

MY MSCDP JOURNAL

BY TRACEY
DEMBO

ONCE UPON A TIME, FOUR ASPIRING
KIDLIT CREATIVES FROM DIFFERENT
PARTS OF AUSTRALIA, WERE CHOSEN
TO TAKE PART IN A QUEST OF SORTS.

TOGETHER, THEY WERE TO EMBARK
ON THE MAURICE SAXBY CREATIVE
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, THE MOST
EPIC AND LIFE-CHANGING OF
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE MENTORSHIP
PROGRAMS IN AUSTRALIA.

ARMED WITH THEIR PENS,
THE MENTEES WERE READY
TO SET OFF TO TAKE ON THE
CHALLENGE.

BUT LITTLE DID THEY KNOW
THAT A STRANGE AND
INVISIBLE FORCE WAS
MOVING THROUGH THE
WORLD....

THANKS COVID!!!

A FORCE THAT TURNED LIFE ON PLANET
EARTH UPSIDE DOWN....

WHICH THREATENED THE VERY
EXISTENCE OF THE MSCDP....

AND WHICH CONSPIRED TO KEEP THE
MENTEES APART FOR ANOTHER TWO
YEARS...

BUT THE MENTEES WERE PATIENT AND
THEY LAID LOW UNTIL THE TIME WAS
RIGHT TO STRIKE.

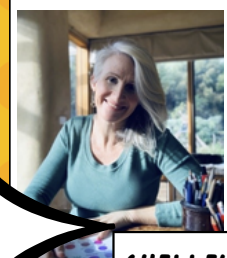
AND FINALLY, IN SEPTEMBER 2022,
THAT TIME CAME.



ME



HELEN



SHELLEY



LUCIE

DAY 1

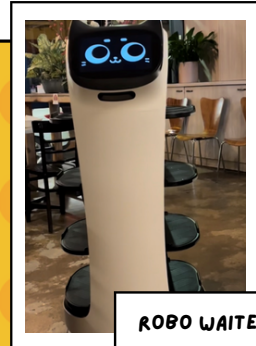
AFTER TWO YEARS OF MANY ZOOM CALLS, CANCELLED PLANE TICKETS AND THWARTED ATTEMPTS BY MANY FABULOUS PEOPLE (PARTICULARLY THE INCREDIBLE HELEN CHAMBERLIN AND PAM HORSEY), IT WAS A SPECTACULAR MOMENT WHEN US FOUR MENTEES FINALLY UNITED AT HELEN'S APARTMENT!

IT WAS SO WONDERFUL TO BE IN THE SAME ROOM AS LUCIE, SHELLEY AND HELEN, AND TO FINALLY MEET HELEN, PAM, REBECCA GREEN, KATIE FLANAGAN AND SUZANNE THWAITES FOR THE FIRST TIME.

POWERED BY TEA AND CUCUMBER SANDWICHES, WE WERE SOON WHISKED AWAY TO MEET THE FIRST KIDLIT SUPERHERO OF THE MSDCP – AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR/HUMAN BEING EXTRAORDINAIRE LUCINDA GIFFORD, WHO IS ALSO A FORMER MENTEE OF THE PROGRAM.

LUCINDA SPOKE OPENLY ABOUT HER CREATIVE PROCESS AND HOW THE MSDCP HELPED HER GIVE HER THE CONFIDENCE TO FULLY DEVELOP HER AMAZING CAREER IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS. SHE EVEN GAVE US A PEEK AT HER TOP SECRET SKETCH BOOK...

LUCINDA GIFFORD



ROBO WAITER

BUT THEN...
AS IF THE DAY COULD NOT
GET ANY BETTER...
WE ZIPPED AROUND THE
CORNER...

FOR AFTERNOON TEA WITH
ANOTHER KIDLIT SUPERHERO...

NONE OTHER THAN THE
ABSOLUTELY LEGENDARY,
ONE-OF-A-KIND, SHAUN TAN!!!!

ASPIRING KIDLIT
SUPERHEROES
BATTLE FEROCIOUS
BEAST!

SHAUN WAS MORE AWESOME IN
PERSON THAN WE COULD HAVE
EVER IMAGINED, AND SPOKE AT
LENGTH ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF
EXPERIMENTING, PRUNING BACK A
STORY, TRUSTING YOUR INSTINCTS
AND BEING OPEN TO IDEAS
CHANGING ALONG THE WAY (AND
ALSO SHOWED US SOME SNEAKY
SKETCHES!).

