



Karen Wood lives and works on the Central Coast of NSW. She is a mother of two and the author of the popular *Diamond Spirit* books, as well as rural romance books, *Jumping Fences*, *Rain Dance* and *Under the Flame Tree* (release Sept 2015). She has also written a series for junior readers called *Trickstars* (release July 2015). She is mad about horses but is also a qualified horticulturalist with a degree in Communications. She has a menagerie of animals on her small acreage in New South Wales and spends her free time with her children and horses.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE REVIEW

<http://auslit.net/2015/04/08/karen-wood-author-interview/>

You began your career as an author with your Diamond Spirit series. For those not familiar with the Diamond Spirit series, how would you describe these novels?

When I set out to write *Diamond Spirit*, I wanted it to be so much more than a traditional 'pony book'. As a person who has lived with horses all her life, these types of books never had a satisfying level of horsey detail for me.

Diamond Spirit is about a girl called Jess who loses her beloved horse, Diamond. She makes sense of her loss by exploring indigenous themes of spirituality and reincarnation. The books have a strong sense of outback Australia and explore big ideas about connection to family, place, ancestors and nature. In the second book,

Moonstone Promise

, Luke camps on an outback river bed with three Aboriginal elders and explores the idea that horses could be his totem. There is a lot of authentic detail about horses and horse cultures, namely campdraft and rodeo, in rural Australia. It explores the deep connection people like myself feel towards horses, but also the spiritual fear Aboriginal Australians had towards horses, which stemmed from the massacres that happened during first contact. By the time I wrote the third book,

Opal Dreaming

, Jess and Luke were ready to meet and fall in love. By total accident I became a romance writer!!!

You have gone on to have two rural romance novels published so far, with a third due for release in September 2015. What are some of the biggest differences between these and the Diamond Spirit novels?

At first I was apprehensive about writing rural romance novels, but my publishers at Allen & Unwin thought I could do it. Writing about horses is my comfort zone, but I'm not a farmer, so I was worried about my work not being 'authentic'. With *Jumping Fences* I tried to stick to what I knew – bush festivals and dog high jump with some horses in the sub plots. I was surprised when *Jumping Fences*

began to outsell

Diamond Spirit

and this armed me with a lot more confidence to tackle some rural issues in Australia. As I began researching for

Rain Dance

, I found a way to weave in the words of our drought stricken farmers, word for word via dialogue, in a way that I felt gave an authentic voice to farmers in Australia and helped to show their plight. I tried to flip the clichéd

losing the family farm

, theme on its head by showing that city people lose their properties too. I explored themes of sexuality, depression, environment and health through both city and country, and tried to find empathy between the two. Again, I seemed to be exploring the idea that the deeper you dig into various cultures, the more we are all the same.

You have recently announced that you have an upcoming children's book series called Trickstars, due for release in July 2015. How have you found the experience of writing children's fiction after writing novels for teens and adults?

These books were so much fun to write. When I first started working on them my daughters were aged seven and ten. I've loved being able to consult with them about the series and share ideas. Ruby was adamant that there had to be magic in them and Annabelle insisted the characters have fabulous blingy costumes. When A&U sent me the draft covers for them, my girls picked them to pieces and made me send them back, demanding more sparkle. Even though they were smaller books, I still had to find that story arc, but they didn't require as much 'block time' in the actual writing process as my previous books. I could write in shorter bursts and have more time for my family. I'd really love to write more for this readership.

Horses are a common element in all your books. Do you find that lots of horse enthusiasts find your books by seeking out horse fiction or by friends recommending your books because they are horse-related?

I'm not really sure. Lots of my readers write to me (I love it) and tell me a friend recommended them, or they say they loved the covers. Some say I HATE HORSE BOOKS... but this one was pretty good... I do get a lot of genuine horse lovers contacting me. They send me photos of their horses and tell me all about them. I think we horse mad girls have a special connection somehow. We just totally get each other.

I recently discovered that John Flanagan, author the Ranger's Apprentice series and the Brotherband series, is your uncle. Have you taken any lessons from the Ranger's Apprentice series, the Brotherband series or from John Flanagan himself that you apply in your own fiction writing?

It was John who inspired me to write *Diamond Spirit*. I was standing in my mum's kitchen when he rang with the news that he had landed a big international book deal. We were all so excited for him. I had an old manuscript that I'd been tinkering with on and off for years, and I thought, *I want to do that too!*

John has been so generous with his time and his advice. He advised me on how to get a book published and if I ever have questions about contracts or how the industry works he is never more than a phone call away. The biggest thing I've learned from the Ranger's Apprentice books is that it's okay to write in great detail about the things you know and love. His fans may not know but he is a talented guitarist and song-writer and he has always loved archery. His books are full of loving detail about stringed instruments and medieval weapons – the things he knows and loves. I must say, the horsey details in his books are spot on too – you've gotta love Tug. And no he didn't get advice from me. When I wrote *Diamond Spirit*

I wasn't sure how much horsey detail to use. I was worried about boring people with it, but I was guided by RA in a lot of ways and I think it did my books well.

If your next book had to be a thriller/adventure novel with an urban setting, what might it be about and why?

I would really like to set a book in a vet's practice – there are all sorts of murderous props in a surgery – it would be a comedy, based on some people I know. I have it all plotted out. They will freak if they read this.

In a writing workshop you run for school groups, you ask students to structure their own

story around a framework of: orientation, complication, events and resolution. Is this the basic framework you start from to form the core of a story for a novel or children's book? [See [Structuring Your Novel: Chapters And Their Endings, by Karen Wood](#) and [Structuring Your Novel: Using A Chapter Summary, by Karen Wood](#) for more on what to do after you have the core of your story.]

In a very basic sense, yes. This was something I had to really concentrate on with my first couple of books, but now, after fourteen books, it just comes naturally and I don't have to think about it as much. It's an excellent framework for teaching though.

What can readers look forward to in your new releases for 2015?

For those who want more horses and romance, my next novel is about rodeo-loving Kirra who has just left school and taken up a job as a horse breaker on a remote station in central Queensland. More info will be released as it gets closer to publication date in September.

For younger readers, aged 6-10, meet the [Trickstars](#) ! Ruby, Lexie and Kit are triplets with a penchant for performing breathtaking tricks on horseback. After discovering an old trunk full of their grandmother's old costumes in the stable loft, the triplets realise that their gymnastics-meets-dance riding style runs in the family, and the girls set about making a name for themselves. The books are full of family intrigue and a colourful Romani past; gymnastics and dance meets horse-riding; and the engaging lead sisters, triplets, each with their own personality, issues and emotional life.

Karen conducts author talks and workshops in schools, provides manuscript assessment services and author mentoring packages. For more information, please contact her at karenwood18@gmail.com