

This month, we've been talking to . . . Errol McLeary

Errol McLeary has had a jam-packed artistic career, working as a magazine designer, a television designer, an art director at an advertising agency and a newspaper illustrator and cartoonist with the *NZ Herald*, as well as doing freelance work. It was always his dream to illustrate, and over the years he has become more interested in illustrating his own books. Errol now lives on the Gold Coast practising and teaching children's book illustration.

We asked Errol some questions about himself and his work, and here's what he said ...

Where were you born? Where do you live now?

I was born and grew up in South Auckland. I have moved around a lot and now find myself living in Australia.

Where did you go to school? Did you have a nickname?

I went to schools in Papatoetoe and Otahuhu. I seem to remember being called Aerofoil or Flynn.

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

At school I mostly hid in the art rooms. Whenever I was late I could always sneak in and pretend I had been there early doing artwork.

What was your favourite book growing up?

Okay, I confess ... I liked Enid Blyton. I got started in books by reading the Famous Five and the Secret Seven.

Who is your favourite children's author?

There are so many. For picture books; John Burningham and Bob Graham. For chapter books; a French writer called Timothee de Fombelle.

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?

I love cooking Italian. Yellow is my favourite colour – its bright, sunny and warm. My mother's family was from France, so I love watching French films.

Who inspired you to write/illustrate?

When I was at Intermediate School my art teacher

got me to do a mural for a bookshop in Auckland City. It was about all the famous children's book characters. I got to know them all and I've been hooked ever since.

How did you get started? How old were you?

I was working as a magazine designer when someone put me onto a writer who was looking for an illustrator. I was eighteen at the time, but I was about 23 when the book was finally published.

Why did you want to be a writer/illustrator?

I used to make up my own books when I was young. It was all I ever wanted to do. I see books as an artform.

How do you think up ideas?

I have a lot of notebooks where I store ideas whenever I think of them. Then when I am ready to write I look back through them.

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

I have had studios, but I keep on moving. Right now I set up my drawing board on the dining table each day. I just have to be careful I dip my pen in the ink and not the jam, or my artwork will end up sticky.

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

I don't get wet going to work.

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

School visits are always fun when you ask if there are any questions at the end. And the boy at the back sticks up his hand and says "I'm going to be a vet – I'll make much more money than you do". Kids are so clever.

What do you do when you are not writing/illustrating?

If I'm not actually writing or illustrating I am thinking about it. Sometimes I manage to squeeze in a painting or two.

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

Probably something that earned money.

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

I'd like to have a chat with Ernest Shepard. He's the man that illustrated Winnie the Pooh and The Wind in the Willows.

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

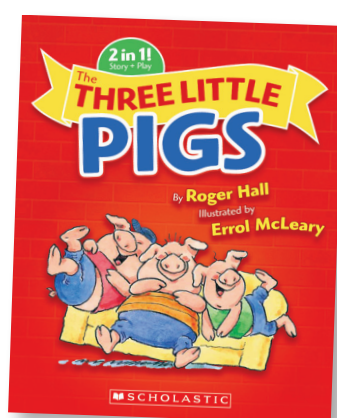
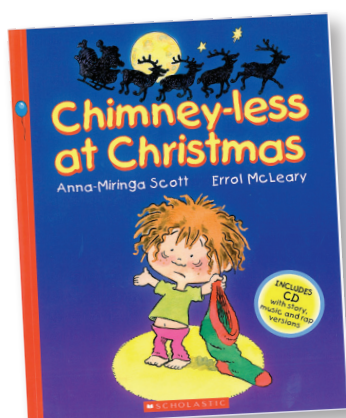
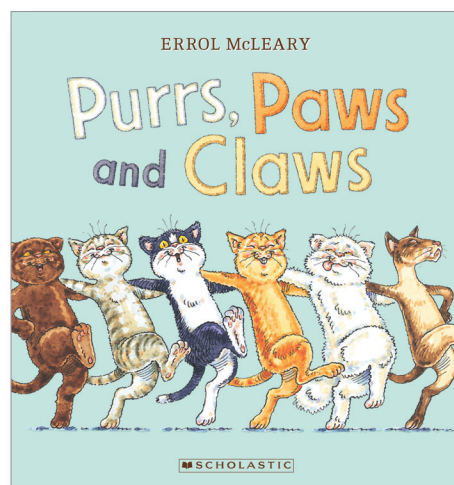
I think I've said too much already!

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Purrs, Paws and Claws

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