

Caleb Reviews

Reviewers: Alison Ahrens, Joy Belling, Heather Blackmore, Debra Dutschke, Natalie Schwarz, Rodney Schwarz

The adventures of Romy by Penelope Foote. 2009 pb 109p

This book's understated cover art and binding belie the treasures within. The author successfully captures the childhood of a young boy who lives an itinerant existence with his parents in a colourful gypsy caravan. Subtle insights into Romy's relationship with God and his family's prayer life are presented with a delicate flair. Included are stories typical childhood occurrences such as the birth of a sibling, the yearning for a pet, broken bones, family illness, music lessons, horse riding and visiting grandparents. But each is ingeniously embellished with a life lesson – of promise keeping, fairness, sacrifice, hard work, reconciliation, bravery, friendship, generosity or persistence. The author's black and white illustrations add a quaint mystique to the stories. A great read is guaranteed for eight to twelve year-olds as well any adult wishing to relive the pleasures of childhood. NS

The amazing bike ride: a true story by Lorin Nicholson. Wombat Books, 2010 pb 32p \$12.95

A back cover photo and biographical notes tell about the supportive family of a boy who, at the age of four, is diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative condition that is a form of tunnel vision. Now an independent adult with four children, he recounts a childhood adventure that helped him cope with his disability. With just 10% vision he embarked on a three day solo bike ride over the Great Dividing Range with only his father for backup support. Brightly coloured artwork with smudgy edges captures the action in the story while providing some idea of what it is like to have limited, blurry peripheral vision. On some pages extra text box illustrations add extra details about the pace and drama of the expedition. Speech bubbles, inserted amongst the text, reflect the taunting of peers, his personal thoughts, and the integral effort and pain of such an ambitious task. A small lively parakeet flits about on most double page spreads. In his preface Aussie journalist Jeff McMullen praises Lorin for the triumph of his childhood bike ride, his appreciation of the simple joys of life, and his willingness to share his story with school children all over Australia. An inspirational tale for all ages! See the related sites Sharp (www.seesharp.com.au/) which includes a downloadable school package with information on visual disabilities, and also www.blindguitarist.com/ for a preview of the book and links to several YouTube clips.

As black from white by Sally Graham. Seaview Press, 2007 pb 108p \$20

Interposed between a happy childhood (with bedtime prayers and teddy bears) and the happy photo of a forty year-old bride are years filled with more horrific experiences than most readers could imagine. – as different as black is from white. There are descriptions of poverty and squatting, binge drinking and alcoholism, promiscuity and rape, broken trust and abusive relationships, transvestites and homosexuals, and drug taking, trafficking and dealing. Suicide, car accidents, gambling, attempted murder, overdosing, abortion, and jail time add to the mix, making it seem more like fiction than a biography set in suburban Adelaide. The author's gritty efforts to turn her life around and to live as a Christian are enervating and uplifting. This amazing life story is short but makes for compelling reading. Visit the author's website at www.asblackfromwhite.com .

Bogged and bothered at the Narran by Stephanie Somerville. Elk & Ice Books, 2010 pb 24p \$14.35

A book about the history of a Methodist nursing service in inland Australia could be a boring tome. But by highlighting one historical snippet at Brewarrina NSW, Somerville succeeds in engaging the reader whilst promoting the work of a little known group of pioneer medical missionaries. The central characters are the rollicking nurses Marj and Ethel and their companion Augustus the Ambulance. A regular health patrol does not go as planned when they encounter a boggy lakeside road, a herd of wild pigs and Bentick the rabbit trapper. Tricia Taylor's light hearted illustrations lift the humorous flavour of the tale. A single glossary page explains some of the mid twentieth century jargon; glossy historical photos on the cover provide an extra touch of realism; and a small maze puzzle adds another geographical dimension. This brief tale should appeal to both children and adults, and leave them thirsting for more stories about these pioneer nurses.

Broken wing butterfly by Renee Bennett. R Bennett, 2009 pb 110p \$19.95

When she was very young, the author's family split up. Her parent's divorce was accompanied by dissension, sadness, bitterness and enmity. She cleverly uses the analogy of a fragile butterfly when discussing the effects of divorce on sensitive young children. This slick workbook seeks to affirm young girls who have similar experiences, helping them work through the issues, cope with emotional and physical changes, escape the cycle of brokenness, become aware of self-destructive habits, and learn not to repeat these behaviours in adulthood. Many personal anecdotes are included. The advice is thorough and carefully structured but offered at a secular level. It singles out divorce as the sole cause of dysfunction and by default, omits other contributing factors. NS

Car Park Parables series - The strange car by Paul Clark. Wombat Books, 2010 pb 32p \$5.95

It is a common sight today to see children playing with a collection of toy cars in a sandpit or on a play mat. Paul Clark draws together a varied collection of vehicles who gather in the church car park to listen to stories. While waiting for the day's story, they make fun of a new arrival Lin-Su an electric car. But Mr T challenges them with the story of Zach, an unusual black car with a rear motor and a tax collector as its owner. Zach wants to see the famous visitor Jesus and is forced to drive to a high vantage point. While the cars laugh at Zach, Jesus kindly accepts him. The rest of the cars are forced to change their opinions of him and of Lin-Su. This is not only original take on a well known Bible story,

but one that begs to be re-enacted with the reader's car collection. Colouring pages and teaching notes, to assist with delving deeper into the stories' messages, are available at www.carparkparables.com/index.html.

