

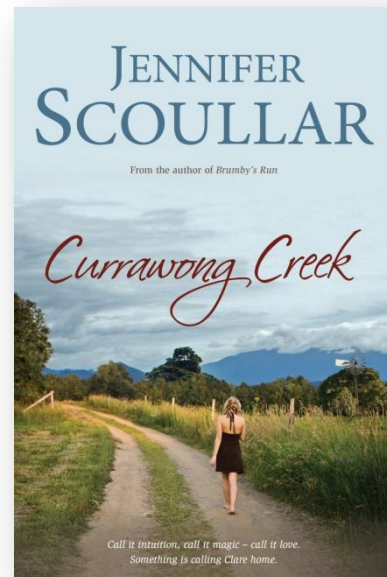
Currawong Creek

Author: Jennifer Scoullar

Penguin Q & A with Jennifer Scoullar, author of *Currawong Creek*

What is your new book about?

Currawong Creek is the story of Clare Mitchell, a young Brisbane lawyer who is very caught up in her career. When she takes on the care of problem child Jack, her ordered life is turned upside down. Her partner's betrayal is the final straw. She takes leave of her job and takes Jack to Currawong Creek, her grandfather's Clydesdale stud at Merriang in the foothills of the beautiful Bunya Mountains. She arrives to find part of the property leased by local vet, Tom Lord, an advocate of equine therapy for traumatised children. Jack falls in love with Currawong's animals, and Clare falls in love with Tom and the life of a country vet. But trouble is coming, trouble that threatens to not only destroy Clare's new-found happiness, but the tiny town of Merriang itself.



What or who inspired it?

I fostered kids for 15 years, and saw many young single mothers, who needed help almost as much as their children did. There's such a desperate shortage of foster carers in our community. Often, no suitable place can be found for a child after being taken into care. So I thought I'd explore that problem in my story. There is so much evidence to show that animals can help to heal traumatised children. I had to give little Jack that chance! The setting was inspired by Queensland's Darling Downs, and its beautiful Bunya Mountains. A growing national concern about land and water has led to a realisation that agricultural land and underground water are finite resources that should be protected. This is another issue explored in *Currawong Creek*.

The characters though, are entirely fictional. I loved the idea of throwing a young professional woman in the deep end with a difficult child – and a German Shepherd puppy! How would it change her? What problems would it cause? How would she cope?

What was the biggest challenge, writing it?

My biggest challenge was writing the relationship between Clare and Jack's birth mother, Taylor. These are two women from very different worlds, yet they share a strong common bond. They both love Jack. Emotions naturally run high in that sort of situation, and I wanted to show each of their positions with sympathy. It needed a delicate balance, and a lot of rewriting.

What did you want to achieve with your book?

I mainly wrote *Currawong Creek* to be an entertaining story. Along the way, it may raise awareness about the challenges and importance of fostering. It may encourage somebody to explore equine therapy as a healing tool for a child. That would be good. I also hope it may help spark debate about land and water conservation.

What do you hope for your book?

I hope my book will be widely read and enjoyed.

Are there any parts of it that have special personal significance to you?

Samson, the German Shepherd puppy, has particular personal resonance for me. I raised and trained German Shepherds for many years, and he is a composite of my most intelligent and charming dogs. My father also passed on to me a particular love of Clydesdale horses, and I've always had a soft spot for Currawongs.

Do you have a favourite character or one you really enjoyed writing?

Harry, Clare's grandfather, was without a doubt my favourite character. Such a sweet, old man with a great deal of courage and very fine principles. I'd love to know him in real life

What do you see as the major themes in your book?

I suppose one of the main themes is finding the courage to stand up for what you believe in. Also forgiveness and the different kinds of love. Love for a child, a lover and a grandfather.

What made you set it in the Bunya Mountains?

They're a magical place, like an island, surrounded by the plains and cleared farming land of the Darling Downs. A refuge of biodiversity, harbouring ancient plants and more than 30 rare and threatened species. Iconic Bunya pines (*Araucaria bidwillii*) tower over tall, moist rainforests along the crest of the range. Their distinctive dome-shaped crowns rise above the canopy, as they've done for millions of years. It's a truly mysterious and romantic setting.

Did the title come instantly to you or did you labour over it?

The title changed as often as the name of the property did.

To whom have you dedicated the book and why?

Currawong Creek is dedicated to the Wilderness Society, as a tribute to the wonderful work they do, protecting and restoring wild places across Australia.

Who do you think will enjoy your book?

Anybody who loves kids, animals, the bush and a ripping love story.