



## Author-Illustrator Spotlight Kim Michelle Toft



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***Kim, you tell your stories with words and pictures? When did you know you wanted to be a storyteller and share your stories with others?***

I started drawing when I was 4 years old. I would spend hours on my own, drawing. My mother would buy me small Golden Books and take me to see all the Walt Disney movies. I knew then that I wanted to have a career in art. I started writing and illustrating my picture books when my daughter Casey arrived, 26 years ago.

***What comes first, the stories or the illustrations?***

I always write the story first. Then I research the animals in my stories and do small thumbnail sized sketches. I then do more detailed drawings which are then drawn and painted onto silk.

***Where and when do you like to work on your stories? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like a noisy space?***

There is no one place or time for me to write. An idea comes to me and then I jot it down on whatever paper or notebook I have with me at the time. I rewrite many times, until the story forms. I always paint my silk illustrations in my gallery which overlooks the water. I paint in the daytime as the light is better for silk painting.

***What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?***

I always write my books with pen and paper. Only in the final stages do I type them onto the computer.

***What media do you mainly use for illustrating?***

All my illustrations are hand painted onto silk.

Find out more about Kim Michelle Toft from her website:

[KimToft.com.au](http://KimToft.com.au)

***Kim, most of your stories have a strong environmental theme, especially about marine conservation.***

***Why is this important to you?***

I have lived my entire adult life on a beach somewhere in Australia. I love the ocean. Its force and beauty inspires me, calms me and fascinates me, and I want to give the amazing inhabitants a voice and help to educate children about their preservation.

***Where do you get the ideas for your stories?***

My ideas come to me when I am interested in a particular theme or concept. All my stories are formed from the initial idea and then written hundreds of times to get the right prose style text.

***What gave you the idea for *The Twelve Underwater Days of Christmas*?***

I collected Christmas books for my daughter when she was little, and I wanted to create my own Christmas book. I also loved the idea that you could sing the book.

***Do you have a favourite illustration?***

I loved designing the Christmas tree of animals in the back of the book. I actually designed that page/poster first and most of the page images were lifted from that 'tree' illustration.

***What do you like best about *The Twelve Underwater Days of Christmas*?***

It is a very joyous book and with the addition of the CD, it is such fun to sing and dance to.

***Kim, at the end of the book you have included a magnificent fold-out poster of the marine creatures included in the book. You have also included information about the creatures, including their survival status. Why was it important to include this additional information?***

At the back of all of my books is extension information so the child can learn more about the creatures inside the book. It also has valuable environmental information.

***How would you like teachers to present *The Twelve Underwater Days of Christmas* to children, and which particular messages would you like them to discuss?***

In the classroom I see *The Twelve Underwater Days of Christmas* as a performance piece. The class could create their own actions /dance to go with the song, then perform it at their Carol's Night or just in the class. Obviously, the extension information in the back focuses on whether the animals are extinct, endangered or under threat. This can start a discussion about why animals become extinct.

***Do you have any advice for children as writers or illustrators?***

The most important thing about writing and illustrating is to be inspired by the subject matter and do a lot of research and look at a lot of photos of your subject matter. I also recommend that the story and illustrations are always completed.

***What is your favourite picture book?***

There are so many beautiful books out there but one of my favourites is Bruce Whatley's book *Little White Dogs Can't Jump*. It is really funny, and the personality of the dog is fantastic.

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