

Sally Rippin, author of *Angel Creek*, interviewed by Imogen Walter, age 11

How did you get inspiration for this book, and its plot?

I have always been drawn to stories about outsiders. We moved house every couple of years when I was growing up, and we lived mainly in South-East Asia. I was often the new girl at school, or stared at in the street because I looked different to most of the people around me. I find myself writing about this theme time and time again.

When I began this novel several years ago it was for young adults and written from the angel's point of view, but I kept coming up against hurdles and couldn't make the story work. Walking along the Merri Creek with my youngest son last summer I decided to start again with a story that was younger and fresher and more grounded in reality.

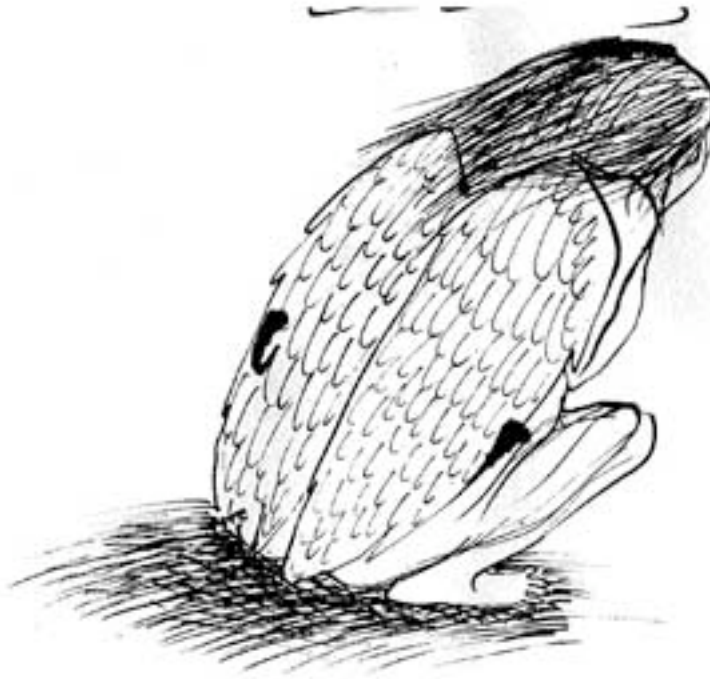


Was the angel only stuck in the rubbish so that Jelly would find it?

This is a tricky question because I don't want to give too much away. I like stories that leave you asking questions, that don't tie everything up too neatly, that leave spaces for the reader to fill in. I was playing around with the idea of fate, or destiny, and what happens if you meddle with this. Perhaps the angel was on its way somewhere when Jelly found it; perhaps it was waiting there for her. I'll leave that up to you to decide.

Is the angel's mother from the creek too?

Once again, this is something I sketch lightly so you can make up your own mind. *Angel Creek* is about the belief that more exists in our world than we can see or explain. Most children are open to the idea of magic, but this precious thing is often lost as we grow up. As a child I was obsessed with Puff, the Magic Dragon. I was devastated that Puff's owner abandoned him as he got older and I swore that I would never do the same. But among all the worries and boring everyday concerns of adulthood, it becomes harder and harder to allow that child part of yourself to thrive. One adult reader told me that *Angel Creek* made her want to climb trees and explore creeks again—this couldn't have made me happier.



Is there going to be a sequel? Are you planning to write any more children's books?

A sequel? Perhaps. Definitely more children's books. I have been writing and illustrating since I was a child and I don't plan to stop now.

Do you have any good tips for kids trying to write a story?

Reading lots is probably the best advice anyone can give, but I also think it can be good to see your story as a lump of clay. I tell this to my adult students too. Unless you have that lump of clay to work with in the beginning you will never have anything to carve into, or add to, or smooth out to create your beautiful sculpture. You can't create a sculpture out of thin air. Writing is the same. You build up that lump of clay by writing lots. By just getting the words down and telling yourself that it doesn't matter how they come out—you're still finding the shape you are going to sculpt your story into. Many people begin a story and never finish it because they are already trying to put the

decorations on their sculpture before they know what the final shape will be. Sadly, some of those lumps of clay may never end up as beautiful sculptures. Remember I wrote two whole novels before *Angel Creek* that will never see the light of day, but practice is never wasted.

Do the characters in *Angel Creek* relate to anyone you know?

All my characters are a mix of me and everyone I know. Pik is based on my youngest son, and Gino, his cousin. Jelly is a mix of myself as a child, and my middle son, who, amazingly, has got halfway through high school without abandoning his lovely, childlike ways. With his younger brother he still climbs trees, builds cubbies and makes adventure playgrounds for worms. His creativity is a constant inspiration to me. Jelly's family is loosely based on my partner's rambling and raucous Italian family, who mostly live within walking distance of each other. Coming from an Anglo family who are spread out across the world, I love my partner's big, close-knit family.



Images by Sally, who couldn't resist drawing some angels as she was writing the book.