



## 2007 Annual Seminar

---

The 2007 seminar showcased some of New Zealand's most successful male authors, [Ken Catran](#), [Phil Smith](#), and [Brian Falkner](#), as well as the official book launches for [Phyllis Johnston's](#) new novel [Dead Dan's Dee](#) and the latest [Sherryl Jordan](#) novel in the Denzil series [The Silver Dragon](#) as part of the new box set *The Adventures of Denzil*.

### Ken Catran

Ken is one of New Zealand's most acclaimed authors, and is spending this year as the [Writer In Residence](#) at Waikato University. Many of Ken's novels have a basis in historical war facts, and Ken gave a fascinating talk on the changing face of war history - real history v common history.

Ken said that because of embargoes on historical facts, often of 50 years, much of what was taught for years was actually based on propaganda, not fact. As an example Ken cited the classic legend of Heinrich Himmler having bitten on a cyanide capsule at the end of WWII. Embargoed



documents released 18 months ago showed that he was actually killed by the British.

Much of what today's kids believe comes from watching television, and what is on tv is often only one person's view of something. Ken's extensive research allows him to find out the real truth behind the stories, and to try and convey this truth through his novels.

Ken spoke of the novel he is currently working on as Writer in Residence, *Wood Dragon and Fire Rooster*, set during the fall of Singapore where 30,000 Japanese troops defeated 130,000 Allied troops.

The novel tells the story of two young men, one Chinese and one Kiwi, who get separated from their armies in the jungle. Initially they try to kill each other, but then settle into a truce, and the story traces the complexity of their two different lives as they learn to trust each other - a trust used against them by other people. Ken's extensive research into his novels, particularly of the little things about history that make his books interesting and real to the reader. His new novel will be released through Harper Collins in 2008 or 2009.



Ken spoke of the dichotomy of children and adult's novels, of the lack of young adult fiction being produced in New Zealand, and of the lack of Government support for children's drama productions. He stated the importance of experimental reading for 9-12 year olds, and of the particular importance of getting your kids to expand their horizons and imagination and extend their vocabularies, particularly through reading fantasy. In this television and texting age kids are rapidly losing the ability to communicate, and they need to read and think to be aware not only of a world beyond television, but to be aware that what the television tells them about the world is not necessarily true.

**Ken's advice for aspiring novelists trying to get published:**

- Check the genre of publishers - it is no good trying to sell a science fiction manuscript to a publisher of romance novels
- Browse through books in the library to find out who publishes what
- Make sure the publishers you approach handle the age group you are aiming for (children/young adults/adults)
- Join a Writers' Group - the advice and support you gain from such groups is immeasurable
- Check out the [Writers' Guild](#) website.
- Write, re-write, and re-write. Ken gets the first draft of a new novel on paper within 2-3 weeks. It then sits for months before he begins the first re-write, which establishes the characters and personal relationships. The final manuscript will still require an editor.

**For more information on Ken check out:**

- [NZ Book Council](#)
- [Christchurch City Libraries info](#)
- [Christchurch City Libraries interview](#)

## Phil Smith

Ex-journalist Phil's first published novel *The Unknown Zone* was a winner in the New Zealand Post Book Awards Children and Young Adults section in 2006.

Phil began his talk by reminiscing about Randy Stone's radio show *Night Beat* in the mid 1950s (that produced a number of nods and "Mmm-hmmms" from the audience). It was this show that inspired Phil to become a writer.

Phil backed up Ken's comments about today's kids whose minds have been anaesthetised by television and dumbed down, and he spoke of how the best stories are still conveyed orally. He enthused about the general knowledge and stories that older people tell, and told of his grandmother's stories of coming over on the *Athena* and berthing next to Amundsen's ship after their successful assault on the South Pole. Mandrake the Magician, Superman, Spiderman, and war comics formed the foundation of Phil's writing influences, and he began a career as a proofreader and then sports journalist in 1965 at the *Rotorua Daily Post*.

From journalism Phil learnt the old maxim "I keep six honest serving men, they taught me all I knew, their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who". This, says Phil, is all there is to writing a novel, although he also spoke of Stephen King's methodology of novel writing: Narrative, Description, and Dialogue.

Phil spoke of the difference between journalism and novel writing - the former being (generally) about tragedy and misfortune, is full of facts and quotations, and does not usually connect emotionally with the reader.

During Phil's time as a journalist, which included three years working for World Vision, his favourite subjects to interview were authors, whom he interrogated as to their habits to try and discover their secrets. At a Bookrapt seminar some years ago Phil heard David Hill talk, which inspired him to tackle *The Unknown Zone*.

