# Working at it

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## Contents

2 **Playing with Words**
*by Apirana Taylor*

7 **In the Picture: Gus Sinaumea Hunter, Illustrator**
*by Janice Marriott*

12 **Working on Ice**
*by Philippa Werry*

20 **How Did He Pull a Stunt like That?**
*by Julia Wall*

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Apirana Taylor is an award-winning full-time writer. His mother was from the Ngāti Porou and Te Whānau-ā-Apānui tribes, and his father is Pākehā. Apirana talks about his life as a writer.

# Playing with Words

by Apirana Taylor

When I was a little boy, I loved playing with words and phrases in my mind. I was always trying to make them more memorable. For instance, if someone said "The missiles went really, really fast over the sky", I'd change that line to something like "The missiles *rocketed* over the sky".

As a child, I found reading difficult. I wrote a lot of my letters backwards, like this: bɐʇǝʞɔoɹ. One teacher helped me overcome my difficulties, and now I read thousands of books, and I write almost every day.

My father was an excellent journalist and, as a boy, I wanted to be a writer like Dad.

Once I learned to read and write, I found that I got a lot of satisfaction from writing. Most kids love it when the teacher gets them to paint or draw. I loved it when the teacher got us to write because, to me, words were like paint. I could use them to create atmosphere, express my feelings, develop my imagination, and tell stories. Teachers praised my stories and poems, which encouraged me.

Less focus was placed on writing as I grew older. We didn't do any creative writing at secondary school, and it wasn't until my first year at Massey University that I remembered my childhood dream of being a writer. One evening, I saw Alistair Campbell reading his poetry on television. That reminded me that I'd always wanted to write – and I started writing that very evening.

I decided to write a five-hundred-page poem. I spent about two months in my room working on this epic. Here is the poem that resulted from all that work:

# Te Kooti

Once hāngi grew
like melon-pregnant bellies
full of black and white flesh.

Now the stones are cold.
Te Kooti is dead
under incubus earth.

We are ashes of his fire
dead a hundred years.

Safe in our houses
we have stripped him
to a feather in the wind
as distant as a morepork
that calls in the night.

What was supposed to be about five hundred pages of writing finished up as thirteen lines. I did a lot of editing, but when I'd finished the piece, I felt such a huge rush of exhilaration that I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life writing.

When I was about twenty, I'd spend about ten hours a day doing hard work like scrub cutting and then I'd spend most of the night writing. I did that for nearly ten years. Sometimes I got up at four o'clock in the morning and wrote for about four hours, and then I went to work.

That was nearly thirty years ago. In that time, I've written three books of poetry, a novel, three books of short stories, and a book of plays. I've also done a lot of painting as well as acting in and directing many plays. I've also acted in a couple of television films and series.

I'm nearly fifty now, and I refuse to do much else other than write and create art. I love what I do.

People sometimes ask me why I write, and I can't think of one satisfactory answer. Maybe it's in my blood. My father was a journalist, as were many of my uncles and aunties. They loved playing with words, too, and they had a gift when it came to using language. Both my sisters are playwrights, and one of them, Riwia, wrote the screenplay for *Once Were Warriors*. The writer William Taylor is my second cousin.

I love writing because it's really just being a storyteller, and I feel free when I'm left alone to use my imagination. I love writing poetry because each finished poem I write is as close as I can get to perfection. Sometimes I think that asking me why I write is like asking someone why they breathe. I'd explode or implode if I didn't.

I write about many things, from an ant to a mountain and beyond. Sometimes people ask me what skills they need to become a creative writer. I think talent and hard work is not enough; you need to have luck and tenacity. I tell them that you need to have the sensitivity of a poet and skin as thick as that of the rhinoceros to survive the hard knocks that this life is full of. Then I wish them good luck.

# In the Picture: Gus Sinaumea Hunter, Illustrator

by Janice Marriott

Gus Hunter is an illustrator. His pictures are published in Australia and New Zealand, in books and as book covers.

