



## 2010 Annual Seminar

The Bookrapt Seminar for 2010 was held on Saturday August 7 and was, once again, a resounding success, thanks to our awesome speakers, authors Fleur Beale and Diana Neild, and illustrator Philip Webb (who has illustrated books for both Fleur and Diana.) Thank you to everyone who came and, as always, an extra special thank-you to Chris and Warren Baskett from [Books-a-Plenty](http://www.booksaplenty.co.nz) for their support and their amazingly stocked book stall on the day.



### Fleur Beale

The theme of this year's seminar was *Inspiration & Illustration*, and Fleur began by mentioning that the one question children always ask her is, "Where do your ideas come from?". The inspiration for *Slide the Corner* came from the simple fact that, at the time, there was no books set in New Zealand to interest Kiwi readers, and so Fleur wrote one.

The idea for *Juno of Taris* came during a trip to Ground Zero a month after 9/11, when everyone was being super-friendly to everyone else, American flags were everywhere, and New York had the feel of being an enclosed society looking inwards, with nothing coming from the outside. Fleur felt it would be interesting to write about an isolated society like that, and so the idea for *Juno of Taris* was born.



Fleur believes in doing a lot of thinking and research about her stories - and asking the questions about the idea of the story. She believes that time is a big part of the writing

process, leaving a piece of writing for a month before coming back to it, reading it again, and then rewriting it.

The inspiration for the *Quin Majik* series also came about by identifying a gap in the market - at the time, Fleur says, all the fantasy stories were saccharin fairy tales for girls, with nothing gritty that boys could get their teeth into. At a book seminar Fleur noted that Ann Mallinson, of Mallinson Rendel, was buying such boys' stories, and when Fleur asked why she was buying them and not publishing them, Ann replied that there weren't any to publish. "Why don't you write one?" she suggested. Fleur didn't mention that she already had - but did e-mail it to Ann the next day. Ann loved it, and signed the story immediately.

Fleur likes to plan out the first seven or eight chapters of her books, and then just see what happens next as her characters take on their own lives. However, she did caution budding authors who let their characters do whatever they want to. Characters, Fleur says, can be like unruly children, and like, children, need discipline - an author does need to keep control of their characters and not give them a complete free rein.

Despite some recent predictions otherwise in the media, Fleur believes that the teen market is still robust, and that books are still popular, even with advances in technology such as e-readers. Indeed, about a month back when the #1 best seller at The Warehouse for that week was Stephenie Meyer's *The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner*, the book was available to download for free on Meyer's website. Fleur says that publishers never seem to know what the next trend will be, and points to the fact that six months before the *Harry Potter* phenomenon went super-nova Scholastic closed their fantasy imprint because the genre was doing so badly.

Finally, Fleur reiterated the need for writers to read over their work after setting it aside for a time, and to be aware of the fact that if you find any part of your writing boring, then others surely will too. Write - leave - reread - rewrite.

[Fleur Beale's Book Council page](#)  
[Fierce September blog](#)

## Philip Webb

Philip is an extremely talented artist, who has illustrated the writings for both of the other seminar speakers, as well as for the likes of Joy Cowley and Pat Quin. Philip started illustrating educational readers, and has only recently moved into picture books. With the number of New Zealand authors having international success there is now, Philip says, more opportunity for illustrators within New Zealand.



Philip seems to have enjoyed an illustration process that many illustrators (and writers) would be envious of - one of high collaboration between him and the authors whose work he brings to life. Philip had table discussions with Fleur Beale and Ann Mallinson about

illustrating Fleur's work, and had many a conversation with Diana Neild before the pigs of *Piggity Wiggity Jiggity Jig* reached their final form.

The process of illustration that Philip undertakes is different for chapter books and story books. For the former, he begins with black and white pencil sketches, that can be changed easily if needed, then uses penline for the finished artwork that is inked over the top and finished with watercolour. For picture books Philip begins with character sketches, storyboarding the entire book on a page, then uses a water-soluble terracotta pencil, applies the watercolour, and uses an HB to finish, concentrating on a skilful blending of line, tone, and watercolour.