Car Park Parables series - The prodigal ute by Paul Clark. Wombat Books, 2010 pb 32p \$5.95

In this retelling of the parable of the two sons in Luke 15:11, there is an altercation between Lucy the luxurious sedan and Trevor the farm ute. Trevor is stolen and leads a profligate life in the city. He is eventually rescued by a tow truck, but his return to the farm has discordant overtones. This pocket sized story book, along with *The Strange Car* (a reworking of the Zaccheus story), were previously published as one of the six stories on the *Old Mr T and Friends* DVD. Young boys are bound to delight in these original versions. NS

Changing lives: mission agencies and their stories Books 1 & 2 collated by Pete Cossey. Strategic Missions Charitable Trust, 2009 pb 180p \$NZ22.95

Forty authors write about eleven different mission agencies, outlining the organisational structure and recounting personal experiences. Some of the agencies are well known (eg Missionary Aviation Fellowship) and others are not. The second book in this series expands the digest of missions. The stories are informative and inspirational. NS

Does my bum look big in this ad?: body image and the media by Lisa Cox. Wombat books, 2010 pb 80p \$12.95

Lisa Cox's jobs in advertising and modelling have provided an interesting insight into how the media manipulates body image. While discussing issues such as eating disorders, surgical interventions, cosmetic enhancements and bullying, she also encourages teenage readers to develop a positive body image, to build up a supportive peer group, and to be an informed consumer. Advice is provided for both males and females. Homework suggestions at the end of each chapter could be a good basis for group discussion. A foreword is addressed to parents and educators. An adjunct to this purse-size book is the website *Muse in the Mirror* (<http://museinthemirror.com/>) – complete with video clips of distorted advertising. NS

Dancing with the seasons: inspiration and resilience through times of change by Juliet Batten. Ishtar Books, 2010 pb 244p \$35 (approx)

The author uses the seasons as a focus for motivation of the spirit. She considers not only the "outer" seasons (summer, autumn, winter, spring) but also the "inner" seasons of a person's soul. She divides each season into three phases: early, middle and late. The meditations draw upon Maori, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Christian cultures. Each is jam-packed with material: introductory quotations, seasonal commentary and illustrations, suggested tasks, reflective questions, exercises for inner listening, detailed endnotes, and companion stories and poems. See the author's blog at <http://seasonalinspiration.blogspot.com/>. NS

Destined warriors into the unseen: a novel by Julia Caroline Gollasch. VMI Publishers, 2009 pb 199p \$17.95

The central characters in this tween fiction book are 12 year old Tess, her twin brother Zeek and her best friend Anya. Tess is presented with a puzzling letter and the three set out on an expedition with the assistance of a guide Pneuma and Alathia, the silver Book of Truth. They encounter the conundrums of the Greatest Power, the Sign, Darkness and the Unseen Worlds. This tale rockets along, always pointing to another layer of spiritual meaning. NS

Dave the donkey by Andrew McDonough. Lost Sheep Resources, 2008 hb 40p \$7.95

The frontispiece cartoon of a doddering old donkey trying to climb a palm tree certainly catches the reader's imagination. It also begs the question of what an antiquated donkey has to do with Jesus' first Palm Sunday parade. But it is soon evident that elderly asinine is an excellent foil for his rambunctious grandson Dave who is exuberantly relating how he carried a king into Jerusalem. His boisterousness is somewhat muted as he describes the king's death and resurrection. Grandpa Donkey relates an earlier event when he carried someone special and helps to put the events into historical perspective. But therein lies a tale that will endure for centuries. This recounting of the Biblical story from Mark 11 certainly demands another look at an age-old story. [Lost Sheep series] NS

Echidnas on Everest by Andrew McDonough. Lost Sheep Resources, 2008 hb 40p \$7.95

Imagine sharing a small tent with 3 spikey, disagreeable echidnas! Emma, Errol, and Edith are the latest arrivals in the Lost Sheep fold. Despite all the challenges confronting them while attempting to climb Mt Everest, they learn to "put up with each other." (Colossians 3:13) Apart from the challenging setting of echidnas in the snow, the book has many more attention-capturing features: the cartoons on the inside cover, quirky details on the verso page, an unambiguous definition of an echidna, artwork with a humorous twist and a few leg-pulling facts. This is an extremely original approach to teaching children or adults about the importance of patience, tolerance, forbearance and open-mindedness. It is also a uniquely Australian tale with a universal message that should transcend cultural boundaries. *Echidnas on Everest*, together with *Peter the Fisherman*, *Cecil and Psalm 23*, and *The Gardener and the Vine* complete Series 4 of the Lost Sheep series. NS

Enslaved to freedom by Tracey Chambers. Ark House, 2008 pb 247p \$19.95

This work of romantic historical fiction is engaging from the very beginning as it successfully draws the reader into the everyday life of the Israelites. The well known Old Testament account of the Exodus, is told from the perspective of young Israelite girl Atariah who, along with her family, yearns to live in freedom. The story fleshes out the Biblical narrative by exploring the emotions and mind-set of both Israelites and Egyptians as they experience the devastating

plagues on Egypt and witness the power of God firsthand. Deeper spiritual issues are well presented, eg the freedom gained by choosing to trust in God rather following personal desires. An enlightening and very enjoyable read. AA

The face of forgiveness by Carol Preston. Inspire Publishing, 2009 pb 332p \$27.95

This historical fiction story begins in colonial Australia in 1839. Aboard a convict ship two young women begin a friendship which will last their lifetime. In only a few months their lives take very different paths. Both marry ex-convicts – one a good man, with honest ambitions and a love for his family, the other unremorsefully addicted to a life of crime which brings his family unremitting heartache and hardship. The women's deepening friendship and their faith, draws their families together over decades, despite challenging issues of conflict, broken promises and tragedy. The novel's themes are forgiveness, acceptance, faith, friendship and hope. An enjoyable novel, giving the reader a glimpse of rural and family life in colonial Australia. AA

Faith-based travels: a devotional guidebook for the faith-filled traveller by Nicole Jeffery. Ark House Press, 2009 pb 303p \$19.95

Groups of five devotions cover the ordinary aspects of travel (planning, language barriers, loneliness and re-entry) as well as the spiritual aspects (prayer, comfort, praise, journaling, evangelism). The author divides travellers into six groups: adventurers, language students, culture vultures, missionaries, workers and nomads. But she exhorts everyone to take God with, and to spend time with him – even when on a busy schedule. This compact volume would be a suitable companion for any traveller or a practical compendium for stay-at-homers. NS

Fire in the rock: the search begins by Rita Stella Galieh. Ark House, 2008 pb 249p \$19.95

A mother goes back in time to help her son who was badly shell-shocked in the Great War. His background as a war correspondent assists him as he delves into the past. In a generation when there were gender and class strictures governing social interaction, the story is revealed of a naïve young woman and three men who change her life. There's history, mystery, pain and romance. There's spiritual searching and complicated choices to be made. A riveting tale of a bygone era - set in suburban Sydney and the opal fields of outback New South Wales.

