

Ten quick questions

Janey Louise Jones is, amongst other things, a practising Christian, an ex-teacher, a respected children's author and a businesswoman. With her husband, she set up *The Jelly Club*, a successful chain of children's activity centres in Scotland. Janey lives in Edinburgh with her husband and three sons. She took time out from promoting her new *Princess Poppy* books to answer ten quick questions asked by Rupert Kaye.



Janey, tell me about your latest Princess Poppy books.

There are six new books out just now. Apart from two new picture books, the others are two novels and two activity books. I am pleased to be trying new formats already. *Princess Poppy* is all about crafts and handmade fun, so the activity books are especially satisfying. The novels allow me to explore Poppy's world more and deal with more complex issues like coming to terms with the fact that we can't always get all we want, and considering the perils of telling tales and gossiping.

Is there a real 'Princess Poppy' from whom you draw your inspiration?

She is partly the child I was and partly the child I would have liked to have been. She is my heroine too; feisty and incredibly warm hearted.

What kinds of things can we expect to see Princess Poppy doing in the future?

More moral dilemmas and learning curves. Poppy is a sociable child who occasionally finds social rules hard to learn. She struggles with jealousy and competitiveness. She will be



travelling out of her village more to see the wider world too.

Do you think we will ever see any Prince Poppy books?

If I write books for boys they will be completely different. I have three sons so have a lot of ideas milling around. I find young boys like the *Poppy* books.

I understand that, before becoming a mother and a writer, you were a teacher. Where did you teach? And, do you miss the classroom ... and the staffroom?

I taught English at secondary level in Edinburgh at a highly geared independent day school. I don't miss it, but I think I would be better with discipline now as a mother myself. I don't miss the staffroom at all, although I still have a few good friends from those days. I found being in school all day quite hard, as though being in a long play as an actress with no respite. I admire people who do it for a whole career but, for me, it was too intense. I did get good results with my pupils, which was expected in that school, but I now see education as an all round thing, not just about exams. I really want my sons to enjoy woodwork, art and drama as much as maths and English.

Janey, how does your Christian faith shape the stories you tell?

I hope that my simple belief in good being the overriding force in people shines through. I also think lessons such as treat others as you would like to be treated and be compassionate and forgiving are all implicit in my stories. I want to be inclusive of other faiths too, but all children are the same in my view.

When did you first realise you wanted to be a writer?

Very early on. About the age of seven. I have always written. As to becoming a professional

writer, I decided on that about three and a half years ago.

In your opinion, what is the difference between a 'good' story and a truly 'great' story?

A great story has a strong and memorable message while a good story is fun to read. Great stories tend to become classics because their message is strong. The Bible contains the greatest plots, characters and messages. Just think of Cain and Abel, or Jacob, or Joseph for instance. Noah's Ark is a great children's story, with all the right elements: animals, drama and a purpose. I also like the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall which reminds us of original sin and how flawed we are. Of course, the Christmas story is delightful and I also like miracle stories like Jesus walking on water, and feeding a multitude with a few fishes and loaves.

Which other children's authors do you respect most?

Jacqueline Wilson because she comforts children in her words. JK Rowling for inspiring a whole generation to read. And Anthony Horowitz; my sons love his Alex Rider books. I love Enid Blyton as her books amused me through my childhood. I firmly believe that children's stories should always amuse first and teach second, otherwise they sound preachy and are no longer fun.

Finally, do you have any other projects in the pipeline?

Yes, I do. I hope to write for older ages and diversify into boys' books too. For example, I will be writing a series of historical romances for teens set in the Regency period and I hope to produce a transport-themed book for young boys. As well as this, I would like to write some adult books for mums and young women.

■ Rupert Kaye