Gus grew up in Wellington with five older brothers who all loved to draw. They'd get hold of Marvel comics and copy the superheroes and villains from them.

All through school, Gus loved drawing. When he was at intermediate, he discovered, in the library, books about famous artists who'd lived centuries ago on the other side of the world. He was amazed at how well artists such as Michelangelo could draw people, and he copied the drawings in order to learn from them. Gus was so interested in drawing people that he even studied books about skeletons to see how the bones fitted together and how muscle was attached to bone. Then, at college, he took art.

When he'd finished school, Gus worked in an office for four years before he realised that he didn't want to spend his life writing letters – he wanted to be an illustrator! To make that happen, he left his job and spent time carving bone and painting wooden carvings. Then he found out about the Visual Communication course at Wellington Polytechnic and enrolled for a twenty-week introductory course. He was the only Sāmoan in the course.

"Bang!" says Gus. "Straight away I knew that art was what I wanted to do. I loved it. I stayed at polytech and did the three-year course. I learned so much, and I've been a freelance illustrator ever since then."

## Illustrating – how does he do it?

**Getting to know the story**

When Gus is given a story to illustrate, he reads it carefully. He gets to know the characters and the dramatic moments of the story. He visualises the story in pictures.

**Planning**

Gus decides which parts of the story he'll illustrate and what perspectives he'll use. Will he look down on his subject from above? Will he take on the viewpoint of a small child or a cat? He decides whether to illustrate the characters from his imagination or copy photos of real people.

**Sketching**

Gus does lots of rough sketches in pencil. He says that the rough sketches are the most important part of the work. When he's happy with the sketches, he sends photocopies of them to the publisher. When the publisher has approved the sketches, Gus starts making the actual illustrations.

## Choosing a technique

Gus uses two main techniques:

**Painting by hand**

Gus coats illustration board (a special type of cardboard used by artists) with gesso (a white paint that's easy to draw over and that gives a texture under the final painting). Then he transfers his rough sketches to the board. He uses acrylic paint to colour the background and, finally, the foreground and figures. A picture done this way, and with lots of detail, will take him about a day and a half to do. A very simple illustration will take half a day.

**Computer-assisted illustration**

Gus often does his colouring-in using a computer. "It saves time," he explains, "and you can always change things. But the computer can't draw for you. You have to learn how to do that." If he's using the computer for his illustrations, Gus scans in the rough sketches. When the sketches are up on the screen, he uses the Photoshop and Painter software programs to colour them. Gus became an expert computer illustrator because he worked for fifteen months, often for twelve hours a day, as a Photoshop artist on the film *The Lord of the Rings*.

# Tips from Gus:

- Visualise a picture in your head before you start drawing.
- Draw what you see, not what you think you see.
- When adding colour, work your way from the background to the foreground of a picture.
- The hardest thing to draw is the human figure. You have to get the proportions right. The body can be in so many different positions. (There are thousands of positions of the hands alone!) Study the anatomy of the body. Find out what bones make up the skeleton and how they fit together. Learn about muscles, finding out where they attach to the bones and how they lift limbs.
- Practise. If you want to be good at anything, whether it's football, playing the guitar, or illustrating, you have to take the time to practise.

Gus now gives workshops in the Pacific, helping Pacific illustrators to learn skills so they can illustrate books for their own people. "I've been lucky," says Gus. "It's good to put something back."

*photographs by Adrian Heke*

# Working on Ice

by Philippa Werry

For nearly fifty years, Scott Base has been New Zealand's base in Antarctica. It houses about eighty people over the summer, although only about ten or twelve of them stay for the long, dark winter. Many of them are scientists, but there are also support staff, who all have important jobs – people like chefs, kitchen hands, cleaners, mechanics, and engineers.

In Antarctica, you use up lots of energy just keeping warm, so you need good, nutritious food to keep up your energy levels. But if you're living at Scott Base, you can't duck out to the local takeaways for a snack – and the chefs can't just pop out to the supermarket, either. In fact, feeding the community at Scott Base takes a lot of organisation because everything has to come in from outside Antarctica. Every aspect, from ordering the food to storing it and disposing of the leftovers, has to be carefully thought out.