Fragments from a forgettery by Doug Buckley. Temple House, 2007 pb 490p \$29.95

In this biography Doug Buckley shares a large number of reflections from his remarkable life. Amongst his forefathers he can list seven and a half convicts! He has lectured in engineering at Universities in Japan, England, America and Australia. As a senior member of the New South Wales public service he was involved in planning the state railways and solving road traffic problems. In an insightful look at politics he writes frankly about New South Wales and Commonwealth politicians. While his concern for the underdog and his Christian commitment are evident throughout the book he speaks of his own spiritual journey and his discovery that "the truth of Christ, if heard and faced, discomfords the comfortable almost as often as it comforts the discomforted". This hefty book is full of humour and the author frequently laughs at himself. It is an entertaining and thoughtful book which I would recommend. JB

Francy the fearful firefly: teaching children about fear by Jen Anderson. HSM Publishing, 2008 hb 24p \$20.95

Stuart Smith's bold depiction of Francy and her taunter Slimey the Seagull really catch the reader's attention. A third character Byron the Blessing Bee, a rather preachy mentor, is equally eye catching. A hungry Slimey targets Francy for an evening snack but stumbles comically. Byron consoles the frightened firefly with a reassuring Bible story. The characters' emotions are effectively portrayed but the text lacks the succinctness of a good picture book. This and the six pages of Bible story and its exposition dilute the tension of the story and lessen the impact of the ending. This large hardback is an attractive book that might be best used in segments with interactive discussion. The printable activities and online games on the series website www.ru4kidz.com.au/index.html provide extra educational support. NS

The gardener and the vine by Andrew McDonough. Lost Sheep Resources, 2008 hb 40p \$7.95

This title straightforwardly points the reader to Jesus' story in John 15. A gardener in pruning mode isolates a scrawny branch and confronts it with the colloquial "good news"/"bad news" options. By trusting in the gardener's expertise, good news becomes great news! McDonough presents children with quite a difficult concept in a form which they can understand. With minimal text and illustrations, important lessons about suffering, trust and hope are conveyed simply and clearly. This story also acts as a Basil prequel when bookended with Basil the Branch (from series 1) and Basil and the Secateurs (from series 2). NS

The gift of values: a resource for family devotions by Rosie Boom. HSM Publishing, 2006-8 pb 160p \$23.95

This first Gift of Values devotional showcases (with tabs) the qualities of honesty, a positive attitude, courage, diligence, perseverance and obedience. The New Zealand author and home-schooler has designed each topic to be used for two weeks in an informal setting – to develop strong character and to plant the seeds of God's Word in children's hearts. The format for each topic includes an introductory meditation, family anecdotes, focus questions, ideas for activities, topical quotes and Bible verses. Last of all is a Dig Deeper section with extra stories, discussion starters and song suggestions. The sturdy hardback cover protects this pot pourri of ideas from which family or group devotion leaders may choose. Appendices include a family photo album, some tips on planning a Bible study, and news of the second series title that deals with generosity, self-control, encouragement, forgiveness, patience and compassion.

Girls Just Want To Be Loved by Liz Walker. LVLup, 2009 pb 208p \$24.95

There are lots of mind-blowing / gob-smacking aspects to this book. Firstly there is the motivation for this Queensland author's writing - her turbulent teen years which were pock-marked with pornography, promiscuity drugs and alcohol. Secondly there is the huge amount of information and advice to assist teenage girls to make wise choices when considering sexual experiences and intimate relationships. Thirdly there is the huge variety of writing styles used both to challenge and reassure: the forthright confrontation of questions and personal narratives hand in hand with evocative analogies and gentle affirmations. Fourthly there is the colourful formatting and Jacinth Foote's artwork that complement the various moods of the text. The Tools and Links page on www.lvlup.com.au/toolslinks/ offers a list of Aussie support services. This is a useful handbook, with an interactive feel, for teens (both churched and unchurched) as well as parents, teachers and carers of adolescent girls, and the gold winner in the 2009 USA Independent Publisher Book Awards! NS

Harvest time poetry: a collection of Christian poems for the heart and soul by Wendy Prater. Renaissance World Publishing, 2008 pb 74p \$

The author has chosen poems from her last eight years of writing and grouped them under the categories of National/International, Life, Devotional, Prophetic and Personal. It is not just the collecting or the folkish flavor that echoes the harvest theme of the title, but the resonant subject matter, eg the end times, rural bounty and man's impact on the environment. This homespun anthology (with poems in both free verse and rhyming verse) has a strong Christian voice. NS

Have you ever ...?: inspirational thoughts for Christians – realistic and relevant to our daily lives by Wendy Deanna Bird.

This book is distinctively different from regular devotionals. After a short focusing Bible verse, the meditations all begin with the challenge 'Have you ever ... [done a certain thing]?' The challenges are varied – from the spiritual to the emotional and everyday living. There are ninety six articles and forty two topics of interest grouped under six themes: Almighty God, Christianity, Sin, Stress, Faith in Action and Salvation. Many incorporate a follow-up story, and each ends with some reassuring Biblical verses and a poem or hymn verse. Thoroughly documented citations and copious endnotes bear witness to the detailed research and the theological depth. The author's varied life experiences are evident in the analogies – from amaryllis to mosquito nets, inexperienced oxen to prairie lupins. One has to agree with the comment of the editor George Gunston: 'a unique book of universal reader interest.' NS

Heartland: a parable by Charles Fivaz. Charles Fivaz, 2010 pb 103p \$18 (approx.)

