayne Mills asserts, "*the quality of this literature for children stands proudly alongside the best in the world*", and I echo that sentiment. (ACE Papers Issue 9, p. 94.) Perhaps some of the lack of recognition may be attributed to a nostalgic view of childhood reading and some of the language that described the genre such as juvenile literature (we never hear of senile literature) or kiddie lit.

I have called this talk ***Past to Present: Navigating New Zealand Children's Literature*** in acknowledgement of a book that has made an impact on me. Diane Hebley's *The Power of Place: Landscape in New Zealand Children's Fiction 1970-1989* noted the prevalence of **seascape** in the literature produced for children, hence my nautical tilt. Rather than leave you with the impression of a boat bobbing in the ocean, I am hoping that by the end of the talk you will see how the current success of N children's literature floats on the **ballast** provided by some legendary individuals.

Let's start with Betty Gilderdale herself, after whom the Storylines award is named. Her contribution to New Zealand children's literature is significant. In my capacity as a teacher educator I have long been a fan, since first reading her chapter in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature* which has remained my go-to tome for many a children's literature class. With convenient timing, the publication of the Oxford History in 1991 coincided with my appointment in the early '90s to the then Dunedin College of Education where I was employed initially to cover for Mary-Anne Baxter, and then join her and Jane Johnson, lecturers in children's literature. So I had great luck in terms of resources and mentors including Anna Marsich and John Smith, as I began a career that was to specialise in the field of children's literature, an area of academic study that was asserting itself internationally as a scholarly area of pursuit. And I have loved my job – where else would you get paid to read children's books?

So where and when did this interest in books emerge? Like many of you I suspect, we were given books for presents and we made excellent use of libraries. Living in rural communities for most of my childhood, we didn't have 'indie' bookshops like Dunedin's University Book Shop on our doorstep, so libraries were our mainstay. And the Country Library Service played a significant role in matching books and readers.

Perhaps some of us had collections passed down through the family, and in my case my mother had kept all her copies of children's classics, like Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, so I had at my disposal some elegant examples to 'issue' when playing 'librarians' or 'teachers'.

I also, however, have kept several copies of early favourite reads, each coincidentally with a focus on animals and very British in orientation. Both examples have a 1950s sensibility, and *Tiptoes the Mischievous Kitten* is quite striking in its portrayal of middle class domesticity. From Tiptoes' arrival at the Moffatt house, a detached two storey dwelling with a large garden, to her ensuing misadventures we gain a sense of some of the household activities of the era, such curiosities as making a feather mattress into pillows! As a child I could obviously relate to Tiptoes' naughtiness and her desire to be better, but I think I would have drawn the line at Tiptoes' comment, "Oh dear...I wish my mother had spanked me more often". The other text is reminiscent of a firm favourite, the Milly Molly Mandy series. I loved thatched-roofed cottages so the cover of anonymously authored *My Animal Picture Book* would have captured my interest from the outset. It comprises a selection of stories with ill-defined plot structure, featuring children with names like Mary, Betty, Susan, and Bobby. These were obedient children living in an idyllic pastoral landscape. By contrast, and in terms of literary progress, I have to credit my daughter, an avid teenage reader, with introducing me to a wider range of authors such as Cynthia Voight, Lois Lowry, Penelope Lively and Joan Aitken, to name a few. My son Peter at the same age was more interested in 'The Simpsons' and *Mad Magazine*!

The School Journal signalled for me a small shift from my British dominated reading preferences, aside, that is, from the American series 'The Bobbsey Twins', to a more culturally located local context. As Athol McCredie has argued in one of the essays published to accompany the 1991 National Library of New Zealand exhibition, not only the written content, but also the visual impact of the School Journal cannot be overstated. With the educational changes ushered in by the 1935 Labour Government, social reform ideology underpinned curriculum revision to align more with prevailing ideas about national identity and specifically the production of texts that offered New Zealand content.

