



This month, we've been talking to . . . Fifi Colston

Fifi Colston has a richly varied career as a commercial artist, writer, illustrator, poet, Wearable Arts designer, and costumer for the film industry. She has illustrated over 35 books and written three junior fiction novels. Fifi also runs art and writing workshops with schools and communities.

We asked Fifi some questions about herself and her work, and here are her responses...

Where were you born?

In York, England; I'm a Yorkshire Pudding!

Where do you live now?

Hataitai, Wellington; but that doesn't make me a Taniwha! (Read up on the Whataitai legend.)

Where did you go to school?

I went to 9 different schools because we were a family who moved about a lot in the air force. The last one was Wellington Girls' College.

Did you have a nickname?

At home I was always Fifi or Fif but I was embarrassed by that at school so to everyone there I was Fiona, which is my real name. I came out publicly as Fifi when I went to Design School – it suited my personality far more!

What were you like in school?

Hugely talkative, always drawing and easily upset by injustice. I went there unwillingly and was hopeless at sports.

What is the naughtiest thing you did?

In high school I drew hearts and flowers and messages about boys all over a newly sanded desk, which was about to be varnished. The teacher found me out and I had to sand it down again in my lunch hour.

What was your favourite book growing up?

As a small child, *The Silver Thimble Storybook* by Rie Cramer. It was full of retold Hans Christian Anderson stories with truly beautiful illustrations.

It was the first book I can remember reading 'all by myself'. I still have it and cherish it.

Who is your favourite children's author?

I love some of them for things other than writing. Kate de Goldi is a wonderful and inspirational speaker. Ruth Paul is one of my best friends and we have lots of fun together. Kyle Mewburn makes me laugh; David Hill is a wonderful gentleman ... I could go on!

What is your favourite food?

Anything my son makes – he is a brilliant chef and he cooks for us all the time!

Who inspired you to write/illustrate?

Rie Cramer. I thought 'If I could draw like that, I would be happy'. For writing, all the teachers who ever encouraged me to write gory ghost stories and romantic novels. And that was just at primary school!

How did you get started?

According to my mother, as soon as I could hold a pencil. I can't remember a time when I didn't draw, read or write. I can remember trying to get better at all of them. When I was finishing high school I knew the next step was art school.

How old were you?

I was 18 when I went to Design School.

Why did you want to be a writer/illustrator?

There was never a time from the age of 8 when I thought I'd do anything other than be an artist of

some sort. I was 8 when our family came to New Zealand to live. I knew I could do anything here.

How do you think up ideas?

My illustration work is such that the idea has been thought of already and I just have to think of how to bring it into a picture form. My writing and Wearable Art ideas pop into my head at strange times, like the middle of the night.

Do you have a special place where you write/illustrate?

I have had many over the years, from bedrooms, offices, cottages and shared spaces with others. But I always take my big old desk with me that I've had since I finished Design School. Right now I am working at it in my lounge.

What is the best thing about being an author/illustrator?

Not wearing a uniform or having a set lunch hour. I can wear and eat what I like, when I like!

Have you had a funny or embarrassing moment as an author/illustrator?

What, just one?

What do you do when you aren't writing/illustrating?
I make Wearable Art (that's a big part of my life).

I visit schools and run workshops; I'm on several committees, and I put quite a bit of time back into the writing and illustration community. I think that's important, to do some stuff for free.

What would you have chosen to be if you were not an author/illustrator?

When I was 6, I wanted to be an air hostess (I liked the hats they wore), a coin collector (I had a collection my father had bought back from different countries), and a nun (I'd been to see *The Sound of Music* and it seemed like fun).

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

Rie Cramer (1887–1977), the author and illustrator of *The Silver Thimble Storybook*. I would like to talk to her, look at her original illustrations and tell her she lit a flame for me when I was a small girl and it has burned brightly ever since.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?

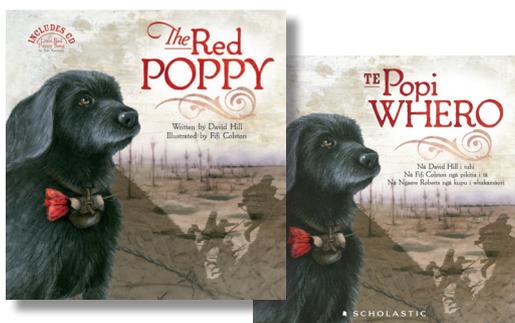
We have a cat called Tre and he leaves white cat hair EVERYWHERE. I have to use a pet hair roller before I go anywhere, especially on my bum, because his favourite place to sleep is on my writing chair!

SOME BOOKS WRITTEN OR ILLUSTRATED BY FIFI COLSTON

Far, Far From Home

Written by Elizabeth Pulford
Illustrated by Fifi Colston

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