

Five Minutes with Deb Fitzpatrick by Beck Blaxell, Education Officer, The Literature Centre

Local author Deb Fitzpatrick was one of the talented presenters at our **2016 Celebrate Reading National Conference**. We were so excited to have Deb with us and thought we'd remind you of some of her amazing experiences and share a little more about this fabulous Fremantle-based lady with you!

Deb, let's deal with the important stuff first... which flavour of instant noodles is your favourite?

Ha ha!! Well, if you really want to know: I love the ones that are imported from south-east Asia – so anything with six sachets is on my list.

Ok, now for those people who might not know you, which one of your books would you recommend they start with, and why?

This is possibly the hardest question you could ask me! I actually don't know the answer to this, so I asked my husband, and he said *90 packets*. His reason? It's darker than my other books, and it's not for my youngest readership, nor is it for my oldest. My reason: because it came before the rest.

Your first book '90 Packets of Instant Noodles' was published by Fremantle Press in 2010, so can you tell us what inspired you to start writing this book?

I wrote this book at the end of a four-year stint living in the cloudforest of Costa Rica. That sounds very exotic I know, and it was, but it was also very hard, and I had some difficult times in those four years. My husband was doing his PhD research over there, in environmental science. We were living in a tiny community, in a shack in the forest, surrounded by monkeys, squirrels, butterflies, sloths and coyotes (at night they would howl at the moon in front of our place). We had no telephone or internet connection. It took me at least two of those four years to get my head around Spanish, but by the end I was semi-fluent. As they say: the best things often come from the hardest things, and so it was with Costa Rica. In the last nine months of our time there, I sat down and channeled all the emotions of those years into the writing of *90 packets*. I'm really proud of the book, and the fact that it's been reprinted twice.

You have recently just published your fifth book. You are clearly a busy lady. So in between writing books, which authors do you always make time to read?

I am devouring Joan London's books at the moment. I read *Gilgamesh* a few months ago, and am now close to finishing *The Golden Age*. She is a wonderful writer. She makes me want to write, but also to give up, because she is so good!! Her depictions of Europeans in Australia, and of Australians in Europe, are incredibly poignant. I will be sure to read *The Good Parents* next. [After Conference – possibly more! – Ed]

Your books all have very clear voices. How do you get into the heads of your characters?

The truth is, I'm not really sure how this happens. It isn't difficult for me, and I'm very grateful for that. Character is at the heart of my stories; I love people – in real life and in writing. I want to understand how they feel about their place in the world, and how they feel about the world in which they live.

I decided recently that my sense of contentment in life is directly proportional to the state of my relationships – with my family, my friends, my colleagues, and also

people I come across more randomly, in the day-to-day. I think these two things – the way I write about characters, and my own relationships with people – are probably related.

I do come to love my characters, too, in their conflicted gorgeousness – for example, Spencer Gray's little sister, Pippa, who is by turns annoying and demanding but also desperately proud of and loyal to her brother. She's right there when he gets into his scrapes, doing everything she can to get him home safe and sound.

Your books also have a beautifully developed sense of place. How important is place to you, and why?

Place is so important to me. Places make me feel – and not always comfortable feelings! I want my characters to feel these things too, and hopefully my readers. I go into wild places (it could be a bit of bush land at the edge of my suburb, or a walk along my local beach, or hiking in a remote spot) and I feel my 'antennae' activated, somehow. Watching the behaviour of birds in nature, watching the wind in the tops of tall karris, watching ants build hills in the sand – and being inside this world without people around feels quite precious. I love the shedding of 'stuff' from my head, the renewed focus on what is in front of me, very meditative.

I also become very attached to houses, and frequently write about houses I've lived in in my books.

Sometimes all this becomes an elegy of sorts. Does that make me sentimental?

Research is obviously an important part of the writing process... What's the craziest thing you have ever had to do as part of your research?

Going for a flight in a non-motorised, fixed-wing glider when I was writing *The Amazing Spencer Gray* – a book about a boy who goes gliding with his dad and they crash. The irony of what I was doing was not lost on me, I assure you.

Do you have a set routine when you write? Somewhere you always go? Cups of tea you must drink?

Cups of coffee I must drink, yes! My routine is to procrastinate for as long as possible, then to bribe myself with coffee until I get the words down. A minimum of 750 words a day must be reached when I'm in a writing phase (five days a week; I do try to spend the weekends doing family stuff). I have a little studio space in Fremantle and I find that going there makes sure that I get some work done. If I stay at home all I get done is the washing. And, as all parents know, there's a lot of washing to be done.

What is one thing we should all know about Deb Fitzpatrick?

I really like eating. I love travelling, within my state, interstate and overseas. I'm constantly seeking solitude. Sorry, that's three things.