Hitherto, the literary canon had been Eurocentric, reflecting a privileging of books published overseas, reinforcing the belief for some that anything produced in New Zealand was fundamentally inferior. A Postcolonial impulse was still some distance away. However, New Zealand publishers and booksellers such as Reed, Pauls, Whitcombe and Tombs, Tapui, and Dorothy Butler played a significant role in the production and marketing of indigenous literature for children. These publishers and booksellers, and their future progeny, provided an impetus for subsequent narratives about culture, relationships, and identities. One seminal anthology edited by Witi Ihimaera foregrounded writing for children in Volume 4 of *Te Ao Mārama Te Ara O Te Hau (The Path of the Wind)* and signalled future winds of change reflecting the need for children to have their own stories and experiences validated. And often it was the School Journal that offered an incubator for nurturing talent. So it is worth noting that many early contributors to the visual and written narratives in the School Journal were, or were to become, notable writers and illustrators of children's books. Arguably New Zealand's foremost children's author,

Margaret Mahy, was amongst this group of experimental pioneers, along with Witi Ihimaera, James K. Baxter, Elsie Locke and Janet Frame. Some of the artists included E. Mervyn Taylor, Russell Clark, Deidre Gardiner, Dick Frizzell, Murray Grimsdale, Robyn Belton and most recently, Dylan Horrocks.

So, the School Journal was very much an essential feature of my childhood reading landscape, as were the instructional readers encountered. And will children who went to school in the last decade or so ever forget Robyn Belton's Greedy Cat? Such is the appeal of Robyn's characterful cat, and Joy Cowley's prose, that these gems have recently been re-issued so a whole new generation of readers will sample this delight. How privileged we are to have school-issued texts that are written and illustrated by such talented individuals. So I think we have to acknowledge the historic and on-going importance of the School Journal, established long ago in 1907. As indicated, it aligned with a new generation of children born in New Zealand who were being introduced to indigenous publications often as a result of the advocacy of teachers and librarians.

It is fitting then that this award should be presented in Dunedin, the newest UNESCO City of Literature, which has played host to numerous influential individuals who have made their mark in the field of children's literature, such as award winning Dunedin pioneer of children's literature – Joan De Hamel. The City of Literature also houses the Centre for the Book based at the University of Otago which hosts annual symposia, and in 2015 Julia Marshall from Gecko Press is the keynote speaker for the children's literature research symposium *A Sense of Wonder: Reading, Writing, and Illustrating Children's Literature* at the University of Otago College of Education.

I would now like to mention three very early pioneers of New Zealand children's literature whose work is archived in the Heritage Collections here at the Dunedin library – some of the ballast referred to earlier – Dorothy Neal White, Edith Howes, and Esther Glen, and in passing, note the connection between English children's author Eleanor Farjeon and Dunedin. Then I will discuss a significant Dunedin initiative, namely the children's writers' residency which graphically depicts the success of contemporary writers and artists, and finally offer some concluding comments around challenges (choppy waters!).

The first of my luminaries is **Dorothy Neal White** who was children's librarian at the Dunedin Public Library. A woman of strategy, and since it was the policy of the day for women to resign on marriage, she remained Miss Neal after her marriage to Desmond White of Newbolds Bookshop in order to secure continued employment. Under her stewardship the children's collection was recognised for its quality and marketing outreach. The imaginative efforts undertaken by Dorothy Neal White to promote children's books by way of the social media of the day – reviews, radio broadcasts – were legendary. You've all heard of the 10 best or the 100 best... well.... Dorothy annotated a list of 2000 books that assisted library and bookshops' purchasing decisions. Her influence was also felt amongst teachers' college students of the 1940s when she was librarian at the Dunedin Training College. Not only was she an esteemed librarian, but also an author of distinction. When my children were young, I remember *Books Before Five* became very well thumbed! Her powers of persuasion are reinforced in Mary Atwool's observation : "*Dorothy Neal White's life-long conviction that only the best was good enough for children was matched by her ability to communicate her knowledge and enthusiasm to others*". (Atwool, M.E. 2014, Te Ara.) Dorothy Neal White remains a pioneer of children's literature scholarship.