## So who's in charge?

The new chefs arrive each year at the beginning of October. Over summer, more people need to be fed and more work has to be done, so there are two chefs. The summer chef works for four months from October to February. The winter chef stays for a full year until the next October.

Donna Wightman is working as the winter chef. She has cooked in all sorts of places before, including cafes, restaurants, and wineries around New Zealand and overseas, but cooking in Antarctica is definitely unique!

## How does the food get there?

A bulk order of food is brought down to Scott Base by ship at the beginning of February. This order includes canned goods; frozen meat, fish, and seafood; and dry goods like flour and sugar.

During the summer, there are weekly flights by Hercules aircraft. These flights bring what people at Scott Base call "freshies" – eggs, dairy products, fruit, and vegetables. The summer chefs order what they want brought down by plane, but the flights are sometimes delayed by poor weather conditions, so the ordered "freshies" might not turn up for a couple of weeks.

The last flight of the summer is in late February. In June, a plane flies over to drop supplies and mail, but the regular flights don't start again until October. That means that over the winter, the chef can only use what's stored on site – which makes it even more important that the food is stored properly.

## How is the food stored?

Even in Antarctica, you still need fridges and freezers! All the basic stores needed every day are kept in the kitchen, where there is a walk-in fridge-freezer and dry store. And there are other big freezers for things like frozen meat, fish, and ice cream.

Once a week, Donna does a food 'breakout'. "That means I go outside to our storage hangar and gather up all the ingredients I think I will need for the week so they have time to thaw out. If I needed to open a tin of tomato paste straight from the hangar, for example, it would be frozen – and that can be very frustrating! So, really, you have to be organised for the week ahead."

Often the problem is how to keep food from getting too cold – so there is also a warm store for eggs, cheese, pumpkin, potatoes, relishes, chutneys, oil, and some canned goods. These are foods that either don't freeze well or would spoil at the temperature in the kitchen.

Eggs come in for special treatment. They are sprayed with oil to stop the air from getting into the shells, and they will then last for ten months or more without going off. And there's no need to worry about going short of food. There's at least two years' supply of extra food, so the staff are unlikely to run out.

## So what does everyone get to eat?

Meals are as good as you'd get at home – or better! Typical meals might include such dishes as nachos, lasagne, pizza, Thai curry, sushi, meatballs with spaghetti, rhubarb pudding, and apple pie and ice cream. Yum!

The chefs also arrange special menus for occasions such as the last sunset, midwinter dinner, Christmas, the first sunrise, and the three "polar plunges". Birthdays are marked with birthday cakes, and there are theme nights, like barbecues (eaten indoors), fish and chip nights (where the food is ordered at the counter and served wrapped up in paper), and blokes' nights (steak, egg, and chips).

"Every Thursday night during the winter, we have American night. Ten people sign up on a noticeboard at their base at McMurdo Sound and come over to have dinner with us."

Staff who are wintering over can put in their own requests for food to be brought on the last Hercules flight. Chocolate is usually top of the list!

## What happens to leftover food?

Donna has to cater carefully to make sure that as little food as possible is wasted or left over. No bones or shells are allowed because of their extra weight, so all the meat is sent down already boned, which also reduces waste. Food scraps, cans, boxes, plastic, and glass all have to be returned to New Zealand.

## I'd love a lettuce ...

During the summer, the food the staff miss most is probably chocolate biscuits or their favourite chips. In winter, once the fresh fruit and vegetables have run out, they start to pine for things like strawberries, oranges, bananas, pineapple, fresh orange juice, and milk.

But even in winter, there's some green stuff available. The winter chef uses a small hydroponics unit to grow things like lettuces, zucchini, and tomatoes. The seedlings are planted towards the end of summer and then put into nutrient baths over the winter, using artificial lighting on a timer system. The hydroponics unit produces enough for a small salad every couple of days.

