



Author Spotlight — Robyn Osborne



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Robyn Osborne, author.

Robyn, you have dedicated this fun book to the memory of your Dad and his 'best buddy Bruno'. Are there any similarities between your Dad and Bob, and between the real Bruno and the book Bruno?

Like many of my books, *Bruno: the Boisterous Blue Dog from the Bush* was inspired by real characters, in this case my father, Tony Bright and his best buddy Bruno. Dad was a widower who spent the last 30 years of his life on his beloved property in the Sunshine Coast hinterland. He was a bit of a hermit and preferred his animals to human company (family excepted!).

Although he was born in England, Dad had a great passion for native fauna and flora and loved to roam through the bush with his loyal canine by his side. Dad's preferred state of dress consisted of tatty old clothes, a battered Akubra hat and bare feet. Bob the barefoot bushie was born!

Over the years, Dad had many dog friends; mostly strays who fell on their paws when they joined the Bright household. There was Rowdy the clever collie; Bluey the psychotic cattle dog and Kimba – nicknamed The Snaggle Toothed Hound – due to her penchant for chewing rocks! We also had two dogs called Bruno as Dad had a habit of re-cycling pet names, which could get confusing at times.

Bruno the book character is an amalgam of many dogs; a mongrel of indeterminate heritage, who is nonetheless a valued and loved family member. I think it is wonderful that Dad and his beloved dogs can live on posthumously through my books.

What gave you the idea for writing this story?

As a teacher, I was frustrated by the lack of children's books that featured the wonderful Australian colloquial language, so I decided to create one! With Bruno Bright as one of the main characters of the book, it was a natural progression to write an alliterative story. With my trusty dictionary beside me, *Bruno: the Boisterous Blue Dog from the Bush* slowly emerged.

Did your Dad get to read the story?

Unfortunately not, he died in 2016, before my previous picture book (*My Dog Socks*) and *Bruno* were published. Dad did get to read my other books (mostly dog oriented) and got a huge amount of pleasure from my success. He was one of my biggest fans!

What would he have thought of it?

I'm sure he would have loved the book. It is about a dog and a bush character, with a bit of humour thrown in – just his cup of tea.

Did you ever count the number of different 'b' words you included in your story of Bruno? If so, how many?

I have not counted the b words, but it is certainly worth thinking about.

What do you like best about your story?

Animals and writing are my passions, so I love the fact that the book highlights the strong bond between dogs and humans.

Do you like the way John Phillips has illustrated it?

Yes, I love his bold, funny and very Aussie themed drawings, which complement the story perfectly.

Are there any messages you would like teachers to discuss?

The rich, inventive and colourful colloquial Aussie bush language is part of our heritage, and I hope the book helps to promote an awareness and greater appreciation of it. As Australia becomes increasingly urbanised, I want children to learn a little about rural life.

Another important message is that people don't need lots of possessions to be truly happy. As Bob discovered, it is who you are with, not what you have, that is important.

You have already published other picture books. When did you know you wanted to be a writer?

Books and writing have always been a big part of my life, and I always had a dream of becoming a writer. My parents loved books and I clearly remember my Dad reading to us at bedtime. He particularly enjoyed poetry and a couple of classic favourites were *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* and *Wyken, Blynken, and Nod*.

Where do you write? Do you like to be by yourself in the quiet, or do you like to write in a noisy space?

I am lucky enough to have a study with the most beautiful view; looking across the sparkling blue ocean to Fraser Island. Unfortunately, this sometimes encourages a little too much gazing and not enough writing! We live in a tiny community of about 60 people, so it is very quiet. Jack, my canine writer's muse is usually snoozing next to me.

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

Mostly computer, but I always have a pen and pencil close, to jot down ideas that pop into my head.

When do you write?

I resigned from my teaching job this year, to concentrate on my writing career, so in theory I can write whenever I want to. Of course, the best laid plans...I do find that having unlimited writing time means you can become a bit slack. Having said this, I try to sit down at my computer and write most mornings.

When do you get your ideas?

All the time, however I often find ideas pop into my head when I am walking Jack the dog.

Do you think of the story in your head before you write it?

Yes, I toss ideas around in my head before I write them down.

Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?

Having taught in primary schools for 20 years, I appreciate how difficult it is to motivate reluctant writers, especially to pick up the pencil and begin a story. Often it is a case of encouraging kids to start small with something like a daily journal or diary, even if it is only a few lines, which helps to normalise the writing process. I also found children quite liked creating letters, as these are a practical form of writing.

Do you have any advice for children as writers?

Believe in yourself and have fun with your stories.

What is your favourite picture book?

There are so many beautiful picture books; it is hard to choose one favourite. I do love *The Tyger Voyage* (Richard Adams) and *The Mousehole Cat* (Antonia Barber). These were two books I loved sharing with my son when he was young.

Who is your favourite author? What do you like about his or her work?

That is an even harder question to answer! In novels, it is hard to beat Tolkien and I am in awe of Philip Pulman's work. In picture books, Andrew and Janet McLean really capture the quirkiness of dogs, which I love.

Find out more about Robyn on her website: [Tiqqy's Tales](http://www.tiqqys.com.au)