THE DOG SITTER

Written by Sue Walker
Illustrated by Beth Norling

Author: Sue Walker

Sue Walker was born in 1965, and when she was young her family followed her father and his work. They lived in Melbourne and Goulburn, and spent a few years in Malaysia.

Sue says that she has always loved writing. "As a child I kept diaries and wrote to penfriends." After leaving school she worked as a secretary for several years, all the while yearning to do "something creative". "I grew up loving Enid Blyton and the worlds she created in her books. As a young adult I'd jot down ideas for children's stories. I even started a few manuscripts. But it wasn't until I had my own children that I thought about writing seriously. It seems natural for me to write about them now that I'm so immersed in their world."

She completed a Diploma in Children's Writing in 2001, and has been busy writing ever since. Now she has published *The Dog Sitter*, has another Solo under contract with Omnibus Books, and is releasing *Camping Capers* with Macmillan Education.

Sue lives in Sydney with her husband and three young children, Eloise, Alexander and James.

Illustrator: Beth Norling

Beth Norling was born in Sydney to artist parents in 1969, and was encouraged to draw seriously from an early age. She studied art for a year at TAFE, and at the age of nineteen she moved to the Blue Mountains and began illustrating for a graphic arts company, G-Raffix. Now working as a freelancer, she produces a wide range of work, from children's picture books to illustrations for gardening magazines.

Beth's talent has been recognised with several awards. She won a Rexell Derwent drawing prize at the age of sixteen, and in 1992 she was given a Queen Elizabeth Silver Jubilee Trust Award and grant to help her set up her own illustration studio. In 1993 she was a finalist in the Australian Young Achievers Award for art, and in 1995 she received a grant from the Literature Board to write and illustrate a children's picture book, *The Stone Baby*. Most recently she won the Ena Noel Award for her work in *Cherryblossom and the Golden Bear*.

In 1997 Beth illustrated her first Omnibus Solo (*The Best Pet*), following this with two more (*Watch Out, William! and Croc Bait*). Her first picture book for Omnibus, the beautiful Cherryblossom and the Golden Bear, was published by Omnibus in 2000, and her next, which she also wrote (*Little School*) in 2001. *The Stone Baby* (Lothian) was published in 2002.

Beth lives at Leura in the Blue Mountains with her husband Joss and their two young children, Indigo and Juno.

About The Dog Sitter

Jack wants a dog very badly. His parents don't think he's old enough to handle the responsibility, but Jack doesn't give up. When he sees an advertisement for a dog sitter in the pet shop window he knows that this is his big chance: he can be a dog sitter for a week, and prove to his parents that he is able to look after a dog of his own. But Samson proves to be a handful—he wees on carpets, runs away from Jack, and wrecks the back yard. In the end he digs his way out under the fence and escapes. Through it all, though, Jack and his problem dog become great friends, and Jack learns something of lasting benefit: owning a dog is not all play.

Jack's parents are impressed by his dedication to Samson, and for his next birthday they offer to buy him any pet he wants. What does Jack choose? A hermit crab!

Sue Walker wrote this story because "most children want a dog—even mine. We were out shopping and I saw a sign in the pet shop window. They wanted someone to look after a dog for a while. I thought it was a great idea."

Notes for teachers

The Dog Sitter is all about making a commitment, and, more importantly, understanding what the commitment entails before taking it on. It's good to think things through before making important decisions! This is especially true of the decision to buy a pet (see Beth Norling's comment, on page 51 of *The Dog Sitter*, for a potentially sad story about the wrong sort of pet—which fortunately has a happy ending!).

Topics for discussion:

- Age and responsibility. At what age might a child be responsible for caring for a pet?
- What qualities make one a responsible person?
- What qualities make an irresponsible person?
- What sort of person are you? Why?
- Some pets need much more care than others. Make a list of pets in order of the degree of care needed.
- Take each of the pets in that list, and write down all the things that pet needs if it is to be cared for properly.
- Talk about your own pets, and what you do to look after them.
- What do you like most about your pet?
- What do you like least about your pet?
- Do you think Jack chose wisely when he chose a hermit crab? Why?
- If you were in Jack's position, what sort of pet would you have chosen? Why?

Activities:

- Make up a poster asking for the services of a dog-sitter (or a cat-sitter, or a fish-sitter).
- Make up a play about Jack and Samson.
- Perhaps the class could visit a doggery or a cattery, or visit a dog or cat shelter. Link this with a discussion about responsible pet-ownership.