



Finding Isabella

About the Author



My background is radio news and sport, but in 1998 when I was living in Porirua, I applied and was lucky enough to be selected for Whitireia Polytechnic's writing programme. At the end of the year I started writing my first novel *Knocked for Six*, which won the Tom Fitzgibbon Award and then the Esther Glen medal. *Finding Isabella* was my second novel and I lost count of the number of rewrites that were required to get it into a form Scholastic would publish. *Rocket Shoes* was 42,000 words when Scholastic rejected it. But I cut out 32,000 words and Pearson published it instead. It's now 10 chapters and 10,000 words. I had to get rid of a lot of characters and a lot of sub plot. I earn most of my money working as a writer at the University of Waikato.

Synopsis

Stacey Harper has been having a hard time of it lately. A while ago her father up and left her mother and now lives in Wellington with his new girlfriend, Daphne. Stacey's mother has had a lot of trouble dealing with the break-up. She hasn't returned to work and has been battling depression. Stacey has been struggling with her own feelings about her father's sudden departure. She needs to adapt to family life living only with her brothers and her mother, and try and resolve the feelings of anger that she has towards her father for destroying her home life and her mother's happiness. To make matters worse, Zac, Stacey's boyfriend, has just run off with Lisa, her best friend.

When Stacey's teacher gives the class an assignment to research and write about an ancestor, Stacey is initially stumped. Then her mother suggests that she find out more about Isabella, her father's great-great-grandmother. Her mother gives her Isabella's daybook, a kind of diary. As Stacey reads through the diary she becomes disheartened. Isabella's life seemed incredibly boring – an endless series of visits to friends and attending church functions. But then Stacey begins to suspect that there is more to Isabella than meets the eye. She has been writing in code.

Hours of pouring over the diary, referencing and cross-checking, leads Stacey to believe that Isabella was involved in a sordid scandal – something that would change her life forever. When Stacey's mum tells her that she has been invited to spend her holidays with her dad and Daphne in Wellington. Stacey tells her in no uncertain terms that she is not interested. However, her mum won't let it go – she insists that he is still her father and loves her. When Stacey realises that she may be able to find out more about Isabella from the National Library, she reluctantly agrees to visit her father, but she is far from happy about the situation.

Stacey is made to feel even worse when she arrives in Wellington and inadvertently discovers that Daphne is pregnant. As more of Isabella's story is revealed Stacey is learning lessons in her own life – adult relationships are complicated and things don't always turn out exactly how you want them to.)

Selected Bibliography

Novels:

<i>Knocked for Six</i>	(Scholastic, 2001)
<i>Finding Isabella</i>	(Scholastic, 2004)
<i>Rocket Shoes</i>	(Pearson, 2011)

Short stories and readers include:

<i>Stop kissing my sister</i>	(Learning Media)
<i>Brotherly Love</i>	(Scholastic, Storylines Anthology, 2003)
<i>Gibber for New Zealand</i>	(Random House, Dare and Double Dare, 2007)
<i>Jesse Ray's Mum</i>	(Scholastic, Pick 'n' Mix, Vol 2, 2010)
<i>Mind Your Manners</i>	(Pearson, 2012)
<i>Flower Power</i>	(Pearson, 2012)
<i>The Tool Makers</i>	(Pearson, 2012)

Non-fiction:

<i>Black Gold</i>	(Pearson, 2009)
<i>Global Food Crisis</i>	(Pearson, 2009)

Awards:

Tom Fitzgibbon Award	<i>Knocked for Six</i>
Esther Glen Medal	<i>Knocked for Six</i>

Classroom Activities

Plot – Create a flow diagram that shows 15 important events from the story in the order in which they occur.

Character – Choose an important scene from the novel where a character acts in a certain way or makes an important decision. Explain the motivations behind the character's action or decision and describe what it shows the reader about the character.

Research – Imagine that you have been given the same research assignment as Stacey. Choose an interesting ancestor to complete your research on. Try and interview relatives and use primary and secondary sources of information. Present your research in role as your chosen ancestor. Include information about the social climate during the period that you are researching and explain how this affected your ancestor's life.

Review – Complete a book review for *Finding Isabella*. Include a brief plot summary, explain what type of book it is and who you think it will appeal to. Describe the characters, the setting and the author's message. Remember to give your personal opinion about the novel.

Marking Schedule – Imagine that you are Stacey's teacher. You are responsible for marking Stacey's oral presentation based on her research.

Design a marking schedule that you would use to grade her performance. You may want to include sections on creativity, use of different resources, how the material is structured and delivery techniques.

Static Image – Design a static image that depicts a main theme from the novel. You may wish to complete a collage using words and images from the text, a poster or a web page. Remember to combine verbal and visual features to convey your ideas.

Letter – Imagine that you are Isabella. Write a letter home to England describing your new life in New Zealand and the challenges that you face coping with a new baby and marriage. Include your thoughts and feelings about what is going on in your life.

Character – Complete a character profile for Stacey. Include information about how she develops and changes as the novel progresses and look at the reasons behind these changes. Use evidence from the novel to back your ideas.