

2007/Feb CATHY HOPKINS - Publishing News

Some people run away to join the circus (or so the phrase goes), Cathy Hopkins left home to join an ashram. Having seen Guru Maharaji talk in North London in the Seventies, she upped sticks and joined him, working for his organisation for 16 years. It's an unusual background for someone who would become the teens' queen of pink lit, but there's no doubt that some of the calming meditation techniques she learnt have stood her in good stead - especially when Piccadilly's Brenda Gardner, publisher of her *Mates, Dates* series, told her that total global sales exceeded three million. "I knew they'd been translated into 25 languages, but I had no idea they'd sold so *many!*"

As well as the *Mates, Dates* series, which has now come to an end, Hopkins also writes the *Truth, Dare, Kiss or Promise* titles and has proved to have an unerring eye for what is important, indispensable and absolutely core to her teenage readers. They will no doubt be delighted that coming next month is her new trilogy, *Cinnamon Girl*, and its launch title *This Way to Paradise*.

Her previous series have both been very much London books, set in easily recognisable areas like Camden Town. For *Cinnamon Girl* she has, this time, gone further afield with her new character India Jane. "Brenda asked me to write about a subject that was closer to my own experience, have my character come from a big family and one that moves round a lot. I have five brothers, but we didn't travel quite as much as India Jane, who's from a very large, very Bohemian family. She has a much more colourful background than the girls in *Mates, Dates*, and she's older, too, 15, so there's also a boy/girl element, and there's so much fun to be had with that."

Hopkins started writing in 1986, producing a string of non-fiction titles, as well as trying, unsuccessfully, to write chic-lit fiction and keeping the writing boat afloat with numerous other jobs. It wasn't until she changed agents in 2000, going to the now sadly deceased Rosemary Bromley, that things changed. "She was 79 when she took me on, and phoned me up one

day, after she'd read something I'd sent her, and told me, 'You've got the literary voice of a 14 year-old girl!'; if she hadn't spotted that I'd still be getting rejection slips from adult editors. Rosemary sent my idea off to Brenda, who commissioned me there and then to do three books."

Hopkins has a genuine connection with her characters, and a real respect for her audience. "I don't write heavy, literary fiction, but the average girl doesn't read literary fiction. And I don't talk down to them or lecture them either, I just try and remember what it was like. I know my readership now and I write for girls who don't like to read."