

## **READdiscovering Single parent families**

**Sam:** Hi, I'm Steve McKern and this is ***Breakfast Today***.

Today marks the beginning of **Children's Book Week** and this morning I am going to profile the stories in four books for 11-14 year olds which have been shortlisted for the award of Book of the Year for Younger Readers. The authors, unfortunately could not be with us, but the young people on whose stories they are based are here to tonight.

Their names have been changed in the books to protect their privacy and we have disguised their faces for the same reason.

The books are ***MacBeth and Son*** by the prolific Jackie French; ***The Tuckshop kid*** by Pat Flynn ; ***Bird and Sugar Boy*** by Sofie Laguna and ***Being Bee*** by Catherine Bateson.

The young people all have in common experiencing life with one parent missing.

The names they go by in the books are Luke, Matt, James (nicknamed Bird) and Beatrice (nicknamed Bee)

Welcome, everyone.

**Luke, Matt, Bird and Bee:** Hi Sam.

**Sam:** Let's begin with some questions to Luke :

Does Jackie French get your story right? In your book you went back 1000 years to become Lulach a Scottish youth. This would be fantasy obviously wouldn't it?

**Luke:** The Lulach part of the story didn't happen to me but I think it is a really clever way for Jackie to tell Lulach's story. He was a real person who lived in 11<sup>th</sup> century Scotland and what happens to him in the book really did happen.

**Sam:** Why did Jackie tell this story woven into your story do you think?

**Luke:** Lulach's father died when Lulach was five years old and his mother married MacBeth who was a hero to the Scots. A similar thing happened to me. My Mum married again too. At the time of the story, I was studying MacBeth the famous play by William

Shakespeare and had to do an assignment. I did some research on the net and found out that MacBeth and his stepson were Scottish nobles who really did exist. I found out that Shakespeare changed the story of MacBeth to make a play about human nature, evil and ambition. He didn't put MacBeth in a good light. Jackie tells the real story in her book alongside my personal struggle with my feelings about my stepfather who is also a well known person.

**Sam:** What point was Jackie making about fathers and step fathers do you think?

**Luke:** I guess I would spoil the book if I told you much but let's say I learnt that life is not either black and white and neither are fathers and stepfathers.

**Sam:** Matt, you have never known your Dad? What difference has this made to your life?

**Matt:** Well, it meant my mum has always had a career. She has always tried too hard to be a big success and make plenty of money for us and sometimes she worked very late. I think she doesn't really feel like the big success she actually is.

**Sam:** Has looking out for yourself meant you have developed some special survival skills, do you think.

**Matt:** Yep, I mightn't be the smartest, fastest or best looking kid at school, but I've got a special talent, alright. It's called 'tuckshop' I can tell kids how they can get more for their buck. For instance, I'm friends with one of the tuckshop ladies who always gives me two squeezes of chocolate topping in plain milk for nix.

**Sam:** Does Pat Flynn get your story right do you think?

**Matt:** Yeah, Withers (that's not his real name) really did say to me "Watch out for the hippo behind you – Oh, that's right, its your bum."

And then *I* said "Come here and say that" and then **Withers** said "I'd rather not get any closer to your man boobs.

Then *I* said "You've got a lot of guts, Withers.

Everyone laughed which was good but I didn't really like being teased about being fat.

I like the way Pat Flynn makes a poem out of the Tuckshop menu at the beginning of each chapter and I think Tom has done great job with the pictures. They 're all through the book and you can read it fast.

**Sam:** Bird, your story ended up in the news, before it was a book, didn't it?

**Bird:** Yes. I shot through, same as my Mum.

**Sam:** Do you remember your Mum?

**Bird:** Her face has come back to me a bit lately but I was only a littler tacker when she shot through so, not really.

**Sam:** What about your Dad? How did he cope?

**Bird:** Well he is a single parent and single parents have to do everything on their own, including having a job, doing the housework and making pineapple costumes from op shop clothes. This means having high stress levels. High stress levels keep you from smiling or singing along to the radio or just deciding to go fishing without too much planning. He is an ex-bikie and all his mates are bikies. He has his own business called Burdell Auto Repairs and he always has a blob of grease somewhere even after a bath. He's not a big talker and he doesn't cry in movies, or tell you his thoughts.

He's always telling me to listen to my teachers but I heard him sending up the principal: Your sons a nuisance Mr. Burdell. Where did he learn such behaviour and could I get a cheap job done on my Lexus please, Mr. Burdell?

**Sam:** What about you, how was life for you without a mum?

**Bird:** Dad always says that I'm, a big dreamer and not to fall into that trap. Stick with reality – it's the way things are. He says it a lot. Big dreams are the way I want things to be – reality is way things actually are. Its important to understand the difference. I'm really into birds – and Sugar Boy (that's my best mate Craig) he was the one who named me bird. Well Sugar Boy and I did

everything together, - fished, played playstation, not footy though he likes soccer and I'm a good footy player. He wouldn't runaway with me but. Said his family would miss him. I wasn't comfortable with girls back then – my life lacked the feminine influence. Dad said women are a mystery, James.