MIND OFFICIALLY BLOWN!!!!

BANG



DAY 2

OUR DAY 2 JOURNEY TOOK US TO THE CANDLEBARK SCHOOL... WHERE WE MET NONE OTHER THAN ICONIC KIDLIT CRUSADER, JOHN MARSDEN!

WE SAT IN ONE OF THE CLASSROOMS, MESMERISED, WHILE HE TOLD US THE STORY OF HIS OWN WRITING JOURNEY AND SPOKE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WRITING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF VOICE. WE WERE AGAIN PINCHING OURSELVES TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH GREATNESS - NOT TO MENTION AN INCREDIBLE THOUGHTFUL AND ENGAGING HUMAN BEING!



JOHN MARSDEN - HIS IDEA, NOT OURS!

TIME AGAIN FLEW BY AND BEFORE WE KNEW IT, WE WERE CATAPULTED TO THE STUNNING DAFFODIL-LINED GARDENS OF DROMKEEN.

THE LOVELY BERNADETTE JOINER GREETED US WARMLY WITH A DELICIOUS LUNCH AND WE MARVELLED OVER THE GALLERY AND GARDENS.



WE THEN ATTENDED A STORYTIME SESSION WITH CORINNE FENTON (READING FROM HER NEW BOOK 'SUBBIE AND HIS MATE'), BEFORE ATTENDING MARK WILSON'S LAUNCH OF HIS NEW BOOK 'VOTES FOR WOMEN'.

WE THEN DID A HIGHLY ENTERTAINING DRAWING WORKSHOP SESSION WITH MARK WHERE WE GOT TO FLEX OUR CREATIVE MUSCLES BY DRAWING DOLPHINS, GIANT SQUIDS AND HORSES!

DAY 3

WHO DOESN'T LOVE A GOOD BOOK LAUNCH?

TODAY'S WAS NO EXCEPTION AS RILEY NOTTINGHAM KICKED OFF THE LAUNCH OF HENRY BOFFIN'S NEW BOOK, 'SPECK OF THE STARS', AT FORD ST PUBLISHING. IT WAS LOVELY TO CHAT TO HENRY AND TO MEET PAUL COLLINS AND MEREDITH COSTAIN, AS WELL AS RUNNING INTO THE IRREPRESSIBLY ENERGETIC AND DELIGHTFUL ADAM WALLACE.



DAY 4

THIS MORNING'S MISSION TOOK US TO THE OFFICES OF ALLEN & UNWIN, WHERE JODIE WEBSTER (PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL MANAGER) AND ELISE JONES (ACTING CHILDREN'S PUBLISHER) TREATED US TO A BEHIND-THE-SCENES PEEK AT THE PLACE WHERE MAGIC HAPPENS! SO GREAT TO HEAR ABOUT CURRENT MARKET TRENDS (HELLO GRAPHIC NOVELS!) AND HOW ALLEN & UNWIN SUPPORT THEIR CREATORS IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT JOURNEYS. THEY WERE FULL OF HELPFUL ADVICE, INCLUDING TO WRITE THE BEST BOOK YOU CAN ABOUT SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO READ. WE LEFT ON AN INSPIRATION HIGH!

DAY 5



WHAT A TREAT TODAY TO MEET THE BRILLIANT TEAM (OF MIRIAM ROSENBLOOM AND GUY DIVISION) BEHIND SCRIBBLE, THE CHILDREN'S IMPRINT OF SCRIBE PUBLICATIONS. SCRIBBLE MAKE SUCH STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL BOOKS THAT ARE JUST SO VIBRANT AND JOYFUL. WE EVEN HAD A TEENSY PREVIEW OF ANNA WALKER'S GORGEOUS NEW BOOK, SNAP!

MMMMM....
DON'T MIND IF I
DO....



JUST A COUPLE OF GIRLS
HANGING OUT AT A&U



CHECK OUT OUR
MATCHING BOOKS!



ODDLY, NO ONE WANTED TO TRY
THE PARMAGEDDON FOR LUNCH!



