**Between our pages**

Episode 4 with Dianne Wolfer

[0:00] Music.  
  
[0:10] Fiona: Welcome, you're listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.

This episode was recorded on Whadjuk Noongar land. We acknowledge the traditional custodians and pay respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

My name is Fiona Bartholomaeus and together we'll be diving into the wonderful world of books and reading right here in WA.  
  
Today we're chatting with Dianne Wolfer, an award-winning author about her new adventure and dog-filled book, Scouts and the Rescue Dogs.

Let's go!  
  
[0:38] Music.  
  
[0:47] Fiona: So Scout and the Rescue Dogs is a new story about community, adventure, and kindness as it follows Scout and her dad traveling across the state on her summer holidays to deliver donations.

It's the next title coming from award-winning writer and self-proclaimed bookworm, Dianne Wolfer.

Thanks for joining me on Between Our Pages.

Dianne: It's such a pleasure, thank you for having me.

Fiona: So you've written more than 20 books, but before you were a writer, you were a bookworm. Is that where it all started for you?

Dianne: Yes, I've always loved books and I was fortunate to come from a family that, we didn't have a lot of money to buy books, but Christmas and birthday presents were a book and yeah, just valued books and one of my earliest memories is there was no library, we lived in the outer burbs of Melbourne, it was orchards back in the day. And at some point they started a book bus service.  
  
So a bus would come in to all the, I guess, the new suburbs, and every fortnight I would come along and you got six little cards, and you'd come in the front door and then you could get your, pick your six books.  
  
And then got-

Fiona: So like a mobile library?  
  
Dianne: Yeah, yeah, yeah, totally, mobile library. Yeah, that's what it was.  
  
And yeah, I still have this really strong scent memory of it so I can remember the smell and because all the kids' books were down the bottom, so I was sort of down there while the adults were looking at the books above and yeah, that was huge.

And then my local primary school that my last year there, they got a library as well and that's where I discovered different kinds of books like Ivan Southall was, I guess the John Marsden of the day, but an Australian author writing really adventurous things that felt quite adult-like at the time.  
  
[2:25] Fiona: And when you were a child, you wanted to be Silky from the Magic Faraway Tree, and before that, the Muddled-Headed Wombat. Has the way those books made you feel as a child influenced the way that you've written yours?

Dianne: Oh, that's an interesting question.  
  
[2:38] I don't know that I'm sort of channeling Enid Blyton or Ruth Park, I think it's in it, and however, that reading books like that and just loving them so much and escaping into them so so that the imagination just totally took over, I guess that influences what I'd hope to recreate for young readers now.  
  
[2:59] I used to just go around the house being a wombat and...

Fiona: Love that so much.

Dianne: Yeah, and then the boy next door had a really round face, so he was Moon Face, and I was pretty bossy, and so we just had this tiny strip of dirt in the playground but it was on a slope and we'd go sort of float up like space people, I suppose, and suddenly we're at the top of the tree.

And so imaginative, you know? Imagination's amazing.

Fiona: It really is. So tell us about your new book, Scout and the Rescue Dogs. What is it about?

Dianne: Oh, Scout and the Rescue Dogs is a passion project that has been finished for a while, and so I'm so excited for the launch in June.

I've often been interested in truck drivers. I don't come from a truck driving family, but living in Albany, I drive a lot to go to workshops, and so I've often seen the truck drivers and think it's just such, they're really holding the country together and they're unsung heroes in a certain way.

So there is a truck driver, it's a truck driving family and I have a rescue dog, our little Harry is the centre of our life.

But rescue dogs, of course, are another passion. So I created a story about a girl who's, you find out straight away, the mother has passed away and so her dad's a truck driver, which means that she has to go to boarding school because he can't look after her.  
  
[4:19] And she, before her mother passed, they were going to get a dog for her birthday and so that can't happen. So she goes to boarding school, it's set in Victoria initially. She hates it and just can't wait to the school holidays and her dad picks her up. That's where the story opens, with her dad parking the Kenworth in there, trying to get through the after school rush.

And they're off on a philanthropic dog food run. A philanthropist has donated dog food and they're going around the dog shelters in Southern Victoria and then into New South Wales and then back down again, sort of like a loop.

And so that was the idea and I'd written it and then it was a complete read-through was done.

[5:00] But then unfortunately then there were the 2019 bushfires, and so this was a Christmas story, it was written at that time, and I suddenly realised that I'd gone over to support my family and was staying with my mother, and the air was so toxic, it was off the charts, the levels of toxicity, and it was just grey and outside the windows, it was in Aubrey.