In the foreword the author notes that the purpose of a powerful vision can be to impel a person to "reflect more deeply on a living circumstance that needs attention or resolution." He sees parables as serving a similar purpose. In what seems to be a simple narrative the reader is thrust far into the 21st century and taken on a quest with the main protagonist Hannah. But the open structure of the story allows the reader to both follow the plot and contemplate its underlying meanings. The author's pen pictures cleverly create the minimalistic atmospherics of a self-sufficient futuristic society, an array of unique landscapes, a realistic traditional aboriginal culture, and a questioning mindset amongst the travellers. For such a short story, there is much for the reader to ponder. At the end of this compelling, high-impact tale I could not help comparing it to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. Highly recommended! NS

I met God in Bermuda: faith in the twenty-first century by Steven Ogden. O Books, 2009 pb 124p \$29.95

The author observes that Christianity is considered out-of-date in our postmodern world and that religion is not a popular discussion topic. He encourages readers to explore the Christian faith and to resolve the way they feel about God. He deals with the concepts of the absence and presence of God. He deflects platitudinous stereotype images of God, seeing faith as "a dynamic attitude to life". Such a positive approach enables believers to answer challenges such as "Why do bad things happen to me?", "Where is God when I need him?" and "Why does a God who allows suffering become the litmus test for believing?" Insightful, thought provoking and easy to read. NS

Invisible realities: finding the hidden dimensions in art written, illustrated and compiled by Lyne Marshall.

ArtClique Projects, 2010 pb 79p \$44 (including p&p)

This compellingly beautiful volume includes five facets. There are quality reproductions of abstract paintings and nature photographs with stunning clarity. Both are accompanied by thought-provoking quotations – both poetry and prose. The fourth element is the text where the author aims to "search out and seek to understand genuinely inventive people who appear to have been on an earnest quest to comprehend the secrets of life." Sadly the assumptions, rationale and sequence of this section fail to engage or convince. A fifth element, artworks by a variety of artists, provides an interesting diversion. NS

The irresistible urge to pursue the call of God by Kerrie Price. Kerrie Price, 2008 pb 134p \$17.95

With a background of forty years experience in pastoral ministry, the author sets out a program for a lifestyle actively committed to serving God. The basis is a combination of "sound spiritual principles" and "good common sense". The program has five parts: preparatory skills for a healthy relationship with God, modification of old habits, development of ministry skills, building up the spiritual dimensions of life, and the practicalities of time management and prioritizing. A rigorous and detailed set of exercises! NS

A land of promise: a coming of age story set in colonial Australia by Wendy Boniface. Renaissance World Publishing, 2010 pb 87p

This work of fiction is based on the lives of the author's ancestors who migrated from Leiman in Germany to Eden in New South Wales in the 1850s. The story follows the central character Hannah from the ages of twelve to twenty one. Her father Abraham was a god-fearing family patriarch and a leading light in the industrious German speaking community. While her friends and relatives get married and have children, Hannah is keen to find an English husband. The characterizations and settings are somewhat stereotyped and leave the reader thirsting for more detail. NS

Laura: 'be thou my vision' by Jo-anne Berthelsen. Ark House Press, 2009 pb 241p \$19.95

From the author of the Heléna stories (Heléna and All The Days of my Life) comes this honest and heart-warming account of how a blind person learns to cope with everyday situations. The story starts with Laura's childhood as she struggles with her blindness at school and amongst her family members. She develops many coping skills to become a university student and then going on to teach visually impaired children. It was very moving to read about her courageous attitude and her developing trust in God. Many of the issues raised in the book would make it a good novel for further discussion – about disabilities in general, tackling life issues, triumphing over difficulty, God and the incapacitated, faith sharing and teaching. HB

Legendary space pilgrims by Grace Bridges. Splashdown Books, 2010 pb 296p \$US9.95

Science fiction is an unlikely genre for a Christian novel but in 'Legendary Space Pilgrims' New Zealand author Grace Bridges uses this form to tell the story of the journey Mario and his friend Caitlin. They are ordinary people working as slaves on a planet where, to ensure maximum work output, "big brother" regularly wipes the minds of those who begin to show too much emotion. Mario hears a Biblical-style voice which calms his fears and tells him how to escape with Caitlin. Their journey takes them to a number of planets where they go through many adventures and trials, always guided by the voice, gradually realising that they may be the chosen ones who will return and free the slaves on the slave planet. An easy-to-read account with surprises along the way. The ending leaves the reader up in the air waiting for the continuing story in the next book of the series. Go to www.splashdownbooks.com/legendaryspacepilgrims.html for more information. RS

Lenny the lying lemur: teaching children to tell the truth by Jen Anderson. HSM Publishing, 2009 hb 24p \$17.95

Following the same structural approach as its sister volume Francy the Firefly, book 2 in this series introduces Lenny, a mendacious lemur, and Captain Podgybutt, the chief navigator of SS Trustworthy. Slimey the Seagull's comical antics and a vibrant circus ring should appeal to young readers. It takes Lenny quite some time to learn about the hurtfulness of telling lies. The Bible story of Joseph and his eleven brothers is included. This story has the same structure and attractive presentation of its predecessor Francy the fearful firefly. An accompanying web page at www.ru4kidz.com.au/Page17.html has downloadable colouring pages.

