



TUNDRA BOOKS



Irene N. Watts

Born in Berlin, Germany, Irene Kirstein Watts emigrated to Britain on a Kindertransport in December 1938 and moved to Canada in 1968.

She is a storyteller, playwright, drama consultant and director who has worked throughout Canada and Europe. She has worked as a playwright and director in Theatre for Young Audiences. Her plays have been produced by The Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, The Stratford Festival in Ontario and The Neptune Theatre in Halifax. She was also the first Program Director of the Vancouver International Children's Festival.

For the last 25 years Irene has lived in British Columbia where she loves living by the ocean. She wrote her first picture book, *The Fish Princess*, on an isolated beach near Nanaimo. Since then she has written several novels for young adults, including *Good-bye Marianne: A Story of Growing Up in Nazi Germany*, *Remember Me: A Search for Refuge in Wartime Britain*, and *Finding Sophie: A Search for Belonging in Postwar Britain*. She is also the author of the storybook *One for Day/One for Night*. Irene co-edited *Tapestry of Hope*, an anthology of writing about the Holocaust for young people.

Irene lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Selected Bibliography

<i>Tapestry of Hope</i> (Tundra)	2003
<i>Finding Sophie</i> (Tundra)	2002
<i>Remember Me</i> (Tundra)	2000
<i>Good-bye Marianne</i> (Tundra)	1998
<i>The Fish Princess</i> (Tundra)	1996
<i>The Magic Sieve, In Within My Reach</i> (Harper Collins)	1993



TUNDRA BOOKS

Awards and Honours

Finding Sophie

- Finalist, CLA Best Book of the Year for Children, 2003
- Finalist, Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People, 2003

Remember Me

- Winner, Chocolate Lily Children's Choice Award, 2003
- Short listed, Red Cedar Book Award (Fiction), 2002-2003
- Winner, Isaac Frischwasser Memorial Award for Young Adult Fiction, 2001

Good-bye Marianne

- Winner, Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People, 1998
- Selected as Outstanding by Parent Council, 1998

The Fish Princess

- Short listed, Ruth Schwartz Children's Book Award, 1996
- Our Choice, Canadian Children's Book Centre, 1997-1998

Author Interview

What was your favourite book as a child?

Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, Noe Streatfield's *Ballet Shoes*, all Richmal Crompton's *William* books, and anything by Enid Blyton. Loved Dickens, and Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare.

What is your favourite book now?

Different books for different moods. *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt, Ernst Hillen's *The Way of a Boy*, *Writing Home - The Diaries of Alan Bennett*.

Favourite children's books: *Goodnight Mister Tom* by Michelle Magorian, *The Homecoming* by Cynthia Voigt, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Who reads your new work first?

My daughter Julia.

What was your first written work (that you can remember)?

A very bad poem called *Civilization*. I wrote it in a little attic room in Wales. All I could see were wet, grey roofs and the coal tips and the sound of a solitary airplane. I was twelve or thirteen.

Do you have a favourite place to write? What's it like?

Yes, but I don't use my desk. I write at an old wooden kitchen table. I look out at my patio, and the crows and the seagulls scream at me through the window. I see tips of trees and can hear the bell from the nearby school. I see rooftops and pastel painted condos, and sometimes it feels like the top of the world, and when it snows it's a very magical silent world.



TUNDRA BOOKS

Where do you get your ideas from?

I don't know. My life, things the children say to me, observations on my travels, music, painting, newspapers, everything.

What do you do when you have writer's block?

Walk along the ocean front, which is only a ten minute walk from my house. Sit and have coffee and scribble ideas. If it's very bad, write about why I can't write. Go to one of my favourite writing exercises and hope that will work. Make lists. Titles. Brilliant opening sentences. Invent a new project. Start a new play, write a postcard story, write a monologue. Stuff that will never see the light of day but that keeps the pencil moving. I have horrendous blocks, and find it hard to settle.

What is the best thing about being an author?

When the writings going well, when I know next day I can start, when I can't wait to write. It doesn't happen often. I love it when someone whose read the book or seen the play shares a discovery with me, sees something that I think only I know about.

What is the worst thing about being an author?

Feeling guilty when I'm not writing.

How do you feel about bad reviews?

I haven't had many, sometimes bad comments or mediocre ones. They're like good reviews, just someone's opinion. If you do anything creative, there will always be people who dislike what you do. It's the risk you take.

If you could meet any famous person who has ever lived, who would it be?

Berthold Brecht. I love his poetry more than his plays, except for *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. I wish I had written the last stanza of Emigrant's *Lament*:

Yet when I asked for work it was no good
You are impertinent they said to me
I'm not impertinent, I said: I'm lost.