

LONGACRE PRESS RESOURCE KIT

New Zealand Junior Fiction

Sil a novel

Jill Harris

Under cover of darkness, the outcast magpies gather.
The big bird whispers,

*When the signal comes, you will drive forward like a
mighty wind. The air will be dark with falling birds.
The ground will be carpeted with bones and feathers.
The voice of the tuis will be heard no more.*

Sil is a rising star among tuis; a brilliant singer and talented composer. For him the annual singing competitions loom large.

Daredevil Bron is Sil's best friend who tells it like it is. They've got a good thing going. But a sense of menace closes in as magpies plot to devastate the valley. The tui way of life — flying free and singing in the dawn — is about to be destroyed.

Sil is a tale superbly told: lyrical, exhilarating and compulsively readable.

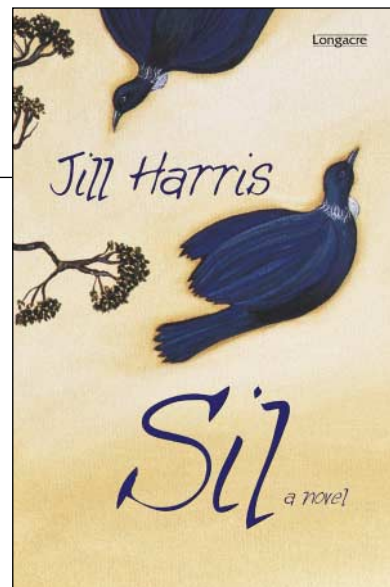


***Sil* has been short-listed for
the 2006 New Zealand Post
Children's Book Awards.**

RESOURCE KIT CONTAINS:

- Information about the author
- Topics for discussion or essay
- Ideas for research
- Debate topics

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PO Box 5340, Dunedin, tel: 03 477 2911, fax: 03 477 7222 Email: admin@longacre.co.nz

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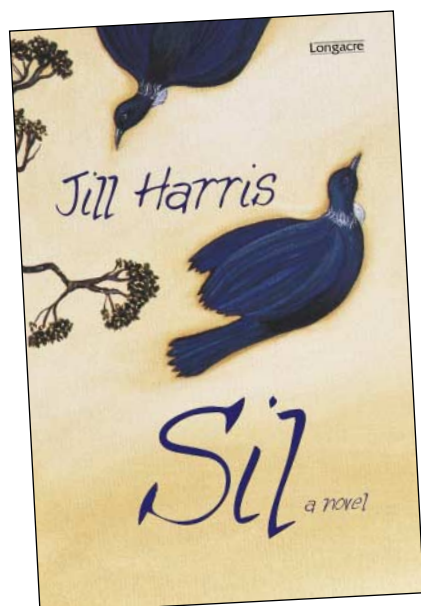
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About the author:

JILL HARRIS lives between the bush and the sea in Wellington. Tuis visit the kowhai trees in her garden each August to feast on the flowers. Kererus flop lazily around the house in spring and eat up most of the new leaves on her laburnum tree. She decided she'd like to write a story about the birds, so she read books and watched videos to find out more about their lives. Although she knew she would have to treat them like people in the book, she also wanted them to behave as much like birds as possible.

She didn't have the story complete in her mind before she started writing, although the singing competition was there from the beginning. The story came together as she went along, partly because of how the characters developed. Sil, Bron and Tor are the central characters and who they are affects how they behave.

The story is about doing what's really important to you, no matter what the consequences. It's about making mistakes but recovering from them, partly thanks to other people. And it's about pulling together to overcome a terrible danger — in this case the magpies' attacks. Jill Harris doesn't believe that any group is entirely bad, and she wanted at least one of the magpies to stand out against what they were doing — even though it cost that magpie his life.



Topics for discussion or essay:

- Discuss the creative process. How does Sil get his ideas? How does this happen for artists, writers or musicians? What about yourself?
- Old Sil tells what's happened between birds and humans over the centuries in New Zealand. Track the interactions throughout the book. What do you know about the history of birdlife where you live?
- Is fiction a good method for the author to use to help readers understand how tuis live? Discuss the differences between fiction and non-fiction in the way they convey information.
- Importance and power: 'Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.' (British historian, Lord Acton) Is this true? What's happened among the magpies? How does Sil deal with a sense of importance (and is this the same thing as power)? How do you? Discuss the difference between having importance conferred on you, and finding your own sense of importance.

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- Discuss times you've behaved impulsively — in disappointment, anger, pain. What does that feel like? Is that a good way to learn about yourself? Are there other ways?
- Do you feel any sympathy for the magpies? How is the magpie 'voice' different from that in the other chapters? Have you ever been in a group where you felt forced to act against your character?
- How do we recognise our gifts? What choice do we have about using them? How far should parents or teachers push children or teenagers? How far should we pursue our talents when that might spell competition and jealousy, or loss of friendship?
- How do you deal with the consequences of something you've done wrong? Is it sometimes best to go away for a fresh start? Can a wrong like Sil's in causing the death of the seagull ever be put right?
- Can any good come from death? (Take for example Old Silver Song's death, the seagull's, the devastation in the forest.)

JILL HARRIS's grandmother and father were great storytellers, and music was always very much a part of their family life. As a result, Jill has been writing since she was nine-years-old, and has had a lasting interest in singing and playing the piano.

Jill Harris lives with her husband in Wellington where their house is surrounded by bush, sea and birds. Watching the tuis and kererus who visited the garden inspired *Sil*, Harris's first book.

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Ideas for research:

- Find out about 'the most dangerous stage in a bird's life' — the nestling and fledgling stage. What strategies do birds have for surviving it?
- Bird-watching. Observe how birds respond to human presence. Can you observe territorial behaviour? How do the various species interact, if at all?
- Find examples in human society where people with limited power have resisted or overcome powerful evil.

Debate topics:

1. Destruction is necessary for change.
2. March to your own drumbeat.
3. Some wrongs can never be put right.