DAY 6

TODAY WE GOT TO PEEK BEHIND THE CURTAIN AT PUBLISHING GIANT, HARDIE GRANT. THE WONDERFUL MARISA PINTADO AND SORCHA HENNESSY SPOKE TO US AT LENGTH ABOUT AMAZING BOOKS ON THE HORIZON, THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT PUBLISHING IMPRINTS, MARKET DIRECTIONS AND HOW BEST TO PITCH A JUNIOR FICTION SERIES.

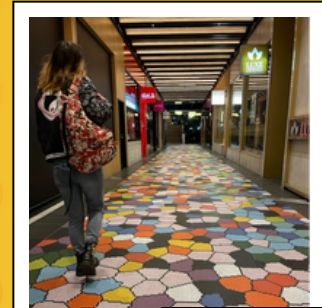
WE WERE ALSO VERY GRATEFUL AND EXCITED TO GET OUR HANDS ON SOME BRILLIANT NEW BOOKS THAT WE CAN'T WAIT TO READ!



SOME EVENING MUSICAL ACTION!



HEY, WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT?



DAY 7

THIS MORNING LUCIE, SHELLEY AND I HEADED OFF TO THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA TO PARTICIPATE IN A MELBOURNE WRITERS' FESTIVAL GRAPHICS NOVEL WORKSHOP WITH THE RENOWNED SAM WALLMAN, THE BRILLIANT MIND BEHIND 'OUR MEMBERS BE UNLIMITED'.

AS A WRITER, IT WAS FASCINATING TO GET A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF COMICS AS A STORYTELLING DEVICE AND HOW OUR BRAINS DECODE THEM.



SAM

DAY 8

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE TODAY... AN INSIGHT INTO THE WORLD OF A BOOK BUYING AND SELLING FROM THE MARVELLOUS ANGELA CROCOMBE AT READINGS KIDS. IT WAS FASCINATING TO HEAR ABOUT THE BOOK BUYING PROCESS, WHAT'S HOT RIGHT NOW IN THE BOOKSELLING WORLD AND WHAT WE CAN DO AS CREATORS TO HELP BOOKSTORES.



HELEN AND SHELLEY,
DEEP IN CONVERSATION



EXHAUSTED BUT HAPPY AFTER
A DAY OF MELBOURNE
WRITERS FESTIVAL

DAY 9

TOO. MUCH. AMAZEMENT...
MELBOURNE WRITERS FESTIVAL OVERLOAD... CANNOT
COMPUTE...

SESSIONS WITH HELEN GARNER, CHLOE HOOPER, GABRIELLE
WANG, SALLY RIPPIN, LEANNE HALL, SARAH AYOUB, ALICE
BOYLE, TOBIAS MADDEN, RHIANNON WILDE, MIRANDA LUBY,
ASTRID SCHOLTE, DEMET DIVAROREN AND KARYS MCEWEN...

TOO MUCH FABULOUSNESS...
TOO MUCH BRILLIANCE...
INSPIRATION OVERLOAD!



DAY 10

THIS MORNING I GOT TO SEE THE UBER-COOL TEENY TINY STEVIES LIVE IN ACTION AND TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR BOOKS. THEN, MORE FUN, AS WE LISTENED TO KARYS MCEWAN SPEAK ABOUT HER NEW BOOK, 'ALL THE TRICKY LITTLE THINGS'.



DAY 11

MORE AWESOMENESS TODAY AS WE HEADED OUT TO THE AFFIRM PRESS OFFICES TO VISIT THE TRIPLE THREAT TEAM THAT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE AFFIRM PRESS CHILDREN'S LIST - TASH BESLIEV, MEG WHELAN AND CORAL HUCKSTEP.

THIS VISIT WAS EXTRA-SPECIAL FOR ME, AS AFFIRM PRESS ARE PUBLISHING ONE OF MY PICTURE BOOKS NEXT YEAR! WAS SO EXCITING TO SEE WHERE DREAMS ARE BROUGHT TO LIFE AND TO TALK TO THESE INCREDIBLY KNOWLEDGEABLE AND DEVOTED WOMEN ABOUT ALL THINGS BOOKS! THEIR ENERGY WAS CONTAGIOUS!



