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

Publisher: potton & burton

RRP \$29.99 hardback

RRP \$19.99 paperback

This New Zealand story, written by an American swimmer, makes a delightful picture book. While in Christchurch some years ago, the author met a young brother and sister on the banks of the Avon River. The siblings told her about Elizabeth, an elephant seal who had taken up residence in the Avon. Elizabeth 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 tale outlines how people tried to encourage Elizabeth to live amongst her own species. After being towed several times to rocky coastlines, she always found her way back to the Avon River and basked on the same city street. The seal became a 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 showing pleasure when lying in the sun and distress when frightened. Various sketches portray people 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 publication. It's lovely to see Christchurch in its 'pre-quake' beauty.

Author's website:

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Reviewed by children's book author, Jean Bennett

