

Safe Harbour

AUTHOR: HELENE YOUNG

Q & A With Helene Young

What is your new book about?

Safe Harbour is a story about both the joy and the sorrow of living in a small community in regional Australia. It's a story of blind ambition, and the dangers of success. It's a story of love and the enduring power of friendships.

What or who inspired it?

Every time I fly into places like Weipa and Horn Island I'm conscious of the poverty in remote communities, coupled with the limited options for the young people. So many of them board our aircraft with wide smiles as they head to the big smoke chasing their sporting dreams. Only a very small number succeed and life can be pretty tough even for those that do.

I also spent some time with a policeman in Cooktown who was responsible for running the PCYC. He had some fascinating insights into how to turn children's lives around. I wanted to explore the sort of person who turns down a high profile career to make a difference in a community they love.

Darcy, my heroine owes much to a woman I met in a tiny New Zealand town who'd turned an old fishing shed into a gorgeous restaurant. That was the beginning for the Safe Harbour and it kept growing over time.

What was the biggest challenge, writing it?

As the story evolved it became a love triangle and right up until the last couple of chapters I really didn't know which way it was going to go. Consequently my latest work in progress is a very different story to the one I planned as one of the characters is still demanding I tell his story and find him a happy ending...

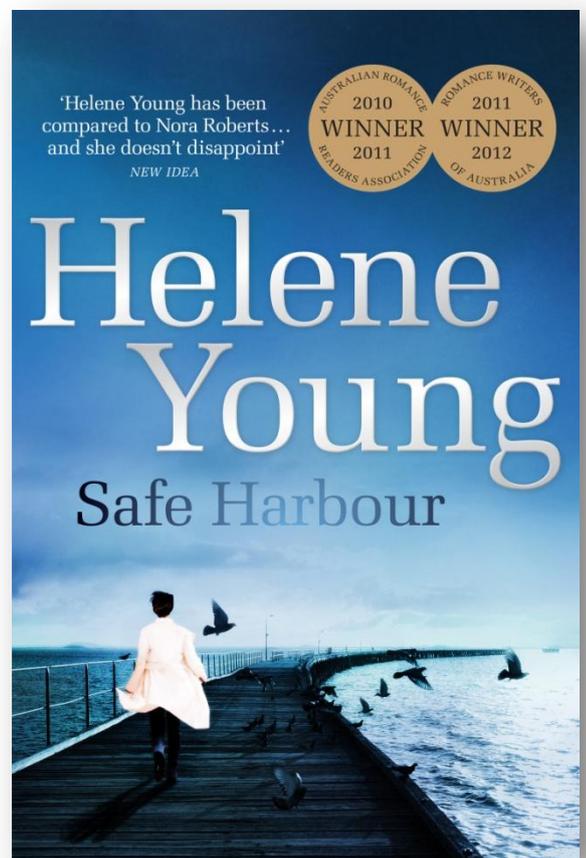
What do you hope for your book?

I hope that it resonates with readers and perhaps promotes discussions or at least some reflections on things like ovarian cancer, drugs in sport and the difficulties of living in remote Australia.

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

I think Darcy's dilemma about whether love can be the slow burn of a friend or a bolt of lightning with a stranger was very much my dilemma twenty-nine years ago. I'm very glad I went with the slow burn – that love's still smouldering in the best possible way.

To whom have you dedicated the book and why?



Safe Harbour is dedicated to an indigenous woman called, Dolly, who I met briefly on a fishing trip out of Darwin. Her grace and quiet dignity inspired the character of Rosie in the story. I didn't think it was possible to learn so much, in such a simple way from a stranger.

Who do you think will enjoy your book?

I think anyone who likes a rich story with tension, heartache, intrigue and an Australian setting will enjoy *Safe Harbour*.

Do you have a special 'spot' for writing at home? (If so, describe it)

I write when and where I can. Juggling a busy day job as an airline captain means I spend time in hotel rooms so I've learnt not to be pickie about my writing spot!

When I'm at home, bobbing on the back deck of our catamaran, Roo Bin Esque, writing is a whole lot easier. There's something soothing about the water and the movement of the boat.

When did you start writing?

I've always been a dabbler. I won a Griffith University short story competition when I was still in high school and always assumed I'd write a book one day.

Life unfortunately got in the way and it wasn't until we moved to Cairns for my job with an airline that I started to write again with any intent. It felt as though I'd turned on a tap and I now have no hope of turning it off. Story-telling is a compulsion. That's partly why I enjoy encouraging others to write and I run workshops for organisations like the Queensland Writers Centre.

Tell us a bit about your childhood?

My childhood was spent alternating between East Brisbane, in the shadow of the Gabba Cricket Ground, and Currumbin Beach, where my family owned a beach shack. It was a carefree existence and as I was the youngest I was always doing things that were slightly too old for me. I was also a tomboy who rarely wore shoes and was most comfortable out doors.

My Dad was a huge inspiration for me. He was a ship's engineer so spent a lot of time away from home. Consequently he wrote stories for my siblings and I and posted them home for Mum to read to us. Until I started school I thought everyone wrote stories!!

Both Mum and Dad always encouraged me to follow my dreams and I'm very grateful that they instilled such a strong love of reading in me.

If you've had other jobs outside of writing, what were they?

My jobs are too numerous to list, but I started my employment life as a MacDonalds' fries cook at 15. I've been an Outward Bound Adventure instructor; I've been a functions co-ordinator, the lunch cook in a psychiatric nursing home, a flying instructor and now a senior Captain in Australia's largest regional airline. It all makes great fodder for an over active imagination!

Describe yourself in three words?

Loyal, tenacious and generous.

What star sign are you and are you typical of it?

I'm a Gemini and friends tell me I am a typical Gemini. I think it helps with the left brain, right brain aspect of my two jobs. I have to be able to tune into the left side when I put on my pilot's uniform – there's no

room for imagination in a job where safety is paramount! On the flipside, of course, I want my right side in control when I'm being creative.

What three things do you dislike?

Dishonesty, rubbish dropped on the beach and cleaning wooden blinds...

What three things do you like?

Rain on an iron roof (I'm a Queenslander!), burying my toes deep into soft sand and the view from the flight deck.

Have you a family, partner or are you single?

I met my husband 29 years ago in the English Lake District and we still hold hands when we walk our manic staffie, Zeus. That's family enough for me!