

JUDITH WHITLOCK, AUTHOR

The following article appeared in *The Singing Roads* Part 2 by Hugh M. Anderson (1969?) and was sent in my Joanne Kader of Mannum, South Australia. It is written by Judith Whitlock and tells her story of becoming an author.

“Living in an old castle, albeit a small converted wing, would strike some writers as ideal. In many ways it is. The blue-grey seas of the English Channel as they pound against the Kentish chalk cliffs provide splendid accompanying rhythm for the typewriter. At least it would seem so by the number of local writers. It was in our village that Frank Richards wrote his prolific Billy Bunter stories. Bachelor Richards has been accused of being too remote from his public, but he was spared the distractions of having a growing audience in his own household. However much your own children may improve your ability to write for them, they do not necessarily improve your ability to organise your time to include them and your writing. Your typewriter gathers dust as you march your infants down to the little cove, so evocative the location for smugglers and of Buchan’s Thirty-Nine Steps, that your memory of Australian beaches recedes and it becomes more difficult to describe the homeland you left in your youth to explore the world.

“The perspective of distance is not valid for children’s writers and certainly not for Leslie Green, my English illustrator, who created a likeable fat green Bunyip out of all the legends and descriptions I had gathered. Out hero was easy to depict, but his acolytes were another matter and we both haunted zoos and cuscus clung in rigid companionship to a papier mache gum tree. In desperation Leslie decided to emigrate, not in search of Bunyip, but to see his environment for herself. The day her plane left, she married instead.

“Like many writers, my ambition dates back to childhood exercise books filled, in my case, with schoolgirl adventure stories always set in England. My first job was the most interesting and valuable any children’s writer could hope to have - editing the Junior Red Cross Magazine in Melbourne. It was stories I wrote for this which I was later to see to supplement my earnings as a journalist in London. One of these was about a Bunyip and, when Leslie Green arranged for me to see her publisher in Oxford, I went armed with the idea of turning him into the hero of a series for small children. I had a pleasant lunch to show for my venture, during which my host did arithmetic on his paper napkin. He was interested in arithmetic and has a manuscript which he knew would end up on school desks the length and breadth of the country. He worked out what it would cost to put Bunyip into a book with colour expensively supplied by Leslie Green. He then asked which I would choose to print - a book on arithmetic or on Bunyip. I said arithmetic and it took four more years to find a publisher to say Bunyip.

“Perhaps Bunyip lay on the same desks as the Oxford arithmetics, for the London County Council prescribed The Green Bunyip and Bunyip at the Seaside as readers in their schools. They Bunyip made a brief appearance on television and settled down to a career of literary respectability as uneventful as the lives of his creators.”

Judith Whitlock was obviously brought up in Australia and moved to Britain and a young woman to be a journalist. I am not positive but think she is likely Judith Lorraine Whitlock, the daughter of William Alfred Norman & Marjorie Mary (Glass) Whitlock who were married at Swan Hill, Victoria, Australia in 1933. This family is detailed on our WHITLOCK05 chart. Her books about Bunyip became popular children's stories in Britain. If anyone has information about Judith, I would be pleased to add it to our files.

According to the internet "Australian aboriginal stories describe the bunyip as an evil spirit which dwells in creeks, swamps, and billabongs. The bunyip's loud bellowing cry terrifies the aborigines."

Source: R2412