Many-coloured realm by Anne Hamilton. Wombat Books 2010 pb 307p \$19.95

This is the first fantasy novel that I have read since I was in secondary school - the age of the target audience. What an enjoyable way to revisit the genre! The story immediately engages the imagination with descriptive detail, unpredictable plot lines, and some detailed illustrations to enjoy. Robby and Chris cross the barrier from the common world into the kingdom ruled by the Goblin King, to rescue Stephen. They are joined in the fantasy world by four ambassadors, and compelled to take up the task of discovering the king's name before time runs out. Goblins and elves, good and evil, grace, sacrifice and love are all inspected. I'm sure I don't know nearly enough about writing or fantasy to recognize many of the features of this novel. A devotee of this genre would, without a doubt, would appreciate underlying meanings, time distortions, and numerous complexities below the surface. A beautifully written book, enriching to both mind and heart. AA

Melanie's Easter gift written by Lorraine Cobcroft and illustrated by Jasmine Hambling. Rainbow Works, 2008 hb 24p \$19.95.

This very different take on childhood cancer centres on young student Melanie. The book draws together elements of Easter celebrations with the story of her baby sister Shelley who has leukaemia. The magnanimous spirit of the children, teachers and Melanie's school community shines through as they decide to donate their usual spending to sponsoring Shelley's transplant. Side issues such as Easter traditions, consumerism and grass roots lobbying are also discussed. This Brisbane author, whose family has had to deal with childhood cancer, has donated profits to the Leukaemia Foundation. NS

Moments for mum: 61 daily devotions by Narelle Nettelbeck. Revival Nation Publishing, 2009 pb 144p \$19.95

Topics from everyday life form the basis of sixty one devotions that engage the reader in a two-way conversational style of questioning, pondering, affirming and validating. The titles given to each meditation are often single word exclamations or questions that are thought provoking and demand deeper investigation, eg Networking, Priorities, Earthworms, Disappointments, and Children! Perth author Nettelbeck has combined Biblical explanations with practical parenting tips. This well presented collection could appeal to a wide audience of families, young parents, child carers or study groups. Check out the author's blog and extra resources at www.momentsformum.com/ .

Mothering heights: a novel approach for Christian mothers by Keitha Smith and Susan Brereton. Judson Press, 2009 pb 160p \$24.95

These two authors (of New Zealand birth) partner famous literary works with elements of the modern day parenting task. Sounds stuffy? It's not! Each chapter relates a famous story with Biblical teachings and parenting helps, eg Treasure Island (embarking on the parenting adventure), Pride and Prejudice (assessing parenting expectations), Sense and Sensibility (managing the household), etc. A great read for the thinking mothers! Excellent and uplifting material for parenting or Bible study groups. A silver medal winner in the Inspirational/Motivational category of the U.S. based Mom's Choice Awards. NS

My purple pants by Samantha Jackel. Ark House Press, 2009 pb 220p \$19.95

There are two distinct sections to this story: the first tells of a young girl who experiences a distressingly abusive childhood and adolescence, and the second uplifting part relates to the healing she experiences later in life. She gains confidence from her talisman pair of purple pants, but more importantly, from her husband and friends who teach her about God's loving care. A compelling account that offers hope to those who suffer childhood abuse. Check out the related website: www.mypurplepants.com.au/index.htm . NS

Names and attributes of God by Dianne Spain. Jabek Publishing, 2007 pb 250p \$NZ39.99

Spain, a professional counselor from New Zealand, compiles a listing of the many names and attributes that describe God in the Bible. While the catalogue is not exhaustive, it is comprehensive – contrasting many well known names like Rabbi, Our Father and Immanuel, with other lesser known appellations like El Maowz-Dal (Defender of the Helpless). The book is beautifully presented. Both Spain's text and Linda Beattie's 'tree of life' drawings have an understated elegance. On the right-hand side of each double page spread is inscribed one name or attribute together with its meaning and applicable Biblical verses.

In her counseling work Spain has observed that people with negative images of God have problems drawing closer to him, and that people with positive images have better self esteem. With this book she aims to help people understand the Lord's positive aspects. A brief two page introduction suggests the use of Dr Dianne Divett's six step 'Refocussing' meditative technique. But the book's format could readily lend itself to other styles of individual or group study activity. NS

The origins of Left Behind eschatology by David Malcolm Bennett. Camp Hill Publications, 2010 pb 418p \$34.95

The books and films of the Left Behind series have been extremely popular. Queensland author Bennett examines the theology of the series. He focuses on eight topics: interpretation of Revelations, the distinction between the Church and Israel as God's chosen people, Jesus' imminent return to earth, the rapture, Christ's two-stage return, a period of tribulation led by an antichrist, a millennium, and the return of the Jews to Palestine. His sources include documents of the early church and the Reformation as well as scholarship of the 18th to 20th centuries. An interesting read with some unexpected ideas. NS

Outback by Angela Williams. HSM Publishing, 2009 pb 24p \$9.95

City boy Josh, together with his RFDS teddy Alexander, flies to the outback to visit relatives on a cattle station. While there the Royal Flying Doctor (RFDS) is called to help a neighbour with a broken leg. Josh learns a lesson about friendship and relates it to the Bible story of Jesus healing the man on a stretcher. A story with a real Aussie flavour – part 2 of the Alexander the Aviator's Aussie Adventures series. NS

Psalmscapes, breathtaking images of Australia and New Zealand: a devotional walk through God's creation with the Psalms by Mal Austin and Matthew Jacoby. HSM Publishing, 2008 hb \$29.95

Mal Austen has gained a reputation for his superb photography and his quality calendars, cards, posters and bookmarks. In this coffee table devotional his photography is combined with verses from Psalms and a related devotional thought from Matthew Jacob (from Sons of Korah). Like the photographs, the meditations are crisp and gently measured. Their scope is broad – from straightforward exposition to forthright lifestyle advice. Compiler Bronwyn Cooling has cleverly blended the artwork with the prose. She has selected a combination of landscapes and nature close-ups, formatting them in a variety of ways – from panoramic vistas to large images with replicated cut-outs. Each devotional is stamped with a one-word descriptor that reflects the selected psalm. The end result is superb - definitely not a volume to be consigned merely to the coffee table! NS

Picking up the pieces by Paula Vince. Even Before Publishing, 2010 pb 356p \$22.95

The Parker family and the Quinlan family are beset by a morass of life dramas. Discovering how they deal with the negatives in life provides not just a not just a page-turning reading experience but also some valuable life lessons. A romantic fiction story with a strong message about making wise choices and forgiving past mistakes.

