

## ANNA MACKENZIE – BIOGRAPHY

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Anna Mackenzie writes contemporary, speculative and historic fiction. Her eight titles to date have netted her six Notable Book Awards, an NZ Post Honour Award, Sir Julius Vogel Award, White Raven listing and numerous additional shortlistings and accolades. Her ninth novel – a poignant and compelling story set in Europe during the challenging and turbulent years of the Great War – will be released by Penguin Random House in July 2015.

Extremely versatile in her approach, Mackenzie says “I write across a range of genres because I’m fascinated by people rather than by a particular style or genre. I’m interested in what makes us who we are, how events shape and change us, how we learn to understand and accommodate others as we endeavour to find our own place in the world. I find people endlessly fascinating, individually and in our interactions. Writing fiction is a way of exploring the intricacies and confusions of who we are.”

Asked about her current shift to historic fiction, she says “The writing process is different – intriguingly so. In historic fiction the background texture is largely immutable, and various fixed points create a scaffold around which you work. One of the critical challenges is to ensure the voice is of the era and faultless. When you’re writing speculative fiction that’s still a challenge but you have far more flexibility.”

The research behind the novel was significant she says. Awarded a writing residency in Belgium by Passa Porta International House of Literature in 2013, Mackenzie visited battlefields, bunkers, sites of hospitals and depots – but she believes the greatest benefit lay in “gaining a feel for the place; its skies and people and ambiance. There’s no doubt that being there has added veracity to the texture of the novel.”

Evie’s War explores a young woman’s experience of coming of age in a world coming apart, and will not be the only novel she writes that is set in the era. “The more I read, the more fascinated I became,” Mackenzie says. “There are so many aspects of that period that deserve exploration, so many stories that still need to be told. The research I’ve undertaken has served to strengthen my understanding of the continuing relevance of WWI to our culture.”

Before she began writing fiction Mackenzie worked in public relations, publishing and ‘numerous less tidy jobs’. Growing up in rural Hawke’s Bay she was determined to “escape and discover the world. Ultimately I discovered myself instead... but it did take time. I think perhaps I was a slow learner.”

She wrote her first novel while her children were at primary school – decades after her first magnum opus, a collection of short stories about an elf that she wrote at the age of six. “I’m so grateful my mother kept it. It’s apparent, reading it now, that I had a grasp of how story should be structured – not of much else back then, but at least that.”

Mackenzie lives on a farm where she writes ‘more or less’ full time – she also edits magazines, teaches creative writing, mentors beginning writers and travels ‘whenever it fits in’. She is Vice-President of the New Zealand Society of Authors.

**Titles:** High Tide (2003), Out on the Edge (2005), Shadow of the Mountain (2008); Sea-wreck Trilogy – The Sea-wreck Stranger (2007), Ebony Hill (2010), Finder’s Shore (2011); Elgard series – Cattr’s Legacy (2012), Donnel’s Promise (2013); WWI – Evie’s War (2015).

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