



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

Kids have been growing up with Grandma McGarvey's wacky adventures for over 20 years. Where does writer Jenny Hessell come up with her seemingly limitless store of ideas for the humorous scrapes our favourite Grandma keeps finding herself in? The latest book in the series, *Grandma McGarvey Surfs the Net*, was published June 2011.

Also look out for *Phoebe and the Night Creatures* (August 2011), where Jenny revels in the power of the imagination with things that go bump in the night!

We asked Jenny questions about herself and her writing, and here's what she had to say ...

Where were you born?

Inglewood. (Isn't that a great name? Say it over a few times - 'Ingle-wood Ingle-wood'. An angle is a small fire. So, Ingle-wood – a small fire in the woods. This is how things work - right from the start I was destined to be a gypsy...)

Where do you live now?

Hamilton

Where did you go to school?

New Plymouth

Did you have a nickname?

My family called me Grub. My friends at school sometimes called me JAM (Jennifer Anne Macdonald – get it?)

What were you like in school?

I didn't like anything about school. I wanted to learn about LIFE – to do this I needed lots of time mucking around in the natural world, lots of silence to think in, and then lots of long conversations with interested (and interesting) adults. School didn't have any of these. I could never see the point of what they were trying to teach kids – and still can't really.

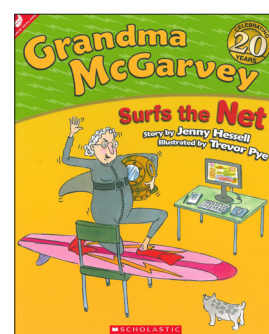
What is the naughtiest thing you did?

I wasn't a naughty child but I do remember one

bad thing I did: when the time came to leave a particular school, I stole two books from the library. They were books I felt I just couldn't live without – 'The Once and Future King' about the life of King Arthur and a book of Shakespeare's stories. For some reason it didn't occur to me that I could have got those books for myself without stealing them – all I could think was if I didn't take them now I would be leaving them behind forever.

What was your favourite book growing up?

Oh dear, I have trouble with the whole idea of a 'favourite' anything! This morning I felt like having peanut butter toast for breakfast – does that make it my favourite food? Maybe – but only for today. Here's a tip: if you want life to be a stunning, surprising, gobsmacking adventure, and especially if you want to be a writer, forget about 'favourites' and open yourself up to all possibilities. If anyone asks you what your favourite 'thing' is, say Everything!



Who inspired you to write?

My father. He was the person who taught me to creep over the top of a hill without a sound so I could see rabbits playing on the other side, who woke me in the middle of the night to get up and look at the stars, who answered thousands of questions, shared millions of his own ideas ... and then gave me lots of time and space to 'get on with it' on my own – the best 'training' a writer can have. (He also encouraged me to do experiments like untwirling the neighbour's bean plants which were growing in a clockwise direction around a pole and rewinding them anticlockwise to see what would happen – again excellent training for a writer. If you want to know what did happen, read the footnote.*)

How did you get started? How old were you?

I started telling stories as soon as I could talk (or so I'm told). I had my first story 'published' when I was 8.

Why did you want to be a writer?

I didn't really. It happened the other way round – writing chose me. I had no more say in the matter than being born in Inglewood, or being 5 foot 3 inches tall with impossibly straight hair!

How do you think up ideas?

Again, I don't. The ideas come to me – I don't go looking for them. In fact the worst writing I've done is when I've sat down and tried to make myself think of an idea for a story. You have to be patient and silent. Of course, once the ideas have rung your doorbell and invited themselves in, you're the boss and can start ordering them around, telling them where to sit and what to say ...

Do you have a special place where you write?

No, I can write anywhere as long as I'm not sitting down – I have to be moving around and chanting the story out loud to get the rhythm right.

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

Every time I do a school visit, there's at least one child who thinks it's Grandma McGarvey who's coming to their class – and of course they're

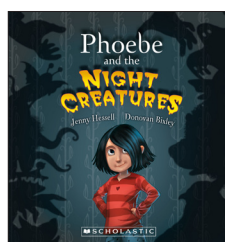
so disappointed when it's just me! But I usually manage to win them over ...

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

A builder. I'd love to build my own house – preferably in a cave. (Maybe that could be my next adventure ...)

Footnote *

Next morning, the bean plants were lying in a heap at the bottom of the pole! Our neighbour was not pleased and wondered aloud to my father what could possibly have happened. My wonderful father didn't say a word ...



Phoebe and the Night Creatures

Written by Jenny Hessel
Illustrated by Donovan Bixley

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