A second luminary is **Edith Howes**. Her book *The Long Bright Land: Fairy Tales from Southern Seas*, conveys the idea of creating a new culture in an adopted home. Celia Dunlop, writing for the Dorothy Neal White Collection asserts: “*Letters from people who knew Edith Howes picture her as a dainty woman with a crown of red-gold hair, shining eyes, and bright step. She is said to have had a Peter Pan quality, to be not unlike a fairy herself*”. (Dunlop, 1991, p. 12.) Born in 1872 Howes was a writer and a teacher, recognised for her progressive ideas about education; for example she succeeded in gaining approval for Montessori teaching methods and persuaded a local Gore firm in Southland to make small chairs and tables that could accommodate four children – an innovative initiative when at that time the usual classroom environment comprised forms and desks. Attention to the classroom environment spilled outdoors, with her great love of nature underpinning much of her writing for children. Her first book *The Sun Babies* published in 1910 was endorsed by Dr Benham, Professor of Biology at the University of Otago and in 1911 she was made an honorary member of what is now the Royal Society. Later she would receive an MBE in 1935 and two years later the King George VI Coronation Medal.

These accolades, including being ranked in a 1926 Canterbury public Library Survey, fourth ahead of Charles Dickens, reflect the assiduous research she undertook to ensure her stories accurately reflected the New Zealand environment. I would like to mention two such research endeavours. First in 1913 she was granted a year's leave of absence and a free Government railway pass to research information for her books – imagine how this early version of sabbatical enhanced her narratives, which offered children stories set in New Zealand that foregrounded local flora and fauna. As poet Jessie Mackay noted, “*Edith Howes clothed science in the green robes of Elfinland*”. (Dunlop p.5.) The second example is a description of a night sortie to the bush with her younger brother George who was instrumental in establishing our local Marine Biology Centre at Portobello. “*The Entomologist said: 'Come collecting with me tonight.' I watched his preparations. Into a satchel went a brush and a jar of treacle and stale beer mixed – a heady allurement, the 'sugar' of entomologists; into it went also a chloroform bottle to bring swift and painless death to the captives, with small boxes and tubes to hold caterpillars, beetles, eggs.... [A]n acetylene lamp on his bicycle, and a butterfly net of green muslin with a jointed adjustable handle completed his equipment. We set off on our bicycles for the nearest edge of the bush. Its scents stole out delightfully as we left bicycles and the setting sun behind us... through the darkening tracks we walked softly.... Dusk deepened, grew stiller, more fragrant....*” (ibid p. 9.) Such a detailed image painted in words!

These observational skills reflected in the night excursion are elaborated further in Heather Murray's essay on Edith Howes' book *The Cradle Ship*, a book reprinted 18 times and translated into French, Italian, and Danish. *The Cradle Ship* was considered something of a revolutionary text as it loosely embraces sex education. I say loosely, since the description 'a silken baby-bag beneath the heart', and ensuing narrative, obliquely concedes that babies grow within the mother's body and a birth process occurs. Interestingly, Howes' articles for an adult audience assert her feminist interests in encouraging women to assume a higher public profile. Her humour and irony are evident in her comments related to a Commission of Inquiry into the education of girls. Hearing that the committee had one female representative she remarked that “*the astounding egoism of the men who take it upon themselves to command the future of all the women in this country is only equalled by the astounding apathy of the women who will submit to the imposition*”. (Murray, Te Ara, p. 1.) Furthermore, Heather Murray informs us that Edith Howes spent the last 13 years of her life in Dunedin where she “*wove her old stockings into floormats, made her own coffee substitute, gardened and preserved. And.... ignoring the prevailing taste*

*for white bed linen, she dyed her sheets pink*". (ibid p. 2.) Interestingly, the illustrator of her novel *Silver Island* published by Hodder & Stoughton (Kotare Books) in 1983 was Alan Gilderdale.