The novel Phil is currently working on is about a young man who travels from Hokianga to Sandhurst, and receives an award for distinguished services in the Falkland Islands. For guidance on this novel, says Phil, he turned to Phyllis Johnston's *The Fugitive Soldier*.

### Phil's advice for aspiring novelists trying to get published.

- Join a writers group such as Bookrapt
- Write a first draft, then revise, and re-revise



- Expect that 10% of effort will go into the first draft and 90% of effort will go into revisions
- In particular look for illogical sequences, excess words, vocabulary and grammar
- Accept that writing a novel is like building a boat - the closer you get to finishing, the more little things there are that need doing
- Have a supportive partner and/or family
- Start with an idea, then build the main characters and crisis
- Allow the characters to develop minds and personalities of their own, and to say their own things
- Be conscious of your audience as you write and choose a genre that is compatible with your ability
- Conduct extensive research for the back story of your novel - good fiction is as much fact as fiction - there needs to be a sense of recognition for the reader to make it seem real
- Put aside thoughts of *am I going to make it?* and *is it worthwhile?* and write for your passion.
- Just tell the story.

**For more information on Phil check out**

- [Christchurch City Libraries interview](#)

## Brian Falkner

Brian's talk was entitled *Birth of a Novel - Rejection - Redemption - and the Road to The Long White Cloud*.

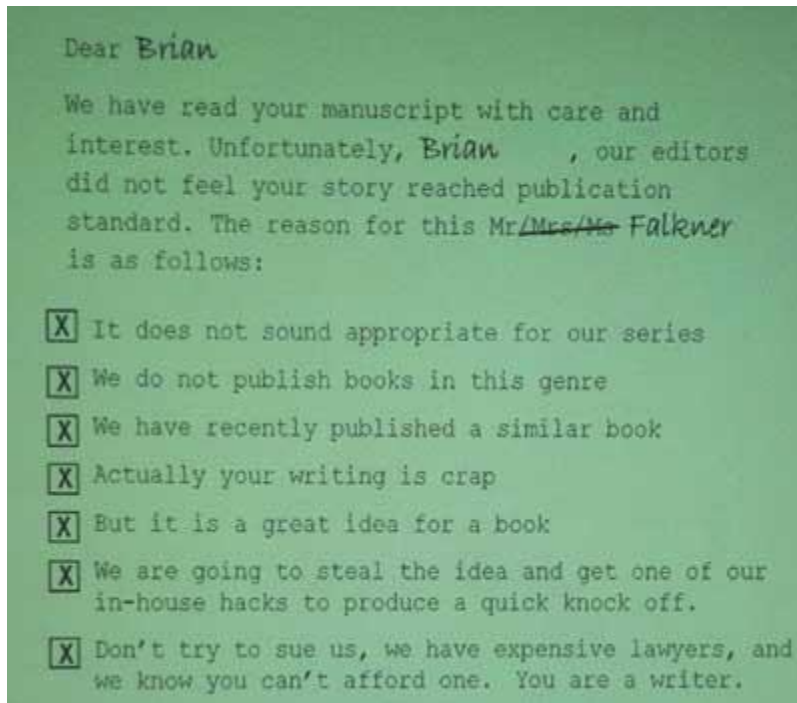


As with Ken and Phil, Brian has a commercial writing background, as a radio journalist and as an advertising copywriter. He was acclaimed as being the top of this field in New Zealand, and won a string of national and international copywriting awards.

Brian's dreams of being a writer started at intermediate school even though, he happily admits, you have to be mad to want to be a writer. You have to deal with writers' block, years of research for back story, drafts, redrafts, and discarding loved characters who just don't work. You have to write for the love of doing it as your chances of getting published are very low. Brian suggested the need for a Writers' Helpline, something like the gambling helpline, as writing becomes an addiction and the writing addict becomes removed from the

real world living, instead, in a fantasy world of their own creation.

Many a laugh was heard from the audience when Brian put up the following "rejection" letter, as it was something probably everyone in the audience could identify with:



Brian's first attempt at becoming a published writer was with a children's book. It was rejected.

His second attempt was a psychological thriller. It was rejected.

His third attempt was a short story. It was rejected.

His fourth attempt was a play. It was rejected.

His fifth attempt was a screenplay for Shortland Street. It was rejected (before it was even written).

His sixth attempt was a romance novel. It was rejected.

His seventh attempt was a screenplay for the NZ Film Commission. It was rejected.

His eighth attempt was a screenplay for a James Bond movie. It was rejected. And he was threatened with legal action for using the James Bond character.