And so it really was impacting my life, and I could see what was going on.

So I thought, well I either have to change, because the towns that were dropping off the dog food, it's almost like I had this horrible match, and I just like, those towns all went up.

And so I either had to change the setting, or I needed to incorporate the fire.

So I took a deep breath and brought the fire into it, which made it much stronger, so it's the bushfire theme, it's in there as well.

So I guess books, when they work on different layers, it's a good thing for an author if you can do that and young readers will link into different things.

Yeah, so the bushfires is a big part of it now as well and across Australia, so it links as well. There are truck drivers stuck on the Nullarbor and Kangaroo Island, so it's across Australia.  
  
[6:18] Fiona: It's quite interesting that something that was happening in your life then influenced and made the book go in a different direction from what you originally intended.

Dianne: Yeah, really interesting and has made it even more of a passion project for me because as well as that interest, selflessness and truckies do, and rescue dogs and some of the other themes that are close to my heart, that really added a whole new layer.

So yeah, I'm really glad I incorporated it into the story.  
  
[6:45] Fiona: So why should people pick up your book and read it once it comes out?

Dianne: Oh, goodness.

Well, I suppose if they like animal stories, I love animal stories personally, there's a lot of heart in this particular story and kindness, empathy, resilience, all of those things, courage, but trucks, dogs, those are things I love.

So, I think a lot of young readers like dogs and trucks and or both and I really like to use country themes as well and bring in country viewpoints and families that are regional families.

So, again, anyone who is reading, who doesn't live in the city, then it's a book for them as well.

Fiona: I was going to say, you live in Albany, but you have lived all over Australia. How much has the environment of Western Australia influenced your books and your writing?

Dianne: Oh, totally. It's home. It's my home. I've lived on the South Coast for, oh goodness, I don't know, 20, 30, however many years, a long time.

And sometimes when you weren't born somewhere, I think you can see it differently.

[7:53] Not with clearer eyes, but, and I do go back and forth, when I do go back to that, my family are in the upper Murray and the high country, my sister lives up in an off-grid up in the Snowy Mountains, it's really, really remote and steep and it's beautiful and part of my heart really opens to that as well.

That's definitely part of me and my DNA I suppose, but my choice has been to live in Western Australia most of my life and particularly the South Coast, it's my home and so I guess for me having moved around a lot in my life, I can see how incredibly beautiful Western Australia is and my husband's retired now and we travel so we've got a motor home and we're heading off in winter again to go up into the Pilbara where I've set two books and into the Kimberley and just to get around and see this incredible state and all the diversity. It's so different.

Fiona: And I'm sure we'll see a lot more books come out from these current travels as well.

Dianne: Well, yeah, there is one coming out that was inspired last year called Cattle Muster, which is a picture book I'm doing with Frané Lessac, I don't think it's too early to say that we're doing that next year, which is, she's already started the artwork, and that was inspired by our travels up in the Kimberley, those beautiful Brahman cattle and a story about a child up there.  
  
[9:08] So there's no doubt that those travels and often when I go into schools or talk to young readers and if they're wanting to know how to be a writer and where to get ideas and I'm always saying get out into nature.

You need to get far enough away from a screen in nature just to get bored, every now and again, even if just once a week, obviously more is better, but to walk through the bush or just around a park and just look at a tree and watch the leaves and the birds and then you'll get ideas. That's when the ideas come, when you're in nature.

So driving long-distance is a time where, it's also a repetitive activity where a lot of ideas are generated or I can – it's not unusual when I drive to Perth to pull over and either write some notes.

Fiona: And look around.

Dianne: Yeah, or just write some notes on a piece of paper or into my phone section in the notes section now. I do that a lot. So driving or walking, that repetitive movement and a bit of daydreaming, that's when – not just writing but I think life problems you can sort some things out doing that.

Fiona: Now you mentioned just before you're working on a new picture book but you have written quite a few different books ranging from historical fiction, early readers, young adult and heaps more. Most writers tend to stick to the same genre or age group. Why so much variety for you?  
  
[10:23] Fiona: Just, I don't know, I'm weird I suppose. I do jump around a lot, it probably would be easier to forge a career in one genre or two genres because that way you you have a following, but I follow my interests and if I have an idea for a story, the same idea could be adapted differently.

But I guess historical fiction and animal stories or anthropomorphism are the things that call me the most, but other ideas can only really be shaped into a picture book or a chapter book, yeah, a novel, a non-fiction, narrative non-fiction as well.

