

Bear to the Rescue - Behind the Scenes

What I was thinking...

This story first reminded me of the fenceposts at the bottom of my childhood home that were “burnt by Ash Wednesday”. Of the days when the car was packed, ready to go, waiting on the news, the radio, and the wind. Always alert to the smell of smoke. Of having our family Christmas at Tea Tree Plaza food court, instead of at my Nanna and Pop’s in Gumeracha. Of whole hills I knew, completely burnt, then regenerating with sparks of lime green in black.

I pulled out the art I had made in 2015, made in grief for the animals who had died in those fires, in those hills. And then I put that art away again. This book is not that. This is a story of hope. This is a story that says yes, terrible things happen, but when they do, there is also help. When everything burned, and many people felt hopeless, there was Bear, and Romane, and the vets, and they helped.

Somewhat separately, I was also thinking that this is a story for children who are told that they are Too Much. For children who find it hard to sit down, to sit still, to be quiet. If you are, or were, one of those children, I hope you see yourself in Bear. I hope you see that you too can find friends and purpose, and that it’s good to be who you are. You have special strengths, even if not everyone understands you.

How I did it...

I illustrated this book using what I had previously thought of as “my sketchbook technique”. That is, with watercolour and coloured pencils, working quickly. I had always wanted to illustrate a book using this method, but it never felt like the right time until Bear landed in my inbox. Bear, with all his energy and enthusiasm begged me to use my natural line work, even if I was scared it would be too messy. Bear, who has been written about by journalists, world over, made me feel that using something akin to a reportage, or sketchbook, style, wouldn’t feel out of place. In the end, it’s neither as messy, nor as

much like sketch-journalism, as I had thought it might be, but I am glad I gave myself the freedom to feel that it could be.

I carefully traced my underdrawings with a light coloured pencil. I laid watercolour in over that, leaving white space to help me work quicker, to add highlights, and to separate objects out. I then used coloured pencils over the top, with a white gel pen to help me fix up mistakes. It was the most joyful process I've ever used, and I was always so excited to get to draw Bear again on each page.

Who else was involved...

Romane Cristescu and Nic Gill are not just the brilliant authors, but also detection dog trainers themselves! Dr Romane Cristescu trained Bear, and is the Director of the University of the Sunshine Coast's Detection Dogs for Conservation. She went out with Bear to save koalas and, in my eyes, she's as much a hero of this story as Bear is! I loved working with Nic and Romane on this book - even from a world away, they were so enthusiastic and joyful!

I am always thanking the team at CSIRO Publishing! What can I say, they are a delight to work with, and they make fascinating and fantastic books. Thank you Briana, for sending me this one, and believing in my vision for the illustrations.

It's always weird coming in last to the project, and being entrusted with something that is personally very important to the other people involved. I mentioned this with *The Opal Dinosaur* but it's just as true here. Thank you all for letting me jump in at the last minute, I'm so happy to be part of the ride!