His ninth attempt was a novel for young adults. Scholastic rejected it. Harper Collins rejected it with a full page letter telling him how appalling they thought it was. Mallinson Rendel LOVED IT!!!



All the years of rejection and hard work paid off - *Henry and the Flea* was published by Mallinson Rendall and was nominated for a LIANZA Award in 2004, ironically losing out to Ken Catran.

Praise for *The Real Thing* was equally high but then, just to show that even published authors don't have it all their own way, his third manuscript for *Cave Dogs* (intended to be the first of a trilogy) was rejected by Mallinson Rendall. His fourth manuscript, *Super Freak*, was picked up though and Brian once again gained the "immense satisfaction from (reading) nice reviews".



His current manuscript, *The Long White Cloud*, was rejected, but Brian thought back to the rejection he had received from Harper Collins and the fact that the same manuscript was accepted by Mallinson Rendel. Rejection letters from publishers are often only one person's opinion.

Believing that a manuscript has a better chance of being read if the author visits the publisher, and heading to L.A. anyway, Brian made the trip to New York to do the rounds of the publishers there. No one was really interested. Then he met an agent who was *really* interested, and who had a contact at Random House. Waiting at the airport to return home his mobile rang - it was his agent calling to say Random House had made a pre-emptive six-figure (\$U.S.) offer for *The Long White Cloud* **and** for a second novel.

Brian had the current manuscript with him at the seminar, the third draft, and it was interesting, and scary, to see just how many pencil comments the editors had made on the *third* draft. The manuscript has been renamed for the U.S. market, and *The Tomorrow Code* is scheduled for release in September 2008.

**For more information on Brian check out:**

- [Brian Falkner's website](#)
- [Kiwi Write 4 Kidz profile](#)
- [Mallinson Rendel profile](#)
- [NZ Book Council profile](#)
- [Christchurch City Libraries interview](#)

## Phyllis Johnston

- book launch for *Dean Dan's Dee*

Phyllis has been with Bookrapt since its first meeting in 1983 (as the Bay of Plenty Children's Literature Association), where she was elected President, a role she held until 1996. Born into a large family of readers and oral story tellers, she wrote down many of their pioneer stories when she started writing nearly three decades ago.



Phyllis's latest novel tells the story of Dee, who is proud to be the daughter of a brave

soldier father who died fighting in the war. After the Great War, Dee lives at the beach along with her mother and aunt. It's a paradise for Dee, with the sun, the sea and the sky, but little by little her seaside haven disintegrates. Her mother and aunt become very ill, leaving Dee abandoned. However, soldier Joe has never forgotten his promise to his army mate, Dan, Dee's dead father. He and Essie take Dee north into half- broken bush country. Roaming the countryside, doing farm work, and making friends, Dee is almost happy again, but shadows hang over her life in Mamaku. Joe and Essie can't afford high school for her, and all the kids seem to know something Dee doesn't - something about her soldier father Dan. Told with subtlety and charm, this is a poignant, bighearted story - of honour, courage and the aftermath of war.

It was a bitter sweet launch for Phyllis's latest book, as we were also officially farewelling her following her move to the Waikato (we hope they appreciate it!) Longacre very generously provided a morning tea for the launch, which was attended not only by the seminar guests but by a large number of Phyllis's friends and family too.

Phyllis's publisher, Longacre Press, sent the following message which was read out at the launch by Angie Belcher:

Longacre was delighted to discover *Dead Dan's Dee* in the large, curving pile of incoming manuscripts. Here was a fresh voice, a sensitive but feisty protagonist; and a rich story from our collective past of one girl's compelling journey. We are proud to be sending Phyllis's book out into the world and wish her all the best, along with Dee who is poised to enter the imaginations of young New Zealand readers.

- Regards Barbara Larson, Penelope Todd and the team at Longacre Press



## Sherryl Jordan

- book launch for *The Silver Dragon*

Sherryl is the full-time author of many internationally critically acclaimed fantasy novels. The latest novel in the Denzil series, *The Silver Dragon* has been released as part of a boxed set of the entire series, *The Wednesday Wizard*, *Denzil's Dilemma*, and *The Great Bear Burglary*.



*The Silver Dragon* was Scholastic's Book of the Month for July 2007, and Sherryl's editor Penny Scown, joined us at the launch. Thank you to Scholastic for kindly providing some bubbly for the day.





**Elsie Jones, Alison Robertson, and Angie Belcher.**



**A big THANK YOU to Chris and the team from Books A Plenty who once again put on an awesome display of books by local and national authors.**



**(L-R) Penny Scown, Sherryl Jordan, Phyllis Johnston, Jean Bennett.**