



A Conversation with Peter Walters

Author of
The Hungriest Mouth in the Sea

What was your incentive to write this particular book?

I can quite vividly picture where the journey of this book began. I was sitting on sandy dunes in Otago, NZ watching two brave yellow-eyed penguins scamper past a snoozing fur seal to a rocky alcove. I felt then that the richness of the environment and web of predators and prey was so detailed, that I believed it could so effectively engage with a child's curiosity.

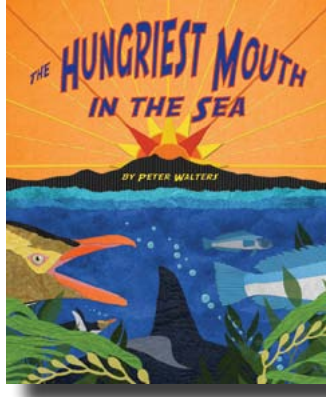
When did you become interested in writing?

For a long time creating stories has been a fundamental tool in my role as a childcare provider, though it's perhaps only the last couple of years that I've looked to capture them to be shared and retold.

How has teaching children all over the world influenced your writing?

I am fortunate that my work with children has exposed me to a variety of cultures and it has always been fascinating to observe the role of

the child and the attitude towards childhood wherever I have been. While I have seen many differences between cultures I have also witnessed traits that appear universal and I am certain the relationship children have with storytelling is one such trait. One other direct influence on my



writing for children is their interaction and interest in the natural world. We of course, as a species, have an intimate relationship with nature and while the modern world increasingly obstructs the time children have to cultivate this relationship, the deep-rooted curiosity that an image of a lion, eagle or dolphin generates still remains.

When are you most creative?

A great many of people have long observed the connection between walking and creative thought and I couldn't agree with them more. Walking the rugged coast of North Cornwall with my Labrador Tui, while muttering to myself was where much of this story was conceived.

Do you have any advice for parents?

I'm certainly not an expert on the marine life of the south pacific, creating this story has taken time and research, but what I think this story shows well is the order and inter-connectivity of all life. Children are drawn to this natural order, whether it's in the seas and oceans, in the jungles and forests or gardens and parks. There will be moments of intense curiosity during a child's development and it's a wonderful experience supporting them in their exploration of the natural world.

Is there one particular animal in the South Sea that you find fascinating?

The south of England, where I live, is without doubt a green and pleasant land, but it is a landscape that has been farmed for millennia. Even the protected 'wild' areas are a landscape shaped by farmers of an earlier time. All of this filtered into the experience of what New Zealand's South island had to behold. It remains a land that still holds on to its wilderness and by becoming immersed in it and observing the life there, in its natural habitat, offered an exhilarating experience. It was this feeling of wonder that encouraged me to explore the world of such creatures as the yellow-eyed penguin, a small bird that offered me a route into a whole ecosystem, each step revealed another splendid life-form whose existence was connected to all the rest.

What is most rewarding and/or challenging about writing children's books?

I feel the challenges are plenty, but one of my greatest was to capture ideas down on to paper. I find ideas in the imagination can swirl around, change shape and can be wonderfully lucid, but transferring them in detail is certainly a challenge for me. It's perhaps then not surprising that the greatest reward is when someone is able to share in the vision.

Why did you choose this illustration style for your story?

Prior to illustrating this story much of my background was in portraiture and painting with oils. Quite early on when forming the story I knew I wanted to bring a fresh approach to the artwork. I went through the thousands of photographs I had taken in New Zealand and what stood out from them were the colors and textures, I wanted that for this story. I immediately started working with paper collages but soon felt restricted by the process. The next obvious step was to move to the digital editor and this freed me up completely. It allowed me to fully explore the spectrum of color and texture in creating the animals of this story.

What do you have coming up next?

Since completing *The Hungriest Mouth*, much of my creative time and energy has gone into illustrating. However, the time spent on walks with my dog Tui remains exclusively for cultivating new ideas and assembling and playing with words. Presently these walks are spent developing a new story that is centred around the life-cycle and great migration of salmon. The scale of the great salmon run is fascinating and it is one of nature's great stories that offers the opportunity to explore important themes, including the role of keystone species.

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