



her writer partner Jared Hunt own and run the innovative Gumboot Books in downtown Vancouver. I recently spoke with this driven young entrepreneur and sparkling literary talent, one topic discussed being why penning an effective children’s story presents so many headaches.

“Every word in a picture book has to count for thousands of words you’d get to use in a novel,” she explained. “You get a short period of time to engage your reader and tell the story. I also think it’s because people all too frequently underestimate children and try to take a good story and ‘bring it down

Whether from stars or starry-eyed hopefuls, Stranaghan and Hunt find themselves under a veritable avalanche of manuscripts. Gumboot Books once received as many as twenty per day, but the daily flow now averages around five. On top of these – and they do consider every single one – they’re spinning a whole lot of other plates as their business develops. Most pertinent of these projects from our local perspective is a book called “*A World of Stories*”. A compendium of children’s tales about the celebration of holidays in different countries and cultures, it’s a collaborative effort stoutly supported by Rotary District 5020, which includes Oceanside Rotarians.

The express intention of “*A World of Stories*” is to raise funds for various literacy projects, a community-targeted sentiment typical of the ethics by which Stranaghan, Hunt and their immediate associates conduct their affairs. Awarded Green Office Certification in December 2007 in recognition of their (ironically) paper-free office environment, recycling, packaging, energy management and other green initiatives, Gumboot Books is about as dependable an outfit as can be imagined. Their website states: “Our aim as a company is to encourage reading and writing in people of all ages, and to foster a sense of social responsibility and respect for our planet and all the people who share it.”

Stranaghan’s own books reflect this overarching mentality, messages concerning such as respectfully sharing our planet with other creatures and global warming appearing in her visionary work. “We try to make books that make people think,” she informed me, “and contribute to our readers becoming socially responsible human beings by the content of our books, as well as our production methods – but not in a really preachy way. The messages are subtle.”

To this end, on the way from Gumboot are kid’s books about recycling and yoga, plus so much more. “We’re working on roughly thirty projects...” Stranaghan said of her spinning plates, “with about seventy-five different authors and illustrators from all over the world.”

You never know, included amongst Gumboot’s forthcoming titles there may well be a book that’ll earn that elusive

## CRYSTAL STRANAGHAN’S WORLD OF STORIES

BY DAVID MORRISON

One of my favourite British sitcoms is “*Black Books*”, a wonderfully silly show set in a chaotic London bookshop owned by curmudgeonly Irish madman, Bernard Black. In one demented episode examining International Children’s Book Week, Black and his assistant Manny stay up all night, drinking heavily, aiming to win a bet by creating a classic children’s storybook. By morning, the unhinged Black has produced several thousand pages of Dostoevsky-esque heaviness, leaving his typewriter smoking. Manny suggests that rather than the Stalinist purges and proletariat oppression it excruciatingly details, perhaps it may appeal more to its intended market if it was about an elephant who loses a balloon.

Like so many misguided others, this crazed pair thought writing a children’s book would be easy. Not so. It’s a discipline requiring considerable skill and an acute understanding of what it takes to communicate with the target demographic. One truly blessed with such seemingly innate abilities is children’s author and publisher, Crystal Stranaghan.

Born in Ocean Falls, raised in Qualicum Beach, twenty-nine year-old Kwalikum Secondary School graduate Stranaghan and

to a child’s level.’ Simply thinking that something is easy means you aren’t likely to give it your all.”

Although I’m sure that in the main their intentions are honourable, you may have noticed the ongoing trend for celebrities contributing to the global catalogue of children’s books. From Madonna to Jamie Lee Curtis, HRH Prince Charles to Jerry Seinfeld, dozens of famous folks have had works published, presumably initially as convinced as our “*Black Books*” heroes that writing for children is simple. But in truth the majority have been received with indifference, their authors’ fame recognized as the sole reason most titles have reached the marketplace. What does Stranaghan think about this?

“As a publisher, I can understand the lure of an author who can practically guarantee press coverage and large sales, and comes with a readymade fan base,” she told me. “However, I hope that they’d still hold those authors to the same standards as everyone else. We’ve had submissions from some very high profile people from the US and Canada – and believe me, it was tempting to work with them. However, in the end it was the quality of writing that was the issue, and the fit of their ideas with ours that wasn’t a perfect fit.”

continued on page 31