

Career Market



Julia Marshall from Gecko Press with *LouLou* by Gregoire Solotareff, above, and *Helper and Helper*, by Joy Cowley and Gavin Bishop, below.

Photos: JOHN NICHOLSON/FAIRFAX NZ

The best books for young minds

Julia Marshall's love of books flows through into her success in publishing.

THERE are, according to Julia Marshall of Gecko Press, two things you need to be a book publisher, apart from an inherent love of reading. One is attention to detail and the other is immense curiosity. Everything else is pretty much negotiable, she says.

Marshall should know – she's been in publishing of one sort or another for over 30 years. Gecko Press was born "somewhere between 2004 and 2005, depending on how we count," she says. In 2008 the company published Joy Cowley's *Snake and Lizard* story book, which took off and put Gecko Press on the map.

"From the start Gecko Press has been about translating the best books in the world into English," Marshall explains. "I wanted to have a push-me-pull-you happening where we sent stories to the rest of the world and we brought their stories to us – it was an odd vision and we've kept to it."



"A lot of people say they always wanted to be a writer, but I knew I wanted to work with books – especially children's books. "Most people like words," she says. "But I'd found – luckily – that I liked words and pictures, and the effect that they have on each other."

Marshall's first job out of school was with *Adventure* magazine in Auckland, where words and pictures were closely entwined. "What I loved about that job was you got to do a lot of everything at many different times and you come out with something tangible at the end.

"At that time there was no publishing course in NZ," she says. "So I thought working as a journalist would be a good start." Marshall quickly found that she and journalism – all words and no pictures – didn't quite suit each other, so she gave up the daily round and travelled to Sweden. "I lived there for twelve years and worked for a company that produced corporate magazines – again, words and pictures – in up to 20 languages," she says. "I was an editor and translating and writing – it was a fantastic job travelling the world, visiting odd and unusual companies, like the

time I went to Venezuela to look at how to design hubcaps." As an industrial writer, Marshall had to take complicated subject matter and make it understandable. The art of translation was also key, she says. "We used to say a good translation is like looking through clean windows but a bad translation is a dirty window." Translation is a large part of the job at Gecko Press. Marshall has recently bought the world English rights to a book by French author Gregoire Solotareff, about a young wolf who becomes friends with a young rabbit.

"He is one of the really great French illustrators/writers and I've been wanting to publish him for quite a while," she says. "When we publish a book like this we translate it, edit the text, think about the design, the cover, the format, the paper, how we will market it, who the readers are." The book will then be sent off to the printer and distributed around the world. Gecko Press sells into America, Australia and Britain, with sales and marketing teams ensuring the books get into bookshops, libraries and schools. The company also works with publicists in each region as well.

"We have to make sure we have good publicity so that the books get out into the media." From her vantage point of being on the council of the Publishers Association of New Zealand, Marshall says it's an exciting time to be in the industry, despite the worry that digital books would mean the end of traditional publishing. "We're completely over that now," she says. "Digital is just another format along with hardback and paperback – the figures for digital used to be going through the roof but they've flattened out and everybody now just reads in the format that suits them." "There's not a device yet that can replace the picture book. In the digital device you don't get the turning of the page – that important pause – but then again for children who read a tonne, digital books are fantastic because you can easily keep feeding them books." The important thing for publishers, she says, is that people spend time reading. "It's not the digital book that's the threat, it's the amount of time people are spending on their devices. It's fine if they're reading but it's the amount of other distraction that's the worry." And then there's getting more people interesting in becoming publishers. "As a career there are so many different ways you can come into it," Marshall says. "And that's good because publishing is so wide-ranging and broad – you could come from science, economics, journalism, law. The kinds of people who make good publishers are all-rounders." These days there is a qualification on offer with Whitireia having a post-graduate one-year course, teaching a broad

Q+A

QUICK QUESTIONS

- NAME:** Julia Marshall
- BORN:** Marton, in 1963
- FIRST JOB:** *Adventure* magazine
- FAVOURITE MOVIE:** *Babette's Feast*
- FAVOURITE BOOK:** At the moment I'm reading the biography of Tove Jansson who wrote *The Moomins* books.