

An Interview with Author Robinne Weiss

How long have you been writing?

I have been writing ever since I learned how to hold a pencil. My first published work was poetry in kids magazines in the 1970s. I also read my poetry on the children's television programme *Christopher's Magic Cocoon* when I was ten years old.

What inspires your writing?

In general, my writing is inspired by the natural world. Even my fantasy stories are based in biology and ecology. Specific ideas come from all over--something I overhear on the street, something I see, a writing contest prompt. My husband is a great source of inspiration. He'll say, "you should write a book about..." I just wish I had the time to write all of the stories he suggests.

Why did you choose to put dragons in modern-day New Zealand for *The Dragon Slayer's Son*?

I love to hike in the mountains, and there are so many weird and wonderful plants and animals in New Zealand that, whenever I'm hiking, I can't help but wonder what *else* is out there. There is so much wilderness in the Southern Alps, *anything* could be hiding there. It doesn't take much imagination to ask, "What if there were *dragons* in New Zealand?"

Your stories have been set in many places around the world. Have you been to them all?

Most of my stories are set in places I have lived in or visited. I grew up in the eastern United States, and went to university in the Midwest. I lived in Panama--the setting for my novel *A Glimpse of Exoskeleton*--for two and a half years as a Peace Corps Volunteer. I've also been lucky enough to have opportunities to travel in many countries in Central and South America. Then, about twenty years ago, I moved with my husband and two toddlers to New Zealand. All that travelling gives me lots of familiar places to set my stories.

What other jobs have you done?

I have spent most of my working life as a heritage interpreter--teaching kids and adults about the natural world and cultural history. I have a master's degree in entomology with a minor in agricultural education, and spent some time teaching fun courses about teaching with insects at the Pennsylvania State University. I also spent two years as an agroforestry extension agent in the Peace Corps, stationed in Panama, where I taught soil conservation and improvement techniques. Odd but memorable jobs have included working a food booth at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire, where I was known as the Veggie Queen, candling and packing eggs at an egg farm, and being Director of the Meeman Archive of Environmental Journalism at a time when archiving the news meant cutting out articles from the newspapers and gluing them onto cardboard to be stored in a file cabinet. Currently, in addition to writing, I work part-time as a teaching assistant.

When you're not writing, what do you like to do?

If I'm not writing, I can usually be found in the garden. I grow most of the family's food, and am an obsessive-compulsive weeder. When the weather is poor, I like to sew. I dabble in lots of crafts--weaving, knitting (which I'm terrible at, but keep trying anyway), and various paper crafts. I also enjoy hiking and camping, hanging out on the beach, reading...there's very little I don't enjoy doing, actually.

Who are your favourite authors?

There are so many authors whose work I love! Ray Bradbury, Isabel Allende, and Barbara

Kingsolver are long-time favourites. Recently I've enjoyed books by Patrick Rothfuss, N.K. Jemisin, Kristin Cashore, and Marie Brennan. My favourite Kiwi authors include Nikky Lee, Dan Rabarts, Lee Murray, Deb Potter, Eileen Mueller and S.J. Pratt. But that short list hardly does justice to all the wonderful authors I've enjoyed over the years!