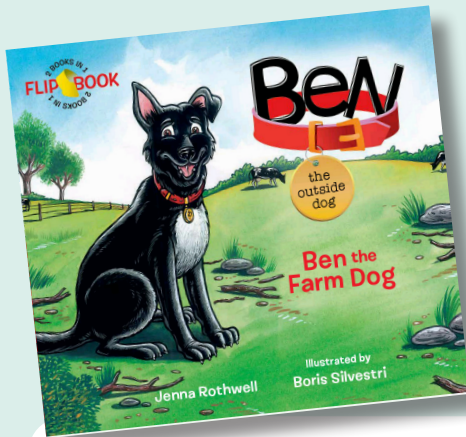


Interview with an author

Jenna Rothwell



Jenna is the author of **Ben The Outside Dog** a childrens book following the day in the life of the loveable black kelpie, Ben, The Outside Dog on Cownley Farm.



How did you get started as a writer?

It is always something that I have wanted to do as a profession. One of my favourite things to do throughout school was write short stories and in the later years write plays and television scripts. After school, when I didn't have the homework 'chore' of writing and putting writing off to 'when I have time,' even though I wanted to. I decided to allocate time to writing as I would to another passion of mine, dancing. So, I sat down with a book idea that had been floating around in my head for a while and wrote Ben the Outside Dog, plus a few more stories of Ben as a series. Once I was happy with the manuscript I then sent it off to publishers in the morning, crossing my fingers and toes; Jo-Jo Publishing called me that same afternoon and said they were interested. I then proceeded to dance around the living room!

What made you choose to write children's books?

I had been working in children's theatre and children's entertainment for the last 6 years, portraying clowns to princesses and all sorts of other characters in between in theatres, school tours and for children's parties alongside other acting work and as a result, ideas started to surface. I was also blessed by hanging out with my first nephew, where I would read stories to him, make them up and have just silly non-sensical fun and I realised that I loved anything to do with kids' entertainment the most. Writing children's books then became a next natural step. I am an avid believer in developing and encouraging children's imaginations, therefore I work a lot within children's entertainment. I run a children's entertainment company, Minnie The Clown Parties (www.minnietheclownparties.co.uk), teach dancing to kids, and I am a Pre-School Music Practitioner and Story-Teller for Juma Arts throughout nurseries in London.

Here is a link to me, or should I say Minnie, promoting Ben the Outside Dog
<http://youtu.be/zNytdxbBqFk>

What inspired you to write about Ben the outside dog?

Well, Ben the Outside Dog is actually based on my partner's family's real life Ben the Outside Dog! After moving to London from Blackpool, I met an Aussie bloke and was whisked off to Melbourne, Australia (as you do).

It's in Oz, in the beautiful Yarra Valley of Victoria, that Ben the Outside Dog was created, inspired by my new Australian family's gorgeous Farm Dog, Ben. As a Brit, I wasn't really

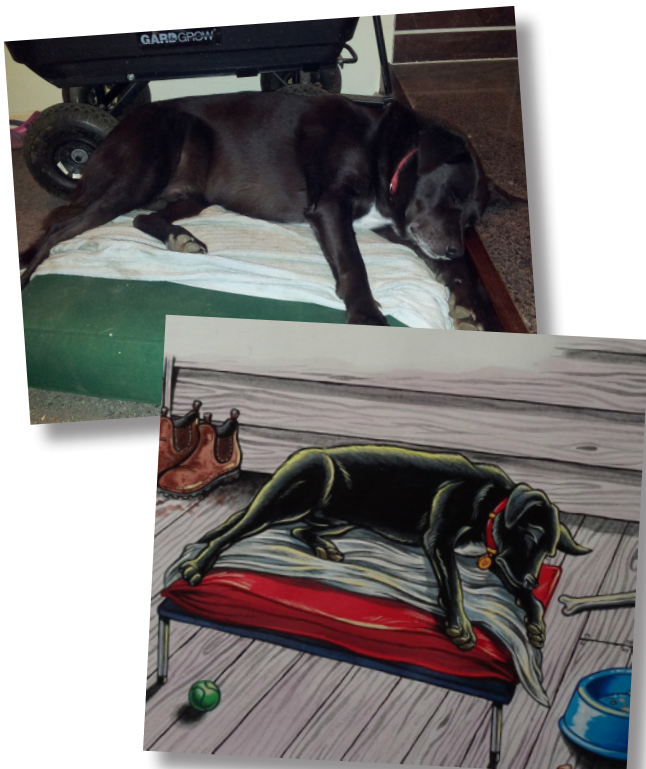
aware of keeping dogs outside and didn't understand this, until I met the wonderfully protective Ben and learned how important his job is. It is really the adventures of our 'Ben the Outside Dog's' true experiences. A working farm dog by day and The Cownley Farm guard dog at night, protecting the family and all the farm animals from indigenous and wild animals. As I was taking my two year old nephew Oscar around the farm I would say, "say hello mrs pig," and Oscar would repeat it. "Good morning chooks," etc and I would describe things on the farm as we went round. 'That's Ben's water so he can drink whenever he gets thirsty' and so I wrote it as I would speak to a child learning to speak and describing things that would interest kids. I wanted to write a book that I knew Oscar would love to read.

