



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

Diana Menefy has lived in rural Northland for the last forty years. She has had numerous stories and articles for both children and adults published or broadcast, and has written seven non-fiction books and two junior novels. Her last novel *Shadow of the Boyd* was a finalist in the New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards in 2011, and won the LIANZA Esther Glen Medal that same year. Having trained as a nurse before becoming a farmer's wife, mother and grandmother, Diana loves getting together with her family, and enjoys researching history and bringing it alive for readers. *1915: Wounds of War* is her first book for Scholastic NZ.

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 Christchurch, NZ, and I live in Tapuhi, Northland.

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

I went to Riccarton Primary and High School. My nickname was Snail (my surname was Smaill and I used to be a good runner). After I left school, I trained as a nurse.

What was your favourite book growing up?

Little Women by Louisa May Alcott – I wanted to be a writer like Jo.

Who is your favourite children's author?

Sherryl Jordan.

What is your favourite food/colour/movie?

Favourite food: homemade chocolate ice cream with big lumps of chocolate in it.

Favourite colour: bright yellow – the colour of sunshine.

Favourite movie: *Out of Africa*.

Who inspired you to write?

My father gave me my love of stories (he'd make up stories for us kids) and both my parents were readers. My home was always full of books and we went to the library every Friday evening.

How did you get started? How old were you?

Apart from some terrible poetry I didn't start writing seriously until my daughter was 4 – I was 25 then. Before that I wrote a lot of letters. Now I hardly write any.

Why did you want to be a writer?

I think it was because I loved reading so much and I'd always had this secret desire to succeed like Jo March did in *Little Women*. But I never thought I would, until I sent my first story off and it was accepted.

How do you think up ideas?

Mostly from things I see, experience and feel. I twist them around using the words 'what if' and off I go ... sometimes it is a photograph that tells me a story, or a flash of inspiration. *Shadow of the Boyd* started from a dream of Thomas being held, hidden, behind a clump of flax and his feeling of devastation because his rescuers were departing and leaving him behind. I knew I had to tell his story.

Do you have a special place where you write?

I share a study with my husband; he has a small corner and I have the rest, lined with big cupboards and bookshelves. My desk looks out into the bush and a couple of hill paddocks. Sometimes the hawks swoop down in front of my window, sometimes the stock graze on the horizon, and when the sun is setting it is very beautiful. On a misty morning it looks like a scene from *Lord of the Rings*.

What is the best thing about being an author?
The writing – using words to make the pictures I have in my mind.

Have you had a funny or embarrassing moment as an author?
An enormous, loud sneeze in the middle of talking to a class. Not just one but several. The children thought it was hugely funny.

What do you do when you are not writing?
I read, work in my garden, cook. I also lead a team of wonderful writers who teach on the NorthTec Online Writing programme.

What would you have chosen to be if you were not an author?
A historian and wilderness explorer – impossible, so I explore from my writer's chair.

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

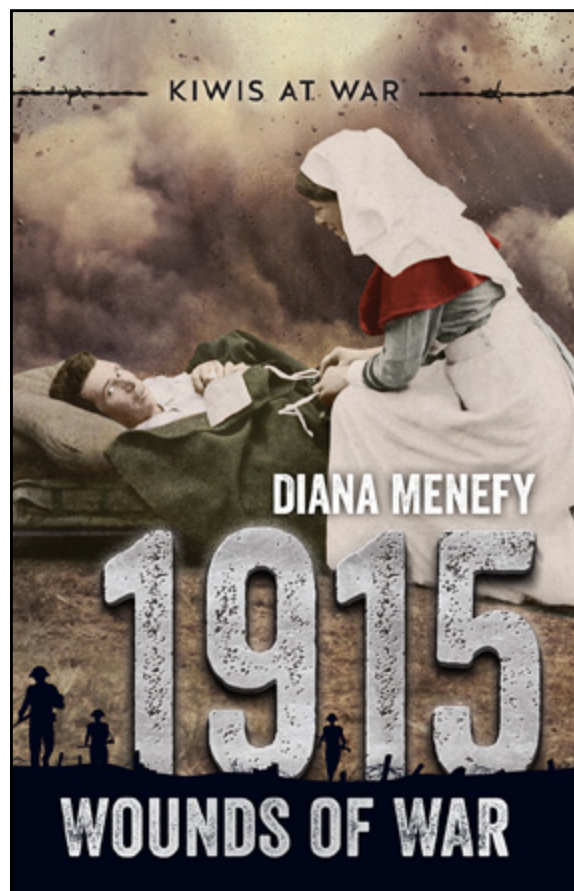
Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?
I have a wonderful, loving family.

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SCHOLASTIC NZ BOOKS BY DIANA MENEFY

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