

2004/April CATHY FORDE - Publishing News

It turns out that Cathy Forde's debut novel, last year's *Fat Boy Swim*, is actually her third book - the first two, *Think Me Back* and *The Finding*, were published by The House of Lochar, a small imprint based on the island of Colonsay in Argyll and Bute. There is a lot of Scotland in Forde's writing, a lot of attitude and lingo and Irn Bru colour - very powerful and all there in her new book *Skarrs*.

Had she found it tough to sell a story, so well salted with dialect, to a London editor? "I didn't think I'd ever sell *anything* down here, but I write what I hear in my head," says Forde, an ex English teacher turned lexicographer who says she began writing when her youngest son started school, because she'd rather write than Hoover while she waited for supply teaching work. "I try and contextualize the dialect, but the words I use are the only ones that'll do."

Skarrs is a heady mix of broken glass emotions, tough, edgy dialogue and page-turning storytelling. There are, in fact, two stories being told simultaneously as we follow a boy called Danny as he nosedives out of the orbit of family and school and comes under the malevolent influence of Jakey, and also discover, bit by slow bit, what happened to his Grandpa Dan during the war in Burma.

While the story is in no way autobiographical, Forde admits that her family can be found there, in spirit at least. "The Old Dear [Danny's mother] is part of me, and Danny is also part of me - and he's part of my anxieties about what I don't want him to be - and Grandpa Dan is my dad, although he never fought the Japanese."

Running through Danny's story is a rock solid core of music. It is, says Forde, a huge part of all her stories and in particular this one as *Skarrs* are a band Danny's obsessed by. "The characters were so real to me, they liked music and it had to be there...I knew what they'd listen to and like," she continues. And the *Skarrs* lyrics in the book? "I wrote them. They're simple and I suppose I was so into Danny's head it was easy to do...I know there are

these right wing bands and that they must write [inflammatory lyrics] like this, so I did it.”

Forde never set out with the intention of writing for children “...I wanted to do adult fiction, but I just happen to write stories with young people in them...it would be presumptuous to say I understand them, but I do remember what it was like - so intense that you’ll never feel like that again. Writing about it is like revisiting the intensity, being observational and not preaching, as there’s no point...and you just hope some kind of message escapes. I don’t know if, when my kids have grown up, I’ll write different stories.” We’ll have to wait and see.