A poor canticle by Kathryn Hamann. Shardlight, 2009 pb 44p

This thin volume of poetry entices the reader to keep dipping into it for many hours of fascinating discovery. There is an assortment of poetic forms. Simple triplets like Duck's Wisdom connect immediately while the descriptive free-verse of Dawn Sky mesmerises with a minute-by-minute description of the break of day. There is also a variety of subject matter from the psalm-like A Leper Speaks to the atmospheric bush setting of Retreat Canticle. There are also challenges for a reader who is unfamiliar to the lives of St Francis or St Clare, or the workings of The Third Order. The anthology includes a number of Bible stories – seen from very different perspectives. It soon becomes apparent that book's cover art and title are not as simple as they seem – they are pointers to a poetry collection of surprising depth and insight. For purchase details see www.shardlight.com/ . NS

Prophets and loss: a Johnny Ravine mystery by Martin Roth. Ark House Press, 2009 pb 214p \$19.95
Johnny Ravine is the son of an East Timorese mother and an Australian father he has never met. He lives in Melbourne and works with his closest friend in a private detective agency. But his Catholic upbringing and his background as a Timorese freedom fighter impact on his life in Australia. He discovers that his friend has been murdered, and resolves to find the perpetrator. He is puzzled that the friend, a born again Christian, was found dead in a brothel. In the process of his investigation he is befriended by a helpful journalist, comes under the steadying influence of a pastor and finds some information about the identity of his father. He also unravels a terrorist plot involving his former L'Este enemies. There's action aplenty! I can't wait to read the next Johnny Ravine story. RS

Return to Baragula by Mary Hawkins. Ark House Press, 2008 pb 253p \$19.95
Nurse Emily Parker returns to her home town Baragula in the Hunter Valley. Here she is forced to face some old demons – a teenage pregnancy, a former boyfriend, a friend's suicide and the loss of her Christian faith. Added to the mix are mental illness, a meningitis outbreak and a flood. What a refreshing treat to find a romantic story that has a realistic Australian setting, a believable plot and an even-handed Christian testimony. An enthralling read is guaranteed. Keep an eye open for the sequels *Outback from Baragula* and *Justice at Bragula*. NS

Russian at heart: Sonechka's story by Olga & John Hawkes. Wily Publications NZ, 2009 pb 256p \$40
Sonechka's story was written by her daughter, Olga, and her husband. It was based on her mother's memoirs written in Russia and Shanghai. Sonechka's happy childhood ended with the death of both parents. Forced to work for Lenin's secret police she experience the terror, the killings and the hunger brought about by the Russian Revolution. In June 1924, the nineteen year old Sonechka fled Moscow alone on the trans-Siberian Express. Due to new American immigration laws she was unable to join her brother in America and became one of thirty thousand White Russian exiles in Shanghai. Sonechka's faith in God gave her courage to make hard decisions and face the daily grind of surviving and feeding her family when the Japanese conquered Shanghai. This biography gives insight into what it is like to be a member of a despised minority living in fear and poverty. Soon after the death of her beloved husband, Sonechka had to face many challenges against a hostile bureaucracy so that she and her daughters could fulfil her dream of reaching America. Although the prose lacks a certain fluency, Sonechka's courage, resourcefulness and faith in God make this an inspirational book. JB

Seeking the divine spark: a satire in the style of Evelyn Waugh by Gerard Charles Wilson. Gerard Charles Wilson, 2010 pb 280p \$19.95
Sexual abuse cases involving the church have been widely reported in the Australian media – often sensationally and with uneven-handedness. Wilson contributes another perspective in the form of a satirical novel written in the style of Evelyn Waugh. His cast of media characters includes Norman Mudlord (radio talkback host), Titia Turnabout (his producer), Samantha Leggin (from Action News Broadcasting), and Torne Rutter (star reporter from the Morning Chronicle). Then there are the lawyers Lex Outasite and Aleta Broadface (from Hammersmut and Sludge). The church is represented by priests Frs Pleasance and Champion and Archbishop Ryan. Extras include Jake Skott (fading football star), Ben Downwood (politician). Dr Speerman (academic spokesman) and Chad Rockfist (pop singer). The story exposes the manipulative and cringe-worthy behaviours of many characters. It also calls focuses on some of society's questionable attitudes. For samples and e-book versions, visit the author's website <http://www.gerardcharleswilson.com/books.htm>. NS

The silver poplar: the true story of a boy's journey from neglected beginnings in a children's home to a life of hope by Edmond Smith. Ark House, 2009 pb 272p \$22.95
A frightened six year old arrives at the rural Sutherland Homes for neglected children near Melbourne. The author describes his eleven years at the home. Despite his lack of a family, the unappetizing food and second hand clothing, he and the other boys have a real zest for life and appreciate the good things that come their way. The silver poplar is a symbol of hope and stability. As a teenager the author finds God and later, with the help of his wife, he is able to discover members of his family and the story behind his abandonment. This biography delves into the issues of abandonment, adoption and the fostering of children. As a counterpoint, the portrayal of the life of the author's childhood friend takes a completely different path, and leaves the reader wondering why. Overall it is an inspiring story which ends on a note of hope. JB

The Single Adult Maze by Wendy Prater. Renaissance World Publishing, 2008 pb 88p
The author aims to 'gather singles together, help them sort through issues in their lives ... and form a support group to help one another move into their destiny.' A series of studies and Bible stories is designed to enable the reader (or a group) to examine their single life, and to find answers, understanding and healing. The final chapter presents the testimonies of six adults who have very different lives as single adults. Overall the author stresses the importance of God's guidance. This book may well fill a gap in a church library collection. To order a copy, email wendyprays@hotmail.com . NS