DAY 12

TODAY WE HAD A HIGHLY CLASSIFIED BACKSTAGE PASS TO THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA. DANIEL WEE AND JODI KOK TOOK US THROUGH WHAT SEEMED LIKE A SPY MOVIE MAZE OF SECRET PASSAGES AND PIPES AND TUNNELS TO UNCOVER SOME HIDDEN COLLECTIONS! THE DEFINITE HIGHLIGHT WAS BEING SHOWN A COLLECTION OF RARE BOOKS (SOME OF WHICH WERE MORE THAN 200 YEARS OLD!) INCLUDING A HORN BOOK, SOME CHAP BOOKS, BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED FAIRY TALES AND A FIRST EDITION OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND. IT WAS INCREDIBLE (BUT NERVE-WRACKING) TO BE ABLE TO TOUCH THE PAGES OF THESE GEMS.



WE THEN HEADED TO THE LITTLE BOOKROOM WHERE WE WERE GREETED BY MICHAEL EARP AND OWNER, LEESA LAMBERT. WE LEARNED THE FASCINATING HISTORY OF THIS ASTOUNDING BOOK SHOP AND THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE TEAM BEHIND IT HAS IN THE COMMUNITY.

THEY DO SO MANY THINGS, INCLUDING CHAMPIONING NEW BOOKS, CONNECTING CREATIVES AND READERS, AND GROWING A LOVE OF READING THROUGH THEIR BOOK READINGS, CHILDREN'S BOOK CLUBS AND SCHOOL AND LIBRARY ACTIVITIES.



DAY 13

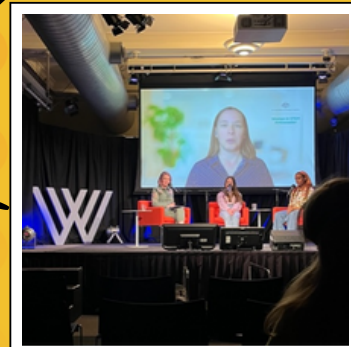
TODAY WE SKIPPED DOWN TO SOUTH MELBOURNE TO BOOKS ILLUSTRATED, RUN BY THE INCOMPARABLE ANN HADDON AND ANN JAMES. WE SAT DRINKING TEA IN THEIR BEAUTIFUL COTTAGE, HEARING ALL ABOUT THEIR AMAZING HISTORY AND UNWAVERING SUPPORT OF THE CHILDREN'S BOOK INDUSTRY (FOR OVER 30 YEARS). WE WERE ABLE TO TAKE A PEEK INTO ANN JAMES' STUDIO AND TO GAZE ON THE BEAUTIFUL ORIGINAL ART IN THEIR GALLERY. SADLY, THEY WILL BE CLOSING THEIR DOORS THIS DECEMBER AND SO WE FELT VERY PRIVILEGED TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO VISIT.



BEST SEAT IN THE STUDIO...

WE THEN HEADED DOWN TO BRUNSWICK, WHERE, AFTER LUNCH, WE WERE WELCOMED BY THE HIGHLY RESPECTED CLARE FORSTER OF CURTIS BROWN LITERARY AGENCY. CLARE SPOKE TO US ABOUT HER ROLE AS A LITERARY AGENT AND HER 'WHOLE OF WORK' APPROACH WITH HER CREATORS. SHE SHOWCASED SOME OF THE CREATORS SHE REPRESENTS AND GREAT TO HEAR ABOUT THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH SHE TAKES WITH THEM.

THE EVENING BROUGHT US TO THE WHEELER CENTRE FOR A 'TEENS TALK' PANEL CHAIRED BY LILI WILKINSON. THE TALK CENTRED AROUND TEENAGERS' VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE AND LISA HARVEY-SMITH, AUSTRALIA'S WOMEN IN STEM AMBASSADOR WAS INTERVIEWED VIA VIDEO.



DAY 14

WERE ON TOP OF THE WORLD TODAY (LITERALLY) AS WE PEERED OUT OVER STUNNING VIEWS OF MELBOURNE WITH AMY THOMAS (COMMISSIONING EDITOR, YOUNG READERS) FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE'S FANCY OFFICES ON SOUTHBANK! THIS WAS A PARTICULARLY EXCITING VISIT FOR SHELLEY AND MYSELF AS WE BOTH HAVE PICTURE BOOKS COMING OUT WITH PENGUIN IN 2023. SO OF COURSE, THERE WAS MUCH PENGUIN CUDDLING AND GENERAL ELATION AS WE GOT TO HANG OUT AT THIS AWESOME PUBLISHER'S HEADQUARTERS.