**Turning now to Esther Glen**, another luminary in the world of early New Zealand children's literature whose work is represented here in the Heritage Collections at the Dunedin Public Library. Having visited Australia and developing awareness of their burgeoning children's literature scene there, and influenced by the novels of Ethel Turner, Esther Glen wrote a parallel text to Turner's *Seven Little Australians* published in 1894, which was *Six Little New Zealanders* published in 1917. Glen's ear for dialogue and comic detail is evidenced in the lively style of narration. Her name is immortalized in New Zealand's longest running book award established in 1945. Born in 1881, Esther Glen was both a novelist and journalist and on a personal note, her social circle in Christchurch included H.C.D. Somerset, the legendary teacher along with his wife Gwen Alley (sister of Rewi Alley) who taught at my mother's old school, Oxford District High in Canterbury. My mother delighted in tales of whole school Shakespearean productions, where, as a five year old, she featured as one of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The LIANZA Esther Glen Award, given by the New Zealand Library Association celebrates 'the most distinguished contribution to New Zealand literature for children' and in 2015 three of the University of Otago's former writers in residence won an award: Leonie Agnew for her Junior Fiction novel *Conrad Cooper's Last Stand*; Ella West for her YA novel *Night Vision*; and Fleur Beale for the Librarians' Choice Award Winner *I am Rebecca*. However, the first recipient was Stella Morice's narrative *The Book of Wiremu*. Tessa Duder, in her excellent biography of Margaret Mahy, recounts Margaret's response to this text: "There were only a few New Zealand books, some of which I still have, like *Six Little New Zealanders* by Esther Glen and the books by Isabel Maud Peacocke. But not all of these gave any real feeling about what it was like to be a New Zealand child living in a small town, going to school every day and playing or fighting with neighbouring children after school. Almost none of these books featured Māori children although there was one, *The Book of Wiremu* by Stella Morice, that I read when I was at high school. However before I actually obtained the book I had read a piece from it in guess where? Yes in the School Journal! The chapter I read there made me want to go on and read more.... Nowadays *The Book of Wiremu* has an odd, rather out-of-date feeling about it, but it was a story set in New Zealand that tried to describe the way we live." (Duder, 2005, p.51.)

And now **Eleanor Farjeon**. A link to Dunedin's City of Literature is also to be found in the work of English author Eleanor Farjeon. In similar vein to the writers already mentioned, Eleanor's picture books and poems contain freshness and theatricality which children find engaging. Like Beatrix Potter, she was educated at home, in the land of the governess, the cook, and the nursery, but more significantly, surrounded by the impressive library of her parents Benjamin, former editor of Dunedin's (still) independently owned newspaper, the *Otago Daily Times*, and American-born Margaret Jefferson. Indeed, their library was reputed to contain 8,000 volumes. ([www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz/heritage](http://www.dunedinlibraries.govt.nz/heritage)).

Eleanor's genius as a poet, dramatist and storyteller is not unsurprising given the close-knit and intellectual vitality of her family circumstances. The theatre was a significant feature in Eleanor's life, as her grandfather Joe Jefferson was a famous American actor, who incidentally, had toured New Zealand in 1864, and coincidentally met Ben Farjeon, Eleanor's father. Eleanor writes: "The two men, not so very much separated by years (Ben was 26, Joe was 35), must have been finds for each other. Both were lighthearted and mercurial, both loved the impulse and the fun of life, both were magnetic." (Farjeon, 1960, p. 52.)

The magnetism was transferred in 1875 in London to Joe's daughter Maggie, already a fan of Ben's novels but expecting to meet a man of similar age to her father. Perhaps Eleanor's special feeling for Dunedin may hinge on this chance meeting between her grandfather and father which yielded such a romantic result a decade later? It is interesting to note Ben's bequest, that his most treasured possessions to be passed on to his elder children, had New Zealand origins – the greenstone for Harry, and the silver inkstand presented to him in Dunedin for Eleanor. Ben held Māori in high regard, particularly once he had taught a local Māori chief to play chess and after some months of perfecting his technique, the 'pupil' could outplay the master.

