

# The Old Trunk

by Gregory O'Brien



There is an old trunk in the hall at Glen McDonald's house. When Glen opens the trunk, the world suddenly becomes a bright, colourful place. Glen's mother, Jill, is one of New Zealand's best-known illustrators of children's books. The trunk is full of her work. There are pictures of animals, children, witches, penguins, snowflakes ...



## A Talent for Drawing

Jill McDonald was born in Wellington in 1927. At primary school, it was clear that she had a talent for drawing. She also loved reading books. In these books, pictures and words came together. As a child, Jill used to read books as fast as the library would lend them to her.

Jill could draw very straight lines, and she could also draw things in great detail. She thought she could use these skills to design houses, so when Jill left school, she went to university to study this. But then she began drawing illustrations for stories, and she decided that was what she really wanted to do. She never looked back.





## Jill and Margaret Mahy

Jill got a job as an art editor for the *School Journal*. One day, a young, unknown writer came through the door. The writer's name was Margaret Mahy.

Like Margaret, Jill believed that life was exciting and great fun. Together, they made some very famous books, including *A Lion in the Meadow*. The stories they worked on are filled with their love of adventure and imagination.



Jill drew Captain Cook and Jesse James, the outlaw; she drew schoolchildren and astronauts. But her favourite subject was animals. She knew a lot about them because her children often brought home stray chickens, mice, and rabbits they'd found on their way home from school. Jill and her family always made room for new arrivals.

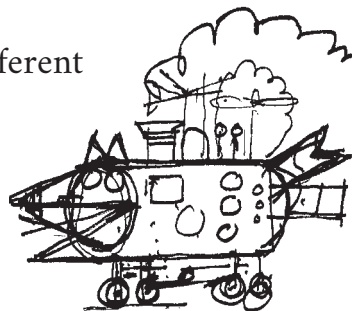


Glen says that life with Jill was always interesting. At home, Jill would read books to her children and draw with them. She encouraged them to use their imaginations, and she would often get ideas from the things they did. Glen remembers that she once made a "stuffy cat" out of a sock. Jill then wrote about the cat in the *School Journal*.

Although she could draw pictures that looked very real, Jill loved making things up most of all. She drew red rabbits and snails with patterns on their shells. She drew owls with beady eyes and lions with curly hair. She also drew some of the friendliest lizards and insects you'll ever meet.

## Her Favourite Subject

Jill drew thousands of illustrations for the *School Journal*. She used pens, pencils, crayons, stencils, inks, paints, and dyes. She also made collages (pictures made from a number of different materials) by cutting up printed words and pictures. This was in the days before computers, so Jill did everything by hand.

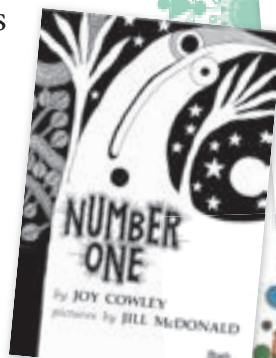




## Moving to England

In 1965, Jill and her family moved to London, England, where she continued working as an illustrator. It was there that Jill drew one of her best-known pictures – the puffin bird for Puffin books. Many millions of Puffin books have been published. At Puffin, Jill worked with Quentin Blake and other famous illustrators.

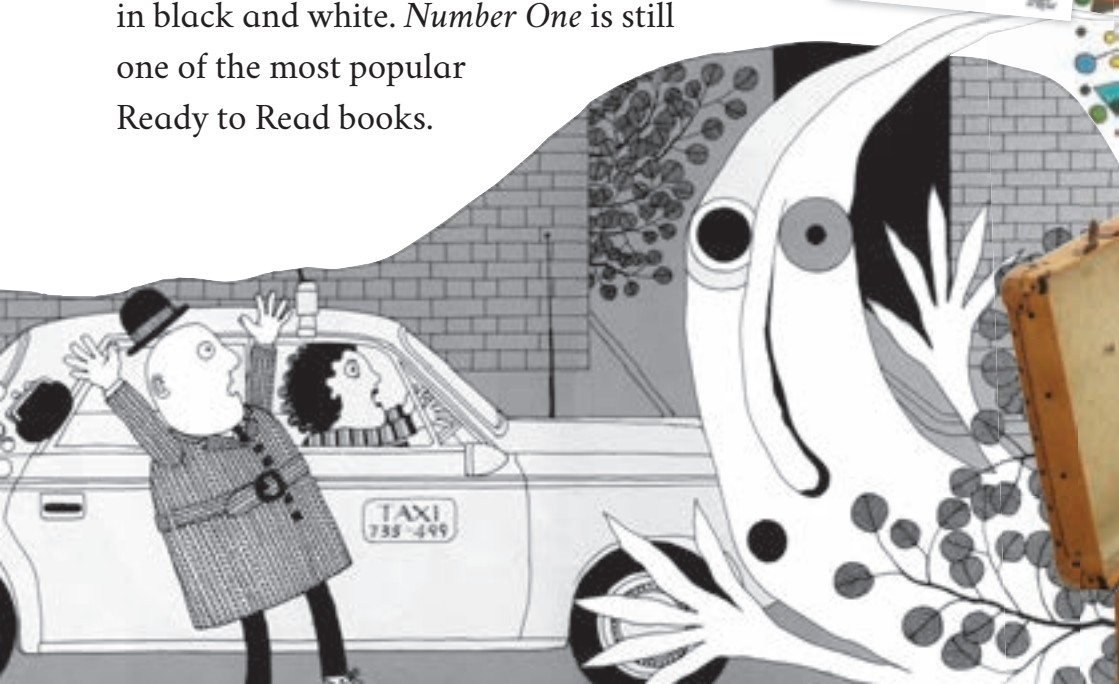
All her life, Jill continued to draw illustrations for New Zealand books. This was before the Internet, so all of these drawings had to be sent back to New Zealand by ship or plane. The last book Jill illustrated was *Number One*, a Ready to Read book by Joy Cowley. She died before colouring the pictures, so they were printed in black and white. *Number One* is still one of the most popular Ready to Read books.



## The Treasure Chest

Jill McDonald died in 1982. A lot of her art was put in the trunk and sent to Glen, who had returned to New Zealand a few years earlier. The trunk is a treasure chest for friends, family, and visitors to the McDonald household.

Jill's great-grandchildren were born long after she died, but they talk about Jill as if they know her. And the thing is, they do know her – through her wonderful and captivating art.



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