The spiritual significance of music edited by Justin St Vincent. Xtreme Musuc, 2009 pb 214p \$20 (approx)
Here music meets spirituality – two huge topics in their own right! The author has interviewed and collected together the opinions of one hundred people working in the music industry. A broad range of musos are represented – from the 1960s vocal pop group 5th Dimension (Age of Aquarius) to 1980s new wave group Devo, Australian Christian band

Sons of Korah to Indian sitarist Ravi Shankar, Hawaiian chant musician Antion to Dr Ken Aigen (academic and music therapist), violinist Daniel Kobialka to Swedish death metal group Unleashed. And there's more: sound engineers, DJs, music festival organisers, songwriters, composers and authors. Their responses are diverse too. For example, some see music as an antidote to materialism, or a transcendent influence during life's darker moments, or a tool of Satan, or a fascinating look into the character of God, or a glimpse into heaven here on earth. And there are many more opinions. Whether the reader agrees or disagrees with a particular viewpoint, the compiler provides many springboards for discussion or further exploration. NS

Stepping out of darkness: one woman's story of triumph over depression by Lisa Limbrick. Ark House Press, 2008 pb 150p \$19.95

OK, there seem to be a lot of current books dealing with the issue of depression. Why buy this one? The author has degrees in psychology and uses diary entries to describe the history of depressive illness in her family. She does not shy away from confessing her own struggles and shortcomings. Her writing style is eloquent and she has the ability to describe the symptoms and treatment without getting tied up in medical jargon. She also tackles myths and stereotypes associated with mental illness. And she sensitively describes the importance of God's working in her treatment and subsequent lifestyle. Not just a biography - also a useful and uplifting support for other sufferers and their carers. NS

Stick your neck out: a tale of two giraffes and a black hole that sucks by Leigh Hay. Poetica Christi, 2008 pb 40p \$19.95

The subtitle may imply that this book is merely a romantic tale or an unusual approach to cosmology, but the book's dedicatory paragraph clearly indicates that this is an original approach to the problem of feeling low. The "black hole that sucks" encompasses depression as well as the accumulation of negative attitudes that sap the human psyche. It looks like a story designed for children, but it has a relevant message for an older audience as well. The main character, Geoffrey the giraffe, lives a self-centred life. He eschews friends, neighbours, laughter, sympathy, thankfulness, forgiveness, trust, etc. In challenging readers to examine their own personal attitudes, the author uses interesting descriptors, eg the light bulbs of love and the vials of values. The heroine Penelope, with her armoury of glitter balls, sparklers, torches and AAA batteries, enters halfway through the tale. Her bright approach helps Geoffrey see the positive side of life. The paintings of first-time illustrator Andrew McKenzie add another layer of liveliness. NS

The tears that became diamonds: a tender story for children of marriage breakdown written and illustrated by Rebecca Coleman-Jones. Mt Gravatt East : Rebecca Coleman-Jones, 2009 pb 32p \$12.95.

This is a tale of a young boy whose parents decide to go their separate ways. David has to cope with a huge emotional gulf when his father leaves the family home. While his mother tries to comfort him, he receives greater consolation from an angel who collects his tears and turns them into sparkling stars in the night sky. The author's pastel drawings sensitively capture the breadth of emotions – from bewilderment and uncertainty, sadness and despondence to tenderness and reassurance. While the depictions of God and the angel are not quite as successful, the message of God's caring love comes strongly to the forefront. Nevertheless this book provides a positive message to solitary children affected by the disruption of parental divorce. NS

The third choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and freedom by Mark Durie. Deror Books, 2010 pb 270p \$24.95
Short listed for the Australian Christian Literature Award 2010. NS

In times past people subdued by Islamic conquerors could opt to die at the point of a sword, to convert to the Islamic faith or to accept the third choice, the institution of the dhimma. Durie, an Anglican minister in Melbourne, examines the dhimma in great detail. He dissects this theologically-driven political, social and legal system, providing many practical examples. A scholarly work recommended for any reader wishing to extend their knowledge of Christian-Muslim relations. In a ninth chapter Durie suggests ways of improving relationships. Excellent appendices: glossary bibliography and index. Short-listed for 2010 Australian Christian Book of the Year. NS

Thrive May-July 2010: Romans- Back to the future by Matthew Jacoby from Sons of Korah. HSM Publishing, 2010 sc \$7.95

It can take quite some mental effort to get one's mind around the concepts outlined by St Paul in his letter to the Romans. In a pocket sized quarterly devotional (in the Thrive series), Matthew Jacoby's gentle expository voice is combined with Deborah Lynn's weekend summaries. Each brief dissertation concludes with one or more suggested Bible readings and a reflective challenge. While it is designed to be used as a daily devotional, it could readily form the basis for a group study, perhaps in conjunction with the Sons of Korah's reading of "Romans: The Unofficial Soundtrack." This Australasian series has so far has featured Psalms and Genesis with more books of the Bible in the pipeline. NS

To a distant land by Julianne Jones. Ark House, 2009 pb 197p \$19.95

The story is set in the late 1820s, and follows 3 characters lives and dreams as they are uprooted from the UK, and settle in colonial Australia. There is Katie (unjustly accused and sentenced to transportation), Rhiannon (whose family emigrate hoping for a better life), and Samuel (a young preacher listening as God leads him). Some interesting issues are explored in this interesting historical context, eg life in a penal colony, the limited opportunities for lower class women, and trusting in God's plans for your life. As the characters develop and their lives meet up, each faces their own challenges from quite different perspectives. The Christian message of salvation through faith in Jesus is given

clearly and naturally, both in story line and in character dialogue. An enjoyable Australian historical fiction tale also suitable for teen readers. AA