It is Eleanor's gift for storytelling and poetry which reflects her ability to see the world through a child's eyes and consequently engage with her child reader. Although her work was written last century and reflects her late Victorian childhood, nonetheless it continues to delight with its own brand of enchantment. Despite her own privileged upbringing, her stories explore some of the social and economic issues of the day, foregrounded too in the work of Dickens whom she admired. Eleanor's ability to craft text which was not overtly didactic, reveals her respect for children and her skill in constructing musical language which reaches into, and extends children's imagination.

As a teacher and like many before me, we are thankful to authors such as Eleanor Farjeon for helping children develop a playful approach to language and a love of reading, a life-long gift. Her legacy to the Dunedin Public Library typifies this generosity, as in 1960 she donated her family collection of books to the library as a tribute to her father. In the 1960 postscript to her portrait of her family *A Nursery in the Nineties* she refers to the correspondence with A.H. Reed and concludes with the following observation about herself: *"Strangely it falls to the lot of the little girl who listened eagerly to papa's tales of adventure among the Bushmen and the Maoris.....(who) inherits the task of sending Papa on his second voyage round the world, to end his career in Dunedin, where it began. The story comes full circle."* (Farjeon, 1960, p.534.)

The authors referred to already whose work is represented in the Heritage Collections are only the tip of the iceberg so obviously plenty of opportunities exist for researchers to mine this rich field of historic children's literature and for curators to mount future exhibitions. And, in order to understand the writing for children of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and indeed the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we need to consider the ideas and philosophies which underpinned them. In both the explicit values of the text and especially the implicit values naturalised in the text, we see connections to the wider world of ideas about society, the family and the child. Children's books are reflections of their time and place of production and while to a modern eye many of the books in historical collections may veer towards the didactic or formulaic, the writer's ability to enter the world of the child through humour, adventure, or familiar experiences is what attracts and maintains audience. This holds true for 21<sup>st</sup> century didacticism too.

Having mentioned several writers whose work is showcased here in the library, I would now like to turn to an initiative that celebrates the success of contemporary writers. These writers and artists have made their mark, and while many live locally, the residency has attracted widespread national interest. It has been an absolute pleasure to be involved in a small way with the operation of the residency – to give it its full title - The University of Otago College of Education / Creative New Zealand Children's Writer in Residence.

Now for some brief background on the residency. For two decades Dunedin has hosted a children's writer in residence. The residency was established in cooperation between the Dunedin College of

Education and Creative New Zealand and when the College merged with the University of Otago in 2007 the fellowship was formally included in the Memorandum of Understanding governing the conditions of merger between the two institutions. Thus the writer continues to reside in the College of Education. The fellowship has a long established national reputation. Many incumbents have won New Zealand's most prestigious awards for children's literature, both prior, and subsequent to, their residency.

The roll call of Fellows reads like a who's who of contributors to New Zealand children's literature. Although you might expect there to be 24, the number of years of operation, there are actually 28 with four residencies being shared i.e. three months each. So in chronological order from 1992 they are: Ruth Corrin; Diana Noonan; Paula Boock; Jack Lasenby; Ken Catran; Dame Kāterina Mataira; in 1998 there was a shared residency between William Taylor and Janice Marriott; followed by Fleur Beale; David Elliot; Penelope Todd; Sandy McKay; in 2003 another shared residency with Pauline Cartwright and David Hill; Brigid Lowry in 2004; and in 2005 the residency was shared between Margaret Beames and Shirley Corlett; Tania Roxborogh in 2006; Vince Ford; Bill O'Brien; Joanna Orwin; Karen Trebilcock; Kyle Mewburn; James Norcliffe; Leonie Agnew; Melinda Szymanik; and in 2015 we have had the good fortune to have another shared residency, this time between Jennifer Beck and Robyn Belton. Keep a look-out for a soon to be published picture book based on the extraordinary story of Alexander Aitken a World War 1 soldier who played his violin in the trenches. What has made the project more poignant is that Alexander was brought up on the Otago Peninsula and attended Otago Boys' High School so the local connection enabled Jennifer and Robyn to undertake research not only indoors in the Hocken but also on fieldtrips in the Otago neighbourhood. We eagerly await its appearance! And in 2016 we welcome award winning author, Barbara Else.

