

Kate de Gold Interview

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You've had numerous short stories, several young adult and adult books published. Tell me what the experience was like publishing your own books.

The first book was a collection of short stories that came about in a traditional way. I had written a couple of short stories and they won a short story award. I was approached by Penguin to turn the short stories into a book – I was very lucky. Thereafter, I had a relationship with Penguin. I sent them *Sanctuary* and did three more. Then after that I began writing teenage books and then I wanted to explore writing for younger children. I met Jacqui who became the collaborator with the picture book. I had written a series of stories as part of a chapter book and they were not working. They had far too much information to convey in a form that didn't work for it. I gave the stories to Jacqui and she immediately understood what I was doing. She had some wonderful suggestions.

The story is in the visual and the text – they were interdependent. Jacqui understood that immediately. I give her the story and she adds all these other layers in the visuals. Some of which she conveys and some she invents.

I wanted to keep control of style, design, and format, and didn't want any interference from publishers. Traditionally you send in the text then the illustrations are farmed out. Publishers are generally chary about receiving submissions with illustrations. They presented an early version to an Australian publisher who rejected it but gave valuable feedback. After changes, I gave it to three publishers (one Australian, two NZ) – all rejected it. In retrospect they did not know what was in their hands. You couldn't pigeonhole it. Then I decided to self publish. We were in a unique position – we had experience and knew what to do. Jacqui's partner designed it. *Clubs* has since been bought out by the original Australian publisher. They saw how successful it has been in New Zealand.

What would you say to someone thinking of self publishing...

Don't do it. It is very difficult to do. We were in a unique position. But you've got to do what you believe in. If I had not had the confidence - like it was my first book I would have struggled. But I do have a publishing history and also have had lengthy immersion in children's literature. Also, Jacqui and Peter were able to combine design and printing knowledge. People should be realistic. It is extremely costly when you are contracting out: sales, distribution and marketing. I already had a media presence. I was reluctant to use channels I was involved in i.e. Kim Hill and Morning TV. I probably get more coverage because my name is associated with children's books. I'm in a pretty lucky position. I do know reviewers and all the outlets where books need to be reviewed.

You have a new book coming out in October – how is it going?

The Lolly stories come from my nephew, own children and my own experiences. My nephew goes to a school that originally inspired the story but it is still an amalgam of

that school, my children's and my own school. The Billy story – is an extravagant version of my nephew's experience of a pet and produce day at school. Uncle Jack is an entirely different series. The manila series; the style of artwork, printing, language and format are stylistically different.

Where did you get the ideas for Clubs et al.

They are an amalgam of nephews, own children and my experiences as a child. Miss Live is an amalgam of teachers I had, my own children had and a teacher my nephew had. It was an incredible tapestry.

Do you think publishers are reluctant to publish sophisticated picture books?

It is a very unknown market in NZ. Publishers are only comfortable publishing what they know. They couldn't pigeon hole it. The text is multi-layered, then the ironic layer which requires adult participation. It is a new thing.

Do you think you are leading the way for sophisticated pbs?

Possibly.

You say in the Book Council interview that you write something as a way to explore questions about the world and being human. Were you exploring separateness and uniqueness in both books?

Yes – even the next one. Asking kids what it is like to be a child and confront all the things children confront. Asking questions about collusions they have with the adult world and the world at large; asking questions, puzzlements and curiosities.

You're writing a non-fiction book about post-war international children's literature – how is that going?

It is a long project. I thought I'd do it in a year but more likely it will take 4-5 years. The more I do, the bigger it gets. It is not commissioned but was given funding by Susan Pryor a benefactor – who has the biggest collection of children's literature in New Zealand.

Self publishing is like a surprise. It met a need. It wasn't something we planned but it is great. There comes a time to stand by the thing you believe in. I write for a certain kind of reader like myself as a child – a sophisticated child reader – and there are lots of them around.

