

DYNAMIC

PORIRUA CITY

Joy to the world from Porirua City

Porirua author and child spelling expert Joy Allcock celebrates the launch of her first children's storybook at Paremata Primary School with pupils (from left) Nikkita Samuel, Merryn Giblin and Wendy Richardson.

Joy's book *The Best Tree Fort Ever* was written 11 years ago while she worked as a parent-help at Paremata School.

To celebrate the launch of the book the school held an art competition for children to create their best ever tree fort.

Joy explains that she wrote the book for a boy, Christopher Sheldon, who she was helping with reading and writing. The deal was she would write him a chapter a week and Christopher would write her a sentence a day. He did and his story was published at school. Joy also wrote her book, but early efforts to have it published were unsuccessful.

However, those early experiences of helping children who struggled with spelling and reading inspired her. In 1996 she



began a Masters of Education, intent on finding out how children learn to spell and how best to teach them.

As a result Joy developed a spelling programme, which was successfully trialled at Paremata School, and is now being used by schools across New Zealand.

She has written a series of spelling

resource books for teachers and children which have been picked up by Reed Publishing. Joy has been overwhelmed by the demand for her work, and her latest book *Switch on to Spelling* has attracted international interest.

In the meantime, Joy says she had lost touch with Christopher and had given up on efforts

to have their story book published. Then a few years ago, out of the blue, Christopher contacted her and asked her to try again.

Recently she showed it to Reed, they loved it, published it and now it is in book shops.

Joy says having the story published means a lot.

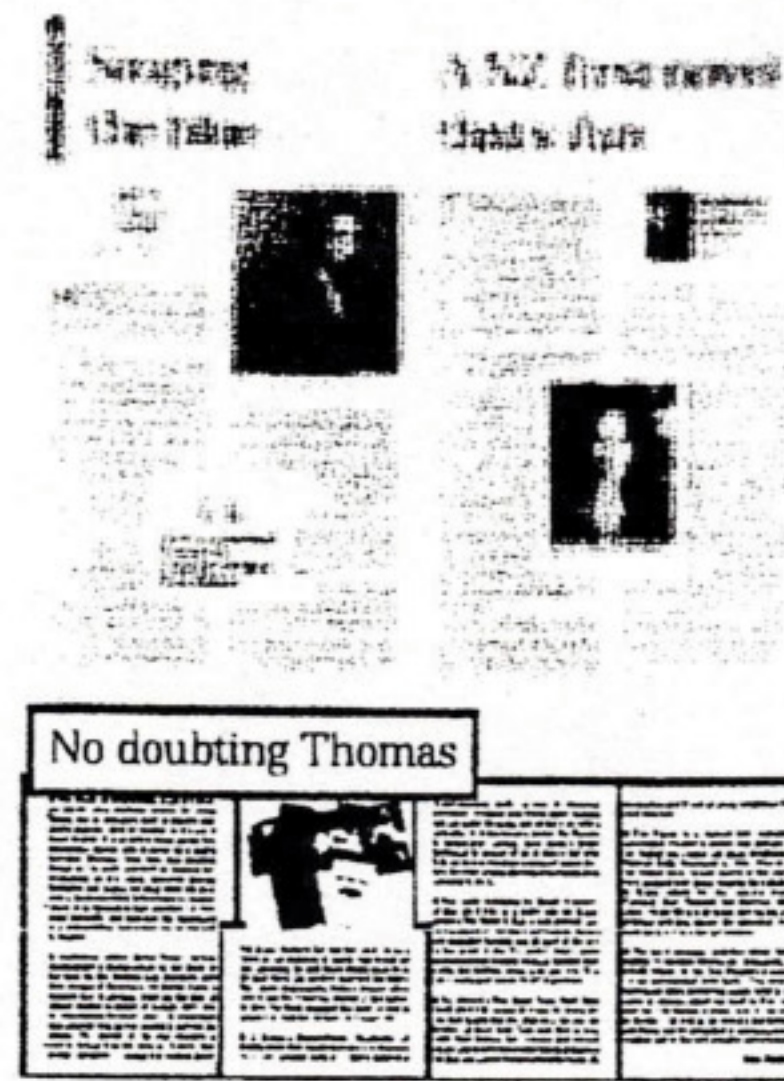
"I was really thrilled, particularly because

Chris had contacted me again. It obviously meant a lot to him . . . It was more than a story. It was part of a time in my life that was important for me. It set me off on a new career."

Christopher, now 20, was at the book launch last month. He says he's really pleased to see the book in print.

And Joy is hopeful that, following this

success, some more of the children's stories she carries around in her head will be published.



