

Finding her place in the universe

By Mitchell Jennings

AUTHOR Heidi Goh has always felt tiny under the microscope of our vast universe, and it is this feeling that has informed her work including her debut creation *York's Universe* which she released earlier this month.

"I guess it's been this real constant theme for me of trying to place myself in the universe and that informs a lot of my writing for both adults and children."

Heidi, who now resides in Sydney, always dreamed of being an author whilst she grew up being schooled at Taree West and Chatham Primary Schools and later Chatham High School.

"I always wanted to be an author and I always loved stories."

Though she had wanted to write for adults her evolution as a writer and artist led her to writing for children.

"My brother, who's eight years older than me, is an artist and really encouraged me to persist with and pursue my art when I was at high school."

Her brother was one of several mentors not the least of whom

was her English teacher Chris Abbott who attended the launch of "York's Universe" at the Better Read than Dead bookstore in Newtown at the end of September.

"He was more of a personal mentor than anything else," Heidi recalls.

"I was going through some difficult times at school but he imbued a faith in my own ability in

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me that helped me persist in those difficult times."

With the encouragement of Mr Abbott and her family, Heidi enrolled at the National Art School believing it would be a great way to inform the writing she also still felt a yearning for.

"I've always used my art as a way to visualise my written work, and I guess one artform fed directly into the other."

Following art school Heidi at-

tended UNE where she obtained a Bachelor of Arts (English) degree in which she also indulged her passion for astronomy by taking several courses in the discipline.

So how did the solar system and the universe come to inform her work so heavily?

"My Dad was a science teacher and he loved to ask these questions about the universe and the way it could be explained and the ways it couldn't."

Her own fascination with the universe combined well with the fact that it is great fodder for the imagination and, in Heidi's opinion, an artwork in itself.

"It really is so abstract, it's really like a piece of abstract art."

York's Universe is a beautiful marriage of Heidi's three passions (writing, art and astronomy) that was eight years in the making.

"It was from conception to publication an eight year process that began with just five images, but I learned a lot about the challenges of writing for children."

These included a painstaking re-evaluation of the text in the interests of subtle simplifications.

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Heidi Goh with her husband Benjamin at the launch of York's Universe at Better Read than Dead bookstore Newtown in September.

Transformation from a writer to author

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“You have to be far more economical with words when you’re writing for children and you have to leave enough space for the child’s own imagination to take them to their own special place within the story.”

Following the difficult process of getting her work published, Heidi is still getting used to calling herself an author.

“When you finally get published it’s this amazing transformation, you’re no longer a writer but an author which still feels strange to say.”

Heidi’s hectic schedule included an in store appearance at Manning Valley

Books. Heidi did some readings, led the children in some cosmic crafts and was happy to sign copies of the book.

Heidi went to great lengths to express gratitude to her family and particularly her parents, John and Lesley East, who still reside in Old Bar.

“Realising a lifelong dream is an amazing thing to reflect on.

“My brother’s an artist, my sister’s a composer and now I’m an author and we all owe that to mum and dad for always encouraging us to pursue our dreams. This book is dedicated to them.”