Yeah, I don't know why I do that. But it is interesting.

Fiona: Change is as good as a holiday.

Dianne: That's right and if I go to, if I'm at a regional school, then there's something for everybody.

Fiona: That's very true. 

Dianne: Yeah, and I think it's really good for readers to read across genres as well, I know I write across genres, but I do have my favorite genres to read. But stretching yourself, you're often surprised, I've just read Sarah Foster's The Hush because I was at a, between the lines down in Busselton, and I'm not usually into thrillers, but this is terrific.

So, yeah, I read really widely, from picture books through chapter books to books for adults and non-fiction.

Fiona: Now, you have also been quite a huge advocate for children's literature over the years. Why is it so important to you?  
  
[11:42] Dianne: It's so important for everybody, every child or every human, everybody needs to be given the opportunity to read. If you can't read, there are so many parts of society that you're excluded from, let alone as far as a practical sense, but as far as further learning and discovering who you really want to be and extending yourself, reading is, whether we like it or not, it's an essential tool. 

And so it's so important to help young, there's a book for everybody, there's so many books for everybody.

Sometimes young readers don't know how to find the right book for them and that's where we come in, that's where teachers and authors and people organising wonderful podcasts like this. This is, you know, like the reading challenge. This is how you can help young people find the book for them and also just to switch on to reading.

If you don't know about it, then you can't know. So you need someone to help you find the right books. So I think that's hugely important so that you can be a full member of the community and develop to your own potential. I think it's really, really important.

Fiona: And the Premier's Reading Challenge is almost back for 2023. How much has reading helped you with your writing? 

Dianne: So much, like totally everything.  
  
[12:52] Reading is not that you want to copy anyone's style, goodness, if someone's putting out a book that is anything like what I'm working on, I avoid it like the plague because I don't want to be influenced, even unintentionally. So I'd totally steer clear until the book's published.

But each time I read a book I'm inspired by the style or the way that the author has, and or illustrator, has developed that theme and how they go about things, what new and interesting things they've done. And on the odd occasion where it's a book that I just don't want to keep going with, I can learn from that as well. So I'm learning what is it about this book that I'm just, is it overwritten? Like have they not edited it enough? If it's an unusual topic I'll still probably stick with it, but if it's something, you know, if it's not catching me as a reader, then that's a learning experience as well. Like, why?  
  
[13:44] Fiona: I like that. No matter what, you're learning something from a book that you're reading.

Dianne: Totally, totally. Always learning and always being inspired. There's so many talented, creative people out there and there are also so many people who aren't published who are, really talented and creative who get a certain way into writing a story but then parts of their life interfere or they're too busy or they can't or they prioritise something else. 

So it's not just the published book, everyone's got a story and in workshops I love to hear people's stories.

Fiona; Now, before we let you go, I'm going to ask you some rapid-fire questions. I just want the first answer that comes into your head.

Dianne: Yep.

Fiona: What is your favourite book?

Dianne: Oh gosh, I should have prepared it.  
  
[14:21] I'm thinking the one that's at the moment, it's got me thinking, is Shaun Tan's Tales from the Inner City. Inner City? Anyway, Shaun Tan. Anything by ShaunTan.

Fiona: What are you reading at the moment? 

Dianne: At the moment, I have just finished Snapshots from the Front, I think it's called. It's actually not out yet. It's Sasha Womsley, who also writes as Ash Harriet, but it's coming out in about a month or so and I was really fortunate to get a sneak peek. Snapshots from the Front, I'm pretty sure that's the name, a beautiful cover. It's just a great book, I really like that.

Fiona: Fiction or non-fiction?

Dianne: Both, totally.

Fiona: Favourite genre?

Dianne: Historical fiction and animal stories.

Fiona: And in the spirit of the Premier's Reading Challenge, how many books do you hope to read in 2023

Dianne: Well, each year I set myself a target through the Goodreads site.

So 62 is this year's, which may or may not hint at my age, and I'm halfway, I'm almost halfway, so I'm up to 28. 

Fiona: Oh, wonderful.

Dianne: I'm really on track, I'm really going well. I think I'll do more than 62 this year, which is exciting.  
  
[15:23] Music.  
  
[15:31] Fiona: You've been listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.

Thanks to our guest Dianne Wolfer for joining me on this episode.  
  
If you want to keep up to date about future podcast episodes, you can follow the Premier's Reading Challenge Facebook and Instagram pages at Premier's Reading Challenge WA.  
  
Thank you for listening. Happy reading. See you next time!  
  
[15:51] Music.