## Do you have any spare time?

"I have Sundays off in the winter, so everyone helps themselves to the kitchen, and they can cook whatever they want, or they can have leftovers from the fridge. My usual working day is from 7 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. (although I do get time off during the day to go to the gym or watch a movie). But on Sundays, I sleep in. Then I can watch a DVD or read, go for a walk, and do my washing, and sometimes I go over to the American base for a drink."

## What does Donna think about working in Antarctica?

"Cooking is my passion – I absolutely love it. Here in Antarctica has been the most rewarding place I've worked. I can use all my skills to make my own pastry, breads, pies, pasta, desserts, chutneys, and lots of baked goodies. I provide morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner. So there's plenty of scope to provide everyone with home-cooked, nutritious meals. Plus the kitchen is a place where everyone gathers, so the smells from the kitchen and the good taste of the food will generally put people in a good mood, and I get plenty of great compliments as well."

*photographs by Donna Wightman*

# How Did He Pull a Stunt like That?

by Julia Wall

Two cars are driving side by side at high speed. A man is clinging to the roof of one of them. He jumps from the moving car and rolls down a bank to escape, just before the two cars crash and explode in flames.

We've all seen car chases like that in movies and on television programmes. It's the kind of scene that keeps you on the edge of your seat. Driving a stunt car is an exciting job, but it can also be dangerous.

The stunt doubles who fill in for television and movie stars have years of training and experience. They won't attempt a stunt unless it's been planned right down to the smallest detail. They make sure that they have the right equipment and that they're working with a team they can rely on.

When it comes to doing car stunts, being able to drive a car is just the beginning. A stunt driver needs to learn how to leap a car over other vehicles or how to crash or roll one.

# In the Driver's Seat: Tim Wong

Tim has rolled out of moving vehicles and taken part in precision driving and car hits. He's also fallen from vehicles that were hanging in the air. After doing advanced driving classes, learning skid control, and getting advice from experienced stunt drivers on the job, Tim got a lucky break when a stunt co-ordinator needed a double for a commercial. He chose Tim because Tim looked like the actor in the commercial and also because of his previous training.

Since then, Tim's stunts have appeared in many other commercials and also in films and video games. His most exciting stunt so far has been falling onto a surfboard from a spinning jeep.

## How do they roll a car?

Often they use a ramp (which is usually hidden by a parked vehicle or a wall).

1. The stunt driver drives the car towards a ramp.
2. One set of wheels goes onto the ramp.

"I was hung upside down by 10-metre wires, with huge fans blowing on the car to make it look like a storm. It was really challenging."

Tim's other skills include rock climbing, kung fu, and acting, and he does a range of other stunt work, such as stair falls and fights.

He loves the range of work and the vehicles he gets to drive – but no matter what the situation, Tim always says no if he thinks a stunt is beyond his ability.

3. The car tips and rolls.

Sometimes, when a ramp cannot be used, a cannon blasts a steel pipe into the ground under the car to make it airborne. (Although it's called a "cannon", it's really a small explosive charge.)

# Stunt Safety

Safety is really important. Before going near a vehicle, a stunt driver makes sure that their body is protected with elbow and knee pads, padded shorts to cover their hips and tailbone, and a full-length back protector. Sometimes they may need a helmet, flameproof clothing, or a special collar around their neck to stop whiplash.

A stunt co-ordinator oversees each stunt to make sure it's performed safely and goes to plan. For a car crash, the driver is strapped into a five-point harness, which is much stronger than a normal seatbelt. Where possible, everything inside the car that could cause an injury, such as the mirror, is taken out, and the car is fitted with a roll cage made of metal piping, which adds strength and helps to prevent the driver being crushed or trapped inside. To cut down the chance of fire, the fuel tank is replaced with a special and much smaller tank, and people are on hand with fire extinguishers to put out any unexpected flames.