No doubting Thomas

■ **The Book of Everything** (Allen & Unwin, pb \$18.99) won multiple awards for Guus Kuijer, one of Holland's most celebrated children's authors. And no wonder — it's one of those stories of a situation many would find intolerable turned into humour by a skilful narrator. Thomas, bless him, sees amazing things in the world around him: tropical fish swimming in the canal, sparrows playing trumpets and angels weeping when his autocratic, fundamentalist father beats his mother. Jesus, who appears to him, answers his questions honestly and becomes his staunchest ally. Astonishing, marvellous and fantastically hopeful.

■ Australian writer Jackie French tackles Shakespeare's manipulation of the truth in her take on the Scottish play, **Macbeth and Son** (Angus & Robertson, pb \$16.99). Luke, a modern-day Australian studying the play at school, begins to dream of Lulach, who lives in 11th-century Scotland, when life was simple and courage was all you needed to survive, he thinks. The period of the real *Macbeth* is vividly brought to life through Luke's "borrowed" memory — seeing the women plucking goose feathers for his bed and hanging them in the chimney in linen bags to kill the lice, knowing the soft linen sheets came from Ireland when his mother married his father. But, more importantly, Luke's dreams allow him to see the historical Macbeth and discover why the Bard changed the facts — and to assess the need for honesty in his own life.

■ G Brassi's **Paperchase** (Scholastic, pb \$16.99) is another Australian story — this time by a New Zealand author — that's somewhat Shakespearean, with its mix of runaway adventure, romance and travel story. Gemma and her sister, Brianna, are on the run, with a pocketful of stolen money, across the Tasman to Melbourne, fleeing their mum's dodgy boyfriend. In search of their father, but with little more to go on than a scrap of paper, they take the train across the Nullarbor plain from Adelaide to Perth.

■ **The Lost Children** by Sarah Mayberry (Puffin, pb \$19.95) is a Kiwi take on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* — a shipwreck, parents in search of children, wild beasts, thieves and mistaken identity are all part of the mix
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in the novel of the TV series, which introduces Kiwi kids to early colonial history. Most adults are baddies, some kids are, too. Who can a young gentleman trust? A good read.

■ Joy Allcock's **The Best Tree Fort Ever** (Reed, pb \$16.99) is one of those delicious stories that makes you feel that you, too, can see forever, up there with Tom and Ben as they build their holiday hut. There's just enough happening to keep the reader turning pages as the pair learn some lessons about farming life, themselves and Tom's grumpy neighbour, Old Jack Donovan.

■ Tim Tipene is a martial arts instructor, established children's writer and founder of the highly successful life-skills programme Warrior Kids, developed in 1994. Winner of the picture book honour award at this year's New Zealand Post Book Awards for Children & Young Adults for the moving *Haere: Farewell, Jack, Farewell*, his **Warrior Kids** (Reed, pb \$16.99) is a fictional take on his programme and gets across the essentials in a good story without being formulaic.

■ The same message underlies **Mind Over Matter** by Heather McQuillen (Scholastic, pb \$16.99), winner of the Tom Fitzgibbon Award for an unpublished first book. This time a benevolent extra-terrestrial called Ariel is the agent of change, attaching itself to Jono and guiding him toward a resolution of his own problems — as well as the world's. Far-fetched and funny, too, it's grounded in everyday intermediate school life and is highly entertaining.

Ann Packer



**TALKING ABOUT BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

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Book information

Title, subtitle	The Best Tree Fort Ever
Author	Joy Allcock
Number of pages	96 pp
First Published	2006 Auckland, NZ by Reed
Book Type1	Novel
Genre	Family.School
Reading age	8 to 10

Annotation:

This short novel is about two cousins, Tom and Ben getting together for the summer holidays, on Tom's family's ten acre lifestyle block. Tom dreams of eeling, camping, building dams and making model rafts from flax sticks. By the time Ben arrives from Auckland he's keen to build a tree fort. The only fly in the boys' holiday plans is Old Jack Donovan, the irascible farmer next door.

When Tom rescues a sheep on Old Jack's property, he is accused of leaving the gate open and causing the death of another sheep. They begin building their tree fort but friction with Old Jack continues, even though the boys become friendly with his dog, Pat. Relations seem to be improving when Tom and Ben help save a sheep from a hole in the ground but again gates are left open and the boys are blamed.

The solution to this misunderstanding is unexpected and funny. The boys and Old Jack are reconciled and the boys complete a splendid tree-hut.

This story's emphasis is on the fun of messing about in the summer holidays, an unnamed illustrator's black and white pictures capture this mood of carefree fun, as well as the problems that face the boys.

[Note tree huts are called cubbyhouses in Australia.]

Trevor Agnew

Themes in this book:

Cubbyhouses. Holidays. Play. Trees. Wellington region, NZ.

Recent Edition Information

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Magpies Magazine Pty Ltd, PO Box 98, Grange, Queensland, Australia 4051
Tele: (+61) 7 3356 4503 Fax: (+61) 7 3356 4649 Email: james@magpies.net.au

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