

## Amber strikes gold

**Eleven-year-old Amber Edwards, a member of Auckland Explorers, has published a rhyming picture book with renowned New Zealand children's writer Joy Cowley.**

***Too Many Cats* came about after Amber met the writer at an authors' event in Auckland. Joy Cowley said: 'From time to time, I encounter children who are very gifted as writers or illustrators, and I have been in the fortunate position of being able to publish their work. The latest is . . . Amber Edwards, who has a very funny and inventive cartoon style and loves drawing cats.'**

### **Amber takes up the story:**

I've always loved writing and illustrating and making up my own books. I even have a callus on my finger from all my drawing! I especially love cartooning and get lots of ideas of drawing styles from books, movies and TV programmes. I draw from images I see in my head, and I usually draw with a pen. I'm a fast drawer.

In 2008 there was a readers/writers event known as Storylines. That's where authors and illustrators sign books, draw illustrations and show off their skills to the crowds. You can buy comics and story books, and even look at some models people have made. It's held each year at the Auckland Town Hall.

Mum and I went downstairs to meet Joy Cowley, who was busy signing books. We had never met her before. While Mum waited in line to get a book signed, I drew Joy a picture to show my thanks. When I gave it to her, she was impressed and gave me her email, saying I should send more of my art to her. I was very excited.

I drew many pictures at home and sent them off to her. At one point, one of my pictures had lots of dragons in it. Joy wrote back and asked me to send some more dragons over. When I did, she chose her favourite dragon and wrote back with a script of a story she had written especially for me. She then asked me to draw scenes from the story featuring 'Winnie', the dragon.

Very soon I sent my full-colour pictures starring Winnie. Joy put a short book together of my illustrations. Joy was 72 and I was 9. Later, in December 2008, she sent the finished copies over. The book was called *Dragon Droppings* and was quite a humorous book. It wasn't published, but Joy said she wanted me to have a taste of what it felt like illustrating a book. It was really great to show everyone at my school, St Thomas's Primary. I felt very proud.

Joy also encouraged me to send my work to the *Journal of Young People's Writing*. They wrote back in March 2009 and wanted me to illustrate a story for them! But then the Ministry of Education suspended publication of the School Journal. The editor wrote that the Ministry had decided that an online resource might better cater for students' and teachers' writing needs. I was disappointed as it was my dream to be published. Then Joy wrote and asked me to send some drawings of cats to inspire her for a story. We are both cat lovers!

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Not long after that I began drawing pictures of cats for Joy. She wanted lots so she could make a cat book. I sent over dozens and dozens of pictures. She loved the cats and sent us a draft of the story in December 2009. The story is called *Too Many Cats* and is about what happens when Grandma and Grandad decide to get a pet. It's a rhyming children's picture book, with 32 pages of detailed black and white illustrations. I drew pictures based around the script, but then realised I hadn't drawn in the borders Joy wanted! We tried to use the family computer to edit my drawings, but mostly I had to redo the entire page. It was quite exhausting doing all of this and it was a huge relief to finally send the pictures away. We eagerly awaited Joy's reply.

She replied soon after and said she loved the pictures and was going to take them to a printer to get the books printed. Her daughter-in-law Janice helped us, too, putting everything on disk for the printer. It took a long time, but it was so exciting to finally see our book. Our cats even got to be on the back cover, as I had drawn them on a letter to Joy. We loved the book and couldn't wait to show the published edition to everyone. This was a special first edition! We are selling the book ourselves and it has had a great response. We are putting the money towards a reprint.

I'm now at Remuera Intermediate, and some of my drawings were shown at assembly while I was interviewed! It was fun and I felt proud to be a published illustrator at 11. I like making people smile and laugh with my drawings.

I had great fun illustrating a book with Joy Cowley, and the experience was wonderful. I now hope I will illustrate another book with her so I can get the same feeling again. I am so grateful to Joy for supporting and encouraging me in my dream to be published.

**If you are interested in getting a copy of *Too Many Cats*, please contact: [edwardsfamily@inspire.net.nz](mailto:edwardsfamily@inspire.net.nz). The book is \$12.00 plus postage and makes a great Christmas present.**