Trial to triumph: inspiring stories of overcomers by George Bryant. DayStar Books, 2010 pb 232p \$NZ29.95
This well known New Zealand author maintains that it is often those who are suffering or disabled who are able to provide the most poignant and pertinent life lessons. He asserts that those who are fit and healthy often fall far behind in being able to overcome difficulties, develop coping skills, solve problems and triumph over adversity. Twenty one people share the exceptional events in their lives. The range of their difficulties is broad: birth defects, accident injuries, mental health problems, organ transplants, blindness, cancer, physical abuse and asylum seeking. The author explains that their “stories are not for the faint-hearted” and that they “challenge able-bodied readers to re-assess their own goals and achievements.” Inspiring tales in an Australasian setting! NS

Watch out! Godly women on the loose by Corallie Thornton. Ark House, 2009 pb 156p \$19.95
The author came from a dysfunctional and abusive family background. But her personal experiences comprise only a small part of this book. After her own life was turned around, she decided to assist others who have experienced a similar upbringing. Her approach is far from mild mannered. She strongly urges abused women to wake up to reality and to avoid band-aid solutions while encouraging them to strive to reach their full God-given potential. Her call to action is Bible centred. The first section on decision making focuses on the drama of Moses crossing the Red Sea to free the Israelites from bondage. Daniel is cited as an example of a Christ-centred life. The second section uses avian imagery to describe the different stages of developing a relationship with God. In the third part there are studies on coping with past hurts, adapting a positive attitude and working to forgive perpetrators of abuse. The final part deals with the many aspects of God as a father figure. Recommended as a worthwhile addition to a church library. NS

Water, wine and a wonderful wedding: Jesus changes water into wine in W! by Cameron Semmens and Rod Allen (illus). HSM Publishing, 2008 hb 24p \$17.95
Rod Allen’s cover illustrations hint at the wackiness inside this retelling of Jesus’ first miracle at Cana. The author’s page of introductory notes corroborates the fun and mischief to follow, as well as affirming the serious purpose of Jesus’ ministry. Speech balloons cleverly add to the drama, and the crisp exclamatory style of the storytelling captures the miraculousness of the event. A memorable tale that is bound to be read over and over again. NS

What does the Bible say about the environment? by David Malcolm Bennett. Camp Hill Publications, 2010 pb 48p \$12
This small book seeks to dispel the myth that the Bible has little to say about the environment. The author delineates between Biblical and humanistic concepts. Threads of theological exegesis are interspersed with Biblical texts and quotes from hymns. Writers from diverse denominational backgrounds are cited, and there are insights from authors both ancient and modern. This concise summary of the Christian approach to today’s environmental issues is combined with loads of practical tips. The author poses some challenging and thought provoking questions, eg Can a Christian be an avid environmentalist? Why did God destroy animals in the Great Flood? What does the Bible say about vegetarianism? These, plus references to other Christian environmental writers, would be a good basis for study groups. NS

What is a Huggle? by Jean Sietzema-Dickson. Poetica Christi Press, 2008 pb 28p \$12
A question from a child visiting Melbourne Zoo was the genesis of this small book by this experienced Victorian writer, editor and poet. Although its original booklet format was produced as a fundraiser for a support group for the disabled, it proved a popular amongst grandparents. The description of the attributes and antics of the imaginary huggle provide a message of comfort and reassurance for young children. Chatty rhyming verse and whimsical black and white line drawings add to the mix. NS

What’s God up to on planet Earth?: a no-strings-attached explanation of the Christian message by Mark J Keown. Affirm Publications, 2010 pb 156p \$NZ24.95
The simple structure of this overview of Christian belief is summarized in its chapter headings: Relationship, Rupture, Restoration, Return and Response. The book’s language is free-flowing, colloquial and replete with the author’s own experiences. Theological terminology is used judiciously and is always explained in laymen’s terms. Reflective open-ended questions appear at the end of each chapter – making the book ideal for personal reflection or group study. The author, now a lecturer in New Testament at Laidlaw College in New Zealand, admits that he was a person who “was once indifferent to God, but is now passionate”. He is now determined to be “a cosmic transformer” and to encourage non-Christians to closely examine and re-examine faith issues. Useful appendices include comprehensive endnotes and Biblical references for each chapter. There are also many follow-up reading suggestions and an “Am I a sinner?” questionnaire. NS

Wilderness by Sally Odgers. Eternal Press, 2008 pb 107p
This tale begins with three sets of characters in three different Tasmanian settings – the tall timber country, the isolated west coast and the winding Derwent Valley. Linking them all is Miriam Moses, a marathon runner and cancer sufferer who runs from Hobart to Cooktown in north Queensland to raise funds for charity. Her role is more than conjunctive. She dramatically changes the life of all the people she meets. The eponymous wilderness appears in a

variety of guises, eg an out-of-the-way habitat, the isolation of illness, life's tragic events, and Biblical references. This fascinating parable explores wilderness and the triumph of perseverance. NS

Winter of Grace by Kate Constable. [Girlfriend Fiction 10] Allen & Unwin, 2009 pb 165p \$14.95

Teenager Bridie struggles with her personal relationships and her own spirituality. The catchcry of her mother, an agnostic and a biologist is, "You won't know till you do the experiment." Bridie is exposed to a broad palate of Christian beliefs and practices. Her spiritual quest begins with some unexpected drama at a political demonstration and culminates at the funeral of her friend's grandmother. On the way she is exposed to traditional Catholicism, evangelical church membership, new age beliefs, Quakerism, creationism and strict sectarianism. She discovers a "God that opens things out, not narrows them down" ... and who "makes everything richer, more meaningful." In this book 10 of the 12 volume Girlfriend fiction series (by a variety of writers), the author even-handedly tackles a topic from which many novelists would shy away. The story won the Children's Peace Literature Award in 2009. Highly recommended! NS