AMY SPOKE TO US ABOUT HOW THE MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY OFFICES WORK TOGETHER AND WHAT AMAZING BOOKS THEY HAVE COMING UP ON THEIR LIST IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE WERE THEN JOINED BY PENGUIN'S GRAPHIC DESIGNER, TONY PALMER, WHO GAVE US AN INCREDIBLY INSTRUCTIVE CRASH COURSE IN TYPESETTING AND TYPOGRAPHIC SYNTAX (SPECIFICALLY GEARED FOR NON-DESIGNERS, LIKE ME!)



AND THEN...AS THE SAYING GOES... ALL GOOD THINGS MUST COME TO AN END!

AND SO, WE FOUND OURSELVES, A LITTLE WHILE LATER, AT THE WONDERFUL HOUSE OF SUZANNE AND DAVID THWAITES, WHERE WE ATTENDED THE FINAL COCKTAIL PARTY. WE GOT TO CATCH UP WITH SOME OF THE FRIENDLY FACES FROM THE LAST TWO WEEKS, ALONG WITH SOME MENTORS AND A NUMBER OF PAST MENTEES.

IT WAS SO GOOD TO SEE EVERYONE ONE MORE TIME AND MANY HUGS WERE EXCHANGED AS WE SAID GOODBYE TO NEW FRIENDS AND WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST AWE-INSPIRING TWO WEEKS!

AND SO, THE MENTEES DEPARTED, FUELLED BY INSPIRATION AND POWERED BY WONDER, FROM THIS OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD EXPERIENCE. IT WAS NOW TIME TO FURTHER DEVELOP THEIR OWN SUPERPOWERS, TO BATTLE THEIR OWN CREATIVE DEMONS AND TO TRY (AS NEIL GAIMAN SAYS) TO 'MAKE GOOD ART'....

TO BE
CONTINUED....

POSTSCRIPT: MORE ADVENTURES...



AND THANK YOU!

ONE OF THE AMAZING PARTS OF THE MSCDP IS THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK CLOSELY WITH A MENTOR. I WAS SO LUCKY TO HAVE BEEN GRANTED MY FAIRY GODMOTHER WISH TO WORK WITH THE INCOMPARABLE JANE GODWIN. JANE WAS IN PERTH WHILE I WAS IN MELBOURNE, SO WE WAITED UNTIL I WAS BACK IN PERTH AND SHE WAS BACK IN MELBOURNE (HAHA!) TO CATCH UP VIA ZOOM OVER A COUPLE OF SESSIONS. SHE HAS BEEN INVALUABLE IN HELPING ME TO FURTHER DEVELOP MY JUNIOR FICTION TEXT AND I LEFT HER SESSIONS FIZZING WITH IDEAS!

THANK YOU, JANE!

A MASSIVE THANK YOU TO EVERYBODY WHO MADE THE MSCDP HAPPEN!

THIS INCLUDES CBCA (VIC) AND THE AMAZING MSCDP COMMITTEE (HELEN CHAMBERLIN, PAMELA HORSEY, KATIE FLANNIGAN, REBECCA GREEN, AMANDA COOPER, SUZANNE THWAITES AND MARK WILSON), ALL THE READERS WHO ASSISTED IN THE PROCESS OF JUDGING THE ENTRIES, THE MENTORS AND EVERY SINGLE PERSON AND ORGANIZATION WHO CONTRIBUTED THEIR TIME, KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OVER THE TWO WEEKS OF THE PROGRAM.

THANK YOU TOO TO THE COPYRIGHT AGENCY CULTURAL FUND FOR THE GENEROUS GRANT TO FUND THE PROGRAM!

AND FINALLY, THE BIGGEST THANK YOU OF ALL TO HELEN CHAMBERLIN AND PAMELA HORSEY FOR EVERYTHING THEY HAVE DONE AND WITHOUT WHOM THE MSCDP WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE!

AND THANK YOU TO MY FELLOW MENTEES - I COULD NOT HAVE CHOSEN A BETTER BUNCH TO SHARE THIS EXPERIENCE WITH!

THE END....
FOR NOW....