**Sam:** Bee your life lacked the feminine influence but you weren't keen to have a stepmother were you.

**Bee:** It's a fair while ago now. All our books were published in 2006 and written even before that so I have grown up a bit since but yes I thought Dad and I were alright, we had each other and Nanna.

It took a while to get used to Jazzi moving in - that's what the book is about really. I guess I felt a bit left out. And then my two best friends seemed to be leaving me behind. I probably was a bit jealous. You know the two's company and three's a crowd thing. Catherine Bateson writes about the person I was back then beautifully. I recognize me. Reading the book, I can understand just what made me tick. In a way the book is more for the younger end of younger readers or even year 3 kids.

**Sam:** There are two other books competing with yours for the award. Has anyone of you read ***Layla, Queen of Hearts*** by Glenda Millard?

**Bee:** Yes, it's a very gentle story about Layla a little girl whose problem is finding a grandmother to take along to an event at school when grandparents were specially invited. It is more for people younger than me as well, maybe year 3 kids, but I really enjoyed it. It's never boring for older readers even though the girl is young, though. I think that is because Glenda Millard is so good at telling the story.

**Sam:** Has anyone read the other book, Andy Griffiths book : ***The cat on the mat is flat?***

**Matt:** Yeah – great. It's like funny short stories that rhyme. It's extra quick to read, even for me, and bit like Dr Seuss books.

**Sam:** Let's finish by reading a funny take on two's company threes a crowd for Bee from Andy's book: Its called ***Ed and Ted and Ted's dog Fred.***

## Ed and Ted and Ted's Dog Fred

There was a man whose name was Ed.  
Ed lived in a shed with his friend Ted.  
Ted had a dog whose name was Fred.  
Ed liked Ted and Ted liked Ed  
And Fred liked Ted but he didn't like Ed.  
One morning Fred jumped on Ed's bed.  
Ed said: Fred, get off my bed!  
But Fred just growled and bit Ed's head.  
Ed saw red and he said:  
'I'm fed up with Fred always biting my head!  
I'm leaving this shed.'  
And he went to his car (which was red).  
He jumped in and away he sped.  
Ted said: "Ed! Come back to the shed!"  
But Ed just shook his head and fled.  
So Ted jumped in his car (which was also red).  
But it wouldn't start. The battery was dead.  
Ted stamped his feet and his face went red.  
'Bother! Bother! Bother!' he said.  
'I'll have to take the sled instead.'  
Ted hitched up Fred to the front of the sled  
(which, by the way, was also red)  
and away from the shed sped Fred and Ted.  
Ted and Fred sped after Ed.  
Ted saw Ed's red car up ahead.  
'Faster, faster, Fred!' said Ted.  
Ted and Fred were gaining on Ed,  
But all of a sudden, Ed stopped dead.  
There was a road block and a sign that read  
"STOP! DO NOT DRIVE! BIG CLIFF AHEAD!"  
Ted said, 'Fred! Stop the sled!'  
But Fred could not. On they sped!  
Ted and Fred smashed into Ed.  
Over the cliff Ed plumm-et-ed!  
Closely followed by Ted and Fred.  
They hit the water and sank like lead.  
Poor Ed and Ted and Ted's dog Fred!  
They were drowning and almost dead...  
When they were swallowed by a whale called Ned.  
'Bother!' said Ed. 'Bother' said Ted.

'Woof! Woof! Woof!' said Ted's dog Fred,  
as they bobbed around in the belly of Ned.  
Ed and Ted and Ted's dog Fred  
Were certain they were surely dead,  
but the whale called Ned – who was overfed –  
blew Ed and Ted and Ted's dog Fred  
out of the hole in the top of his head.  
Up, up, up, flew Ed and Ted.  
Up, up, up flew Ted's dog Fred and then..  
Down, down down, they all did head!  
'Oh no,' said Ted with deathly dread.  
'We'll hit the ground. We'll end up dead!'  
'Fear not,' said Ed, to his friend Ted,  
stretching a handkerchief over his head.  
'Hang on to me, Ted! Hang on to Ted, Fred!'  
and down to the ground they para-chut-ed.  
'Thank you, thank you, Ed! Said Ted.  
'Thanks to you we are not dead!'  
'Woof! Woof! Woof! Said Ted's dog Fred  
as he jumped up and LICKED Ed's head.  
Ed hugged Fred! Fred hugged Ed!  
Ted hugged Fred! Fred hugged Ted!  
Ed hugged Ted! Ted hugged Ed!  
And they lived happily ever after in their shed.