What made you choose to base your story on an Australian sheep farm? Is the story based on your own experiences or someone you know?

As I mentioned, Ben the Outside Dog is based on my experiences living on a farm in Australia. I learned so much about farm animals, farm life and so much about dogs and particularly outside/working dogs that I wanted to write about it. Having never had a dog myself, I loved how Brett and his family narrated for Ben and Millie (the inside dog). For example when they Ben would bark to tell Millie that someone had pulled up at the Farm, and Millie would bark to tell mum. They wouldn't stop barking until they were acknowledged by their mum by a simple 'thank you Ben, Millie.' I loved learning and watching Ben with his master round up the pigs, not just sheep! And the amazing relationship between the Master, Brett's dad, and his dog. Ultimately it was the tireless job Ben did as an outside dog both day and night, chasing the foxes, possums and other 'threats' to the family that compelled me to write about him and inspired the two books in one and flip book design – a day and a night story of Ben's adventures.

How did you work with the illustrator to decide how the illustrations of the story would look?

Boris Silvestri and I communicated regularly via email to discuss the pictures. As it is based on a real life Ben and Millie, I had some pre-requisites of what Ben and Millie would look like and sent him pictures to get an idea of what I was after. For example:



Here is a picture of the real Ben asleep on his bed I sent to Boris and then Ben's picture brought to life through illustration in Ben the Outside Dog.

Also, much research was done with other images of Kelpies. Boris was brilliant! I wanted a book that on the shelves in a bookstore someone would pick it up and say that they are beautiful illustrations and Boris did a fantastic job. I wanted a really friendly looking Ben with

a red collar and one ear down and a small fluffy dog for Millie. We wanted to get the Australian setting across, for example, when drawing the character of the Master for "Ben the Outside Dog" Boris kept in mind the typical characteristics of the typical Australian farmer.

I asked for lots of animals, birds and insects to be on the pages so that kids can also pick and point out other interesting things in the book too and learn about other Australian animals. On my website: www.bentheoutsidedog.com there are some cool and interesting facts about all the animals, birds and insects that are featured in my new book plus games to play along with the book, for example: how many birds can you see? Or can you name the animals? Also, further pictures and fun illustration information can be seen on my website: www.bentheoutsidedog.com/bens-fun-illustration-facts

What's the most difficult part of writing a book?

Getting started! If you want to write, just do it, don't put it off! Then of course, getting published. It is all subjective and up to the will of the publishers and the attention of the kids. But, you have to put it out there to try.

What book are you reading right now?

I am currently reading a book called, 'The Serpent's Eye' by Thomas. H. Brand who is a friend from University and this is his first published book. I also like to keep up to date with kids books and with what is popular so that if a parent asks for an entertainer as 'The Gruffalo,' which has happened, I am on top of it. It helps with writing of course and also with the general chat with children at parties! I recently had to watch the new 'Lego Movie' for work. I say 'had to' and for 'work' lightly as I was very excited about seeing it and it was absolutely amazing!

What do you think makes a really good children's book?

Oh lots of things. Good stand out characters, the illustrations, something unique that captures the imagination.

What was your favourite children's story book and why?

I had so many! First that springs to mind is 'The Elves and the Shoemaker.' I made my dad read that to me countless times, I never bore of it! I had a fascination with mice as a child! Also 'The Taylor of Gloucester' (also mice) by Beatrix Potter and the 'Fantastic Mr. Fox' by Roald Dahl. I seemed to like animal themes! They just captured my imagination and were just brilliant stories. I loved all Enid Blyton Books! Especially the Magic Faraway Tree! I got lost in her books. Gosh, I would love to write books like her! I am excited thinking about these! Inspiration to write!

What skills do you need to be a great story teller and make a story come to life?

For me, I think you need to create good strong characters that people can empathise with and an interesting storyline to capture the imagination to follow them on their journey. Everyone is different. I have always liked to write how I talk and write as though I had an audience of children in front of me and see how I could keep their attention if I was reading it aloud to them.

How important are books and reading for children in the early years and how do you hope to encourage that love for reading?

Books and reading to kids is extremely important. As an adult, you notice when you don't read how your vocabulary slips somewhat and how it improves the more you read, so it is fundamental for a child to teach them to speak whilst their brains are like sponges. Stories develop language, imagination, sense of fun, intelligence and bring a wealth of entertainment. To repeat myself, I am an avid believer in developing and encouraging children's imaginations, therefore I will continue to work within children's entertainment. I believe if you are passionate about something, this will rub off on to children and become infectious.

I love this quote; it says it all:

If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairytales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairytales. – Albert Einstein.

www.bentheoutsidedog.com

Ben The Outside Dog

Written by Jenna Rothwell and beautifully illustrated by Boris Silvestri, here is a delightful tale of a day in the life of the loveable black kelpie, Ben, The Outside Dog on Cownley Farm.

This is two books in one, a day story and flip the book over to the reverse and read the night story.

Follow Ben throughout the day in his role of being the outside dog. Learn why he has to stay outside, even though he wishes sometimes that he could join his Master, the Master's wife and Millie, the inside dog, inside the house when he gets lonely. Enjoy Ben's adventures from helping his Master feed all the animals in the morning to protecting the farm animals at night, where he has to save the chooks from the sneaky Mr. Fox.



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