



This month, we've been talking to . . . Diana Noonan

Diana Noonan is the award-winning author of over 100 publications for children and adults, from picture books and young adult fiction to early literacy, poetry and non-fiction. She was editor of the *School Journal* for eight years and has had around 200 educational texts published in New Zealand and internationally. Diana lives on the remote Catlins Coast of South Otago with her husband, award-winning illustrator and writer, Keith Olsen. Diana's picture book *Quaky Cat*, written in response to the Christchurch earthquake, has raised over \$150,000 for Christchurch charities.

We asked Diana some questions about herself, and here's what she said ...

Where were you born? Where do you live now?

I was born in Dunedin. I now live in Papatowai, a tiny village in the Catlins, in south-east Otago.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Waihola Primary School and Tokomairiro High School.

What were you like in school? What is the naughtiest thing you did?

I was a pretty responsible student at school although I did do something rather mischievous one day. At high school, we had to wear regulation coloured tights. One day, I had regulation coloured tights on but my friend didn't. We kept swapping tights to confuse the head mistress who liked to check on such things, on what seemed to us to be an almost hourly basis!

What was your favourite book growing up?

I adored the Trixie Belden series. And the poem 'The Song of Hiawatha'. And *Shane* (by Jack Schaefer) which I finished reading under the blankets with a torch when I was supposed to have my light out. The ending made me cry.

Who is your favourite children's author?

Jane Gardam, who writes for children as well as adults.

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?

Spinach is my favourite food, and chocolate comes a close second. My favourite colour is green because it reminds me of nature, which I feel very close to. My

favourite movie ... it sounds old-fashioned, I know, but I like *The Sound of Music*. I used to watch it with my very special friend, Mabel, who died just a little while ago, aged 97.

Who inspired you to write?

I had a very good English teacher called Liz Flett. She encouraged me to write by telling me I was good at it! I enjoyed writing in class but I don't remember writing in my free time, just for fun. At school, I would get butterflies in my stomach when asked to write because I found it so exciting to be given the opportunity.

How did you get started? How old were you?

My husband, Keith, was a potter and was painting lovely forest scenes on his pottery. I wished I could paint too, but I couldn't paint well enough to please myself so I decided to 'paint with words' instead.

Why did you want to be a writer?

I wanted to 'paint' what I could see out my window – the forest and the sea. I had to create a story to go with the setting! My settings are usually very important, even though I care very little about what a character looks like.

How do you think up ideas?

Now and then I have a thought about something that affects me very deeply. Often, it makes me cry. I then find I need to do something with that emotion, so I write a story to explore it.

Do you have a special place where you write?
When I'm working very hard on a piece of writing, I usually stay in bed to do it so I don't get distracted by everyday things such as cooking and cleaning and answering the phone and talking to visitors who call.

What is the best thing about being an author?
I get to spend time alone and I get to 'explore' people and places and significant events. It's a bit like travelling, which is something I also enjoy.

Have you had a funny or embarrassing moment as an author?
One day, just after my very first book had been accepted for publication, my publisher arrived unexpectedly at my home for a visit. I was very pregnant and was dressed in a top I had made from an old curtain (we were very poor at the time). I was holding onto my two donkeys who I'd taken with me blackberrying. When the publisher arrived, the donkeys got a fright and ran off. Her friend went to look for them. Now, we all have a good laugh about it but at the time it didn't seem so funny.

What do you do when you are not writing?
I garden, garden, garden! It's my favourite activity. I also read, draw with my oil pastels, run and walk. And I like to write letters – real ones with a pen and paper rather than emails.

What would you have chosen to be if you were not an author?
I would have been a gardener or a radio broadcaster. I didn't know you could be these things when I was young, so for a few years before I became a writer, I was an English teacher.

Which famous person from the past would you like to talk to?
Jesus Christ.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?
The world is a very special and exciting place. Although technology is fun, I think that if we spend most of our time looking at computers and mobile phones, being on social media and listening only to music through our headphones, we will miss out on much of the real world around us. To be a writer, you need to be in touch with the world around you. You need to see it up close; to smell it and touch it and think about it.

SCHOLASTIC NZ BOOKS BY DIANA NOONAN

Quaky Cat Helps Out

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