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***Elizabeth, Queen of the Seas* by Lynne Cox** illustrated by **Brian Floca**

Publisher: Schwartz & Wade books, Random House

RRP \$29.99

This New Zealand story, written by a notable American swimmer, makes a delightful picture book with a feel-good factor. The author was in Christchurch some years ago and, while walking alongside the Avon River, she met a young brother and sister, Michael and Maggie. The siblings told her about Elizabeth, an elephant seal who had taken up residence in the Avon. They were waiting to see Elizabeth who often hauled herself from the river to stretch across a two-lane road for a snooze. This caused traffic chaos and put the elephant seal in danger of being run over.

The well-told tale outlines how concerned people tried to encourage Elizabeth to live amongst her own species on rocky coastlines. After being towed several times to distant shores, she always found her way back to the Avon River and basked on the same city street. The elephant seal became a local celebrity and, because she was considered such a regal animal, she was named Elizabeth, Queen of the Seas.

Soft-coloured illustrations echo the riverside and ocean scenes. Elizabeth is given an appealing face that shows pleasure when basking in the sun and distress when frightened by traffic. Various sketches portray people of all backgrounds coming together to discuss how to protect the seal and avoid danger to everyone using the road. The engaging illustrations depict the charisma of a wild creature who knew where she belonged and the community who helped her to stay.

A fact page about elephant seals completes this attractive hardback publication. Lovely to see Christchurch in its 'pre-quake' beauty.

Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

Author's website:

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<http://www.brianfloca.com/>

