



This month, we've been talking to . . . Jenny Cooper

Jenny Cooper lives in Christchurch and has illustrated a number of junior novels and picture books, including two collaborations with the Topp Twins, *There's a Hole in my Bucket* (2011) and this year's gorgeous sing-along *Do Your Ears Hang Low?*

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

Where were you born? Where do you live now?

Born in Wellington and live in Christchurch, and I am now trying to find a bit of land in the country for myself, my partner Chris, our cat, plus chooks Elsie and Hilda.

Where did you go to school?

Wadestown Primary School in Wellington, then Fendalton Primary in Christchurch.

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

I was quiet, I think, but had some very good friends, whom I still see today. A friend once dared me to drink out of the gutter, which I did, (more silly than naughty, I think!). My favourite thing in school was drawing ... title pages, posters, projects, maps on the blackboard, doodling in the margins. Once, my best friend and I made complete sets of teeth, upper and lower, out of dried PVA glue, and spent hours of every day drilling them with protractors and filling them with pencil lead. Weird!

What was your favourite book growing up?

I read heaps, under the bed covers, sometimes reading all night, eating granny smith apples ... the usual books for girls my age, plus *Moomintroll*, (so sad!) *The Little Prince* by Antoine Saint Exupery, and the best book ever written, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster.

Who is your favourite children's author?

Margaret Mahy ... I still read *Dangerous Spaces* every year ... she was so interesting, funny and intelligent and had a way of turning everything

on its head ... always looking at things from unexpected angles. If you said you'd walked through a spider's web, she would instantly come up with a story from the spider's point of view.

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?

Favourite food? Food is ALL good and gets my full attention. Colour? Colour is my work, I love them all. Movie? *Strictly Ballroom*! Lots of women my age love that movie ... check with your Mum!

Who inspired you to illustrate?

I had a great English teacher at Christchurch Girls' High School who let me draw all through English lessons. It was amazing to me that a teacher thought my drawing was that important. (In art classes, we were naughty, and spent most of the time writing out of the dictionary as punishment.) And my Auntie Audrey was an author; she showed me that ordinary people can get their work published.

How did you get started? How old were you?

That is a big question! I really got started the first day I picked up a pencil. I have drawn constantly since I was a child. Officially I started when I was quite old. I came back from 3 wonderful years living in Western Samoa; I had a toddler, Kenese, and a baby, Kalia, and I needed a good job to support us all. I was 26. I went to Christchurch Polytechnic and did a design degree, and illustrated my first children's book while I was there. The book was really bad, and my second book was worse, but they were enough to get me started.

Why did you want to be an illustrator?

I really couldn't help myself, illustrating chose me; I was born with a strong need to draw. It was my best skill, so I turned it into a job.

How do you think up ideas?

I think illustrators are interested in everything, and are always looking for ideas everywhere they go. My brain automatically stores what it sees, for later use, whether that is a bizarre hair style, a particularly floppy dog, a really big nose or a beautiful mix of colours. Mainly I draw what I am interested in, and I hope that other people are interested in it too.

Do you have a special place where you illustrate?

Yes, a lovely sunny studio with walls covered in pictures, and lots of biscuit crumbs on the floor.

What is the best thing about being an illustrator?

There are so many good things! Sometimes I feel very proud of my work, which is a great feeling. I also love working from home, it gives me lots of freedom, although it can get a bit lonely. I love the feeling of learning every time I begin a new book. I also like all the people I work with; I have never come across a grumpy or horrible editor.

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

Once I thought I had set fire to my studio, it was full of smoke. I called the fire brigade, who came

rushing around, lights flashing ... but it turned out I had only boiled the jug dry. Once I was rushing to finish a book and get it onto a plane flight in half an hour, when I spilled a bottle of black ink all down my desk and onto the carpet. I flooded the carpet with water, covered everything with heaps of towels, and kept working on the edge of the desk, because I had to finish that book!

What do you do when you are not illustrating?

Reading, gardening, doing up old furniture, making lamps, mosaic, papier mâché, sewing and doll design, restoring old tools and any old bits and pieces I buy second-hand ... you know, all the good stuff! Plus seeing my friends and family, of course!

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

An artist or craftsperson, or perhaps a teacher.

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

Edmund Dulac, an illustrator from around 1900. I want to watch him work and find out how he did such amazing paintings.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

I would suggest that if you think you might like to be an artist of any sort, the best thing you can do is to draw, anything you like, in your spare time. That is the best art school you will ever have.

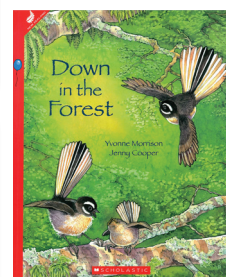
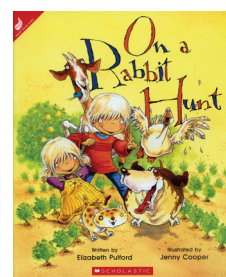
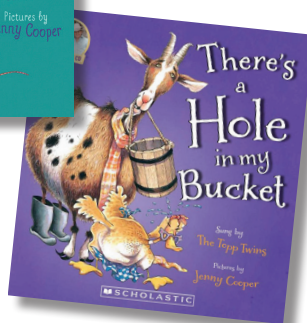
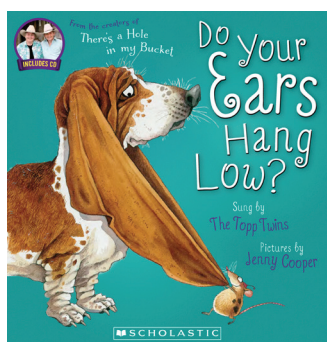
SOME BOOKS ILLUSTRATED BY JENNY COOPER

Do Your Ears Hang Low?

Music by the Topp Twins

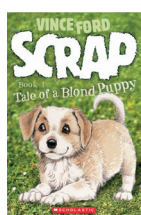
Illustrated by Jenny Cooper

Publication October 2012
ISBN 978-1-77543-104-6
RRP \$21.00
Age All



Scrap series

Coming 2013 ...



 **SCHOLASTIC**

Read Every Day. Lead a Better Life.

Scholastic New Zealand Limited, 21 Lady Ruby Drive, East Tamaki; Private Bag 94407, Botany, Auckland 2163, New Zealand
Telephone 09 274 8112 Facsimile 09 274 8114 Web www.scholastic.co.nz