Philip had a delightful presentation that he shared with the audience, that included early black and white sketches of Diana Neild's pigs, as well as a veritable array of his other work.

[Philip Webb's website](#)

## Diana Neild

Diana gave an enthralling and hilarious talk, beginning with some anecdotes of her life as a young girl on a very remote farm in the Waikato, where they had no TV, and the long bus ride to Primary School was a Major Social Event. Diana began writing rhythm and rhyme stories at school, and over the years used them for parties, weddings, 21sts, and apologies to teachers for children's absenteeism.

She further developed her writing skills at Boarding School, where the students were "forced" to write a letter home every Sunday. Diana said this taught her to say what she wanted to say in writing, and taught the valuable skills of making the letters as interesting as possible (for her parents) and how to say something nice about something that wasn't really nice at all (that present from Grandma).



Originally applying for journalism school, Diana ended up studying music instead, had four kids, and learnt what worked in writing that was intended to be read aloud to children. As much as she loved *Postman Pat*, Diana found that the stories, that took 15 minutes to read aloud, were too long for a busy parent, and so she developed the idea of putting her energy into writing something that could be read aloud in three to four minutes. The release of the "only-published-because-the-author-is-famous" *Budgie the Little Helicopter* books added further determination to Diana to write something that was good.

Diana played around with hard letters that sounded good aloud - p, d, j, x, and z - originally wanted a dog, but decided that was too close to *Hairy Maclary* and settled on pig. She wanted a lot of characters, as the stories are really about human interaction and relationships, did not want any technology in the stories (no TV, radio, etc), and wanted a father-figure that had a prominent role. Diana was not keen on the habit at the time of belittled father figures, such as found in *The Berenstain Bears* and on *The Cosby Show*, and wanted a dad who could be respected.

Once Diana had her characters, she chose their names on the basis of the ease of being able to rhyme something with them, and then developed each character's likes, dislikes, and relationships. Once the characters were sorted, Diana found it easy to put the story together. She optimistically sent the manuscript off - and promptly received four rejection letters. Deciding that the story had an English flavour she sent it to Walker Books in London, who loved it, but (possibly somewhat condescendingly) said children weren't capable of understanding long words. At this Diana decided to just write the entire series and leave them for her grandchildren to enjoy, and to publish long after she was gone to fund themselves through college. However, with no publishing deal and no realistic incentive to write the piggies were put on the back burner for six years, until Diana's Uncle looked into self-publishing, and offered to pay for the pigs to see the light.

Diana had the pictures done for the story, and then ended up in touch with John McIntyre, who looked at the ready-to-print book and said "Story - brilliant, pictures - adequate". John took the story in hand, wrote to publishers himself, and had the story picked up by Scholastic. After a long wait Diana was told that the new illustrator would be Philip Webb. "Philip who?" she thought, and was horrified when visiting his website to discover that there was NOT A SINGLE PICTURE OF A PIG! She sent him an e-mail at 8am, received sketches back at 4pm, and knew that his pigs were perfect. Scholastic arranged a meeting between the two, and Diana was soon convinced that her pigs were in the best trotters possible.

At the launch it seems, by the photos that Diana showed the Seminar audience, that the entire local (Palmerston North) community got in behind the pigs - not just school children, but lawyers, businessmen, bankers, and politicians came dressed as pigs in full costumes made by Diana and the Piggity Props Department, along with polystyrene recreations of Philip Webb's wonderful illustrations. The local newspaper produced a six-page broadsheet *The Daily Porker* especially for the launch, and children re-enacted scenes from the stories.

Diana finished her talk by offering aspiring authors the same advice that Fleur Beale did - write - leave - return - rewrite. If something doesn't fit, take it out - even if it is hard to let go. Diana feels that her musical background has been important for her writing, as it taught her how to practice, practice, practice until everything is perfect. And perfect Diana's pigs certainly are.

[Diana Neild's Book Council page](#)