Sometimes a driver has to be set alight as part of the stunt. In this case, the driver wears two or three layers of woollen long johns soaked in water gel under their clothing for protection. They also put water gel on any bare skin. Sometimes they wear the special fireproof suits that were developed for racing car drivers.

Special effects people then put stunt fire gel on the stunt driver's clothing. It burns cooler than petrol or kerosene (but it's still very hot), and it doesn't soak into the clothes that the driver is wearing or spill onto the ground.

Although the stunt drivers and film-makers take as much care as possible, stunts do not always go to plan. Often drivers push the limits, and sometimes unexpected things happen, or people are rushed, and they make mistakes. Stunt drivers can be seriously injured – or even lose their lives.

One thing that has made car stunts safer is technology. By using digital effects, action scenes that used to be done by stunt doubles (such as running away from a car explosion) can now be done with star actors.

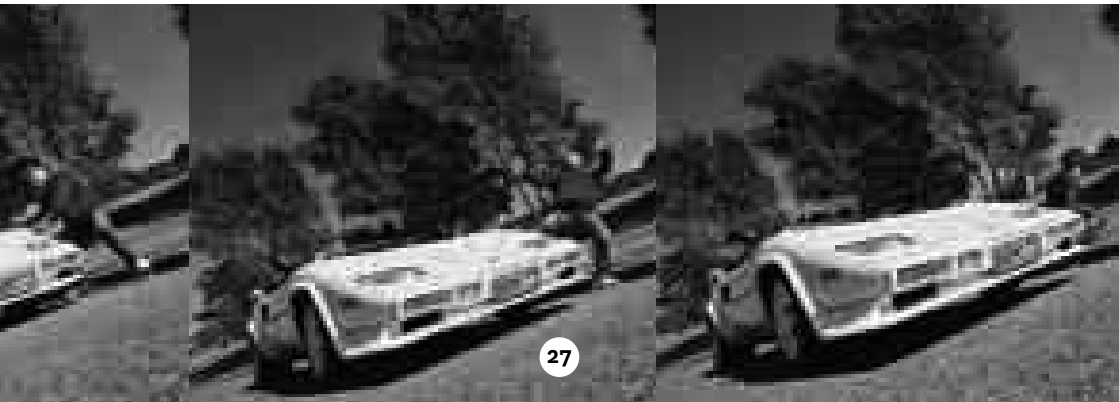
# Working as a Stunt Driver

Getting a job as a stunt driver can be hard. New stunt drivers are competing against experienced ones who have lots of skills, and there are not many vacancies. Usually jobs only come up because people have retired.

Being a stunt driver can involve working long days in bad weather. The work may only be part-time, which is why Peter suggests learning extra skills to increase the chances of getting other stunt work. (Most stunts involve things like fights and falls down stairs or through windows.)

There are no professional stunt schools in New Zealand, but there are courses overseas. Each course costs thousands of dollars, and once a driver has learnt how to do the stunts, they still need to practise a lot. Successfully completing a stunt training course isn't counted as a qualification by the New Zealand Stunt Guild, but a course can give you an idea of whether stunt work is really the job for you.

On the positive side, stunt drivers can earn around $500 a day. They visit interesting places, get free meals, and meet all kinds of people in the film and television industries. They also get to see themselves on screen and their name in the credits. Best of all, they use their skills and experience to do some very exciting things with vehicles, which entertain and thrill thousands of people.



# Tips from an expert

Peter Hassall, an experienced stuntman, offers the following tips for breaking into the industry:

- Get as many different types of vehicle licences as you can.
- Study maths, physics, and mechanics.
- Do advanced driving courses and get a first-aid certificate.
- Gain experience in car racing.
- Learn how to do things such as gymnastics, martial arts, and horse riding so that you can do other stunt work.
- Find work as an extra to learn what it's like working on a film set or on location.
- Join the New Zealand Stunt Guild, which promotes and protects the interests of stunt people. (See www.stuntguildnz.com)

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Editor: Kay Hancock
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