

Thursday, 24 March 2016

# Waihi Ward Reflections

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## Visiting author wants to keep telling stories



YOURS PERSONALLY: Julie Thomas signs copies of her new book for locals after speaking in the Waihi Library.

Putaruru-based Julie Thomas started writing at about the age of eight and hasn't stopped since. On Monday last week, locals had the chance to meet the now bestselling author at the Waihi Library. Her visit, hosted in conjunction with Paper Plus Waihi, was part of a tour to launch her new novel *Rachel's Legacy*.

Julie told a captivated local audience that her first book had taken seven years to write, between 1999 and 2006, but it wasn't until 2011 after a series of publisher rejections that she made the decision to self-publish by uploading it to Amazon Kindle and Smashwords. At a price of 99 cents, of which she received 33 cents before tax, she knew it wouldn't make her rich – but she hoped it would “attract the attention of someone”. It did. Thousands of e-book sales later, she noticed an email in her spam box from HarperCollins USA, expressing an interest in publishing her work.

The following year *The Keeper of Secrets* became a hard copy bestseller. It tells the story of a valuable Fuarneri del Gesu violin looted during World War II, and its pre-war Jewish owners the Horowitz family – in particular Simon Horowitz and later his grandson Daniel. The book was inspired by Julie's own musically gifted family and by a Jewish childhood friend, as well as a fascination with tales about looted art treasures.

A crime novel was next, and while this was also well received, Julie increasingly heard that readers wanted to know more about the Horowitz family. So *Rachel's Legacy* focuses on Simon's sister, a character Julie had put a lot of research into but never really developed.

In the second book of the series (a final third part is in the pipeline), Dr Kobi Voight is given a set of old letters by his mother, revealing how a young Jewish woman was forced to give up her baby daughter while fighting with the Resistance in Berlin. As Kobi explores Berlin and visits its war memorials and museums, he learns the truth about his family's past and realises he is part of the story, too. Julie continues with a theme of looted artwork: this time a painting by Albrecht Durer, an artist whose work she fell in love with during her student years.

In addition to her research at home, Julie travelled to London, Berlin and Munich to explore museums and memorials just as Kobi does in the book. She visited places that would have been significant to the Horowitz family, including the Neu Synagogue in Berlin that was rebuilt after Allied bombing in 1945, and the infamous Dachau work camp.

Julie told her Waihi listeners some of the back-stories of the many people she learned about and met through her research. Though a lot has been written about the holocaust period, she believes there are still thousands of personal stories waiting to be told, and that it's important to keep telling them to deter history repeating. With this in mind, she aims for her own writing to appeal to both teens and adults.

All of Julie's books are available from Hauraki District Libraries.

Along with Megan, who now lives in Auckland, their supporters included many of the friends they now consider their Kiwi family.

Within weeks of getting to Waihi the couple bought a home near the college. Primary teacher Rachel worked as a reliever and as a cook before being appointed as the Life Education Trust's Waikato East educator.

Her high-energy role took her to schools around the region, in the distinctive mobile classroom emblazoned with a large-as-life portrait of the trust's mascot Harold the giraffe. “It was a great way of getting to know a lot of people and getting to know the area,” she says.

Since stepping down a year ago to take up a position as a new entrant teacher at Waihi Beach School, Rachel is enjoying having her own class of children, “though I do miss Harold”.

For Art, adjusting to different teaching approaches presented some challenges. He'd envisaged a multi-media style design technology department, but instead needed to fit into the context of traditional woodwork and metalwork classes. However, after work he'd only have to head the short distance to the beach to think how his colleagues in Britain would “give their right arm to live somewhere like this”.

In 2012 the Johnstones moved house to Waikino, a neighbourly community where they appreciate that “everyone talks to each other” and people are accepted for who they are. It reminds them of a traditional English village, with the bonuses of having bush and the Hauraki Rail Trail on the doorstep.

While Art took another career step recently with a move to become head of technology at Morrinsville College, he has put down roots in the Waihi area through a stint as a Waihi Beach Coastguard volunteer, involvement with annual Art Waikino events, coaching and playing hockey, and joining a group of keen cyclists.

Rachel's community interests have included St John, the Waihi Drama Society, scrapbooking with other locals, and weekly Run Waihi events around the Martha Mine Pit Rim walkway. She's also a Board of Trustees member at Waikino School – and the young kowhai trees she and Art were presented to mark their citizenship are now planted in the school's native bush area.

The ceremony in the Council chambers was the biggest the Mayor has ever led; and Art dressed for the occasion in the Johnstone tartan kilt he wore on his wedding day, as a tribute to his Scottish birth land.

“We've been ‘home’ to Britain a few times, including for a magical snowy Winchester Christmas,” he says. “Then on January 9th or 10th we were on Waihi Beach again wearing shorts and t-shirts. We have the best of both worlds, but our lives are here now.”

Other Waihi residents among the new citizens sworn in on 23 February were John Perrins and Anne and David Evans from Great Britain; Amanda, Adrienne, Hayley, and Robyn Erasmus from Zimbabwe; Lynn Jones from the Phillipines; and Antoine Spodobalski from France.

### PUBLIC NOTICES

#### KERBSIDE REFUSE AND RECYCLING COLLECTIONS FOR EASTER

Due to Monday, 28 March 2016 being a statutory holiday, kerbside collections scheduled for that week will be carried out a day later than normal.

Please see the schedule below showing the dates for collections in the Waihi ward for the week of 27 March to 2 April.

Township	Collection Day	What to put out
Whiritoa	Tuesday 29 March	Refuse and recycling
Waihi	Friday	Refuse and recycling
Waikino	1 April	Refuse and recycling

Collection days will be back to normal starting Monday, 4 April 2016.

LD Cavers  
Chief Executive  
Hauraki District Council

#### MINISTRY OF HEALTH NOTICE FLUSH OUT YOUR TAPS

Some plumbing fittings have the potential to allow minute traces of metals to accumulate in water standing in the fittings for several hours.

Although the health risk is small, the Ministry of Health recommends that you flush a mugful of water from your drinking water tap each morning before use to remove any metals that may have dissolved from the plumbing fittings.

We are recommending this simple precaution for all households, including those on public and private water supplies.

Hauraki District Council



Rachel and Art Johnstone at home in Waikino.

## New Kiwis put down new roots

Teaching brought Art and Rachel Johnstone together – they met at training college in Winchester in 1982 – and nine years ago it brought them to New Zealand. By then they had lived and worked in Bristol, Yorkshire, Kuwait, Devon, and returned to Winchester, but felt they were becoming stuck in a “formulaic” rut. So an advertisement for a technology teacher in Wellington caught Art's attention.

He didn't get the job, but almost immediately found another vacancy for a teacher to introduce design technology at Waihi College. After a phone interview he was offered the position, and the Johnstones arrived in New Zealand in January 2007. As well as a teacher, Waihi College gained two new students: their daughter Megan and son Callum. “We didn't know anyone, but came with the idea of staying for three years,” says Art.

Last month he and Rachel, 54 and 52, were among 25 New Zealand citizens sworn in by Hauraki Mayor John Tregidga.

## Funding for local arts

Get involved

APPLICATIONS CLOSE  
 Thursday 31 March 2016 - 4pm