There are many people over the years who have contributed to the successful running of the residency. However, I would like to acknowledge one such significant individual who was involved in establishing the residency at the Dunedin College of Education and that is Anna Marsich. Under her tutelage the residency gained prominence within the children's literature community, and from its inception in 1992, it has enjoyed uninterrupted occupancy, and financial security thanks to the generosity of Creative New Zealand and the College of Education, now the university. Locating the residency at the College consolidates the College's role in promoting children's literature and in recognising its importance for teachers and students. It is important that teachers know what is being published locally and who the writers and illustrators are. The residency provides opportunities for authors and illustrators to visit schools and take workshops both in Otago, and at our Southland campus in Invercargill.

The high calibre of applicants, as you have just heard, reflects the residency's ability to attract candidates of literary merit who demonstrate originality, innovation and excellence. A further practical attraction is the partnership between the Robert Lord Cottage Trust and the University to provide rent-free, furnished accommodation for the six month duration of the residency. The cottage is quite possibly the smallest dwelling in Dunedin in the smallest street, ironically named Titan Street! It is situated in the centre of 'Scarfie-land', and the Robert Lord Cottage Trust has ensured heat pumps and double glazing provide warmth and quiet, and Campus Watch has added Titan Street to their 'beat'. So future applicants from beyond Dunedin can feel reassured that we do our best to make their stay comfortable. Relatively few residencies are available for children's writers and illustrators, and as the only designated children's writer's residency, we believe we provide a supportive professional environment that offers collegial exchange with academics and teachers involved in the study of children's literature. We are

delighted to continue to market the children's writer in residence alongside the University of Otago's other prestigious fellowships – the Burns, Mozart, Frances Hodgkins, and Caroline Plummer.

Clearly, children's literature is a force to be reckoned with. Australian novelist Sonja Hartnett endorses this view of the importance of children's literature in her statement, “*...I believe that the only lastingly important form of writing is writing for children. It is writing that is carried in the reader's heart for a lifetime; it is writing that speaks to the future.*” ([www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)). New Zealand children's literature enjoys global recognition and I have personally basked in some reflected glory at international conferences, when just by being a New Zealander, and coming from the land of Margaret Mahy, Joy Cowley, Lynley Dodd, Patricia Grace, David Elliot, Maurice Gee, Joanna Orwin, Gavin Bishop... and the list could go on... elicits excitement and envy.

My own research interests in the field of children's literature have recently focused on an historical context (perhaps I should thank Tom, my tame historian here!) partly because there is such a wealth of material to investigate, as previously indicated in this talk. Currently I have been researching the experiences of Polish child refugees in World War 2, some of whom were relocated to New Zealand. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this story, in 1944 the New Zealand government accepted 733 Polish refugee children who had survived deportation to the Soviet Union labour camps in Siberia before reaching Red Cross camps in Iran. While many refugee narratives have been produced as a consequence of World War 2, few, if any, document the journeys undertaken by families who were evicted from their Polish homeland and deported. Displacement on such a scale underscores the depth of cultural trauma and its manifestations in the selected texts I focused on – two of which were written by holders of the residency – Melinda Szymanik's novel *A Winter's Day in 1939* and the picturebook *Stefania's Dancing Slippers* by Jennifer Beck and Lindy Fisher. With recent global events precipitating an increase in the quota of refugees accepted into New Zealand, the first increase in 60 years, I am aware as a teacher educator that we need a variety of children's books that relate to diverse interests that both draw on, and affirm, students' social and cultural identities. Books such as Raymond Huber's *Peace Warriors* contribute further to children's understandings about civil rights and the politics of war.

Some concluding remarks. Today we celebrate the diversity of children's books published locally, and New Zealand children's literature goes from strength to strength. Many younger writers have wide teen digital fan bases and I'm thinking of writers like Lani Wendt, Ella West, Kyle Mewburn, Leonie Agnew and Melinda Szymanik and many others. Their blogs attract honest interactive responses that demonstrate high levels of involvement with quality literature. Quality children's literature should above all be engaging, yet also provide challenge. Alison Lurie notes, “*The great subversive works of children's literature suggest that there are other views of human life besides those of the shopping mall and the corporation. They mock current assumptions and express the imaginative, unconventional, noncommercial view of the world in its simplest and purest form. They appeal to the imaginative, questioning, rebellious child within all of us, renew our instinctive energy, and act as a force for change. This is why such literature is worthy of our attention and will endure long after more conventional tales have been forgotten.*” (Lurie, 1990, p.xi.)

The choppy waves of controversy have flooded our media recently with issues of censorship, and I refer explicitly to Ted Dawe's *Into the River*. To put this in context, as long ago as 1950, Brian Sutton-Smith's *Our Street*, published by Reed, became something of a cause-*celebre* and sparked lively socio-political debate. The novel's edgy social realism was attributed by the author to the influence of reading Stella

Morice's book (mentioned earlier in this talk) to the children at Brooklyn School. Smitty and his friends, South Park-like, are troublemakers with little respect for authority. Like Dawe's narrative, Sutton Smith's text offers a realistic portrayal of childhood. Realistic narratives such as those mentioned already, and I'm reminded of similar situations of public disquiet following publication of William Taylor's *The Blue Lawn* and Maurice Gee's *The Fat Man*, graphically depict the complexity of relationships encountered by young adults. Similarly Sandy McKay's *Losing It* probes issues of relevance for young adults and navigates a serious topic (anorexia) with a deft style that never underplays the gravity of the situation. And who could forget the powerful picturebooks that deal compellingly with sensitive topics like bereavement such as Kyle Mewburn's *Old Hu-Hu*, Joy Cowley's *Brodie*, and Janet Pereira's *Blackie the fisher-cat* with multi-layered illustrations respectively by Rachel Driscoll, Chris Mousdale, and Gabriella Klepatski.

With the plethora of competing interests from social media sources, and as literature becomes more broadly defined, it has to connect with readers who are used to navigating digital media. Critical literacy underpins engagement with current multiliterate practices, and texts such as *Into The River* open avenues for discussion of complex issues within a safe environment. Emma Neale sums this up well in her statement, "*I strongly believe literature is one of the places that young people can safely think through situations, and rehearse their moral choices, without the grave personal compromise that living through the real events might involve.*" (ODT interview.) Critical literacy has been described as developing 'knowing readers', that is, "*readers who perceive the implicit and explicit ideas, values, and attitudes that constitute the architecture of words [and images] and out of which texts are constructed*". (Winch et al, 2001, p 332.) These critical literacy skills and empathetic approach engendered by exposure to quality children's literature will assist our learners as they sail into their future career pathways.

To sum up, Margaret Meek writes, "*Literacy has two beginnings: one, in the world, the other, in each person who learns to read and write.*" (Meek, 1991, p 13.) As teachers, we are highly indebted to children's writers and illustrators who provide us with a platform for deeper engagement with students and their worlds. Exposure to children's literature enhances development in imagination, linguistic development, humour, empathy, and critical inquiry, and I am reminded of the power of story, irrespective of the medium, to assist readers in developing their navigational skills for participating in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing global environment.

And most importantly, I adore the intergenerational connection mediated by children's literature. As a grandparent I have a lovely time with my three grandchildren sharing many of our locally published books with them. And former holder of the residency, James Norcliffe, is a firm favourite with our 10 year old fantasy fan.

A sincere thank you to all our inspiring, aspiring, and productive writers and illustrators of children's books. To close with words from Betty Gilderdale when she was asked what advice *she* would give to aspiring writers: "*Keep reading. Keep writing. Turn off the telly!*" (Interview Christchurch City Library.)

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