

## Unity Books

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**From:** Unity Books  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 29 April 2003 18:50  
**To:** 'linda.henderson@booksellers.co.nz'  
**Subject:** NZ books

Dear Linda

I don't know whether you are planning to respond to Steve Braunias' abysmal page 94 column (Listener May 3) but if so, you may like some information to hand - NZ fiction represents 8.4% and NZ nonfiction 11.5% of our total sales to EOY 31 March 2003. NZ children's publishing is absorbed into our department for general children's books so our total NZ sales are over 20%.

All the best  
Tilly

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Unity Books  
'The Best of Both Words'  
57 Willis Street  
Wellington  
04 499 4245 Ph  
04 499 4246 Fax

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# Help yourself

A YEAR HAS PASSED SINCE I WAS appointed books editor of the *Listener*. You get to deal with most of the best literary minds in New Zealand, but apart from that it's a good job. A basic requirement is that it calls for you to select from close to a thousand books – that's an estimate of how many have crossed my desk in the past 12 months – when deciding which titles ought to feature in the magazine. The questions are immediate and crucial. Are you choosing the best, the most important books? Or are you overlooking works of marvellous promise, even of genius? Have you given local authors and publishers a fair shake? Do they deserve a fair shake? How sensitive are you to representing valuable studies by lesbians and academics? Such issues take up many seconds of an average day.

The vast majority of books are ignored. More exactly, they are thrown into a tin filing cabinet next to my office, and when the shelves are full, a great event takes place at the *Listener*: a book draw is announced.

I held the latest draw just before Easter. At least 200, probably more like 300 books were up for grabs. It was revealing to inspect this jumble sale of the neglected and rejected laid out on desks. Rightly or wrongly, there were rather a number of New Zealand titles that I decided against featuring in the *Listener*: *Psalms for the Road* by Joy Cowley, *Cannabis on the Brain* by Paul Smith, *The Topp Twins Book*, *The History Makers* by Vaughan Yarwood, *The Dirty Decade: New Zealand in the 1980s* by Stephen Stratford, *Are We There Yet?* by Graeme Lay, *Looking for Trouble* by Glenda Hughes, *Outrageous Cricket Moments* by Ian Smith, *Back in the Shed* by Jim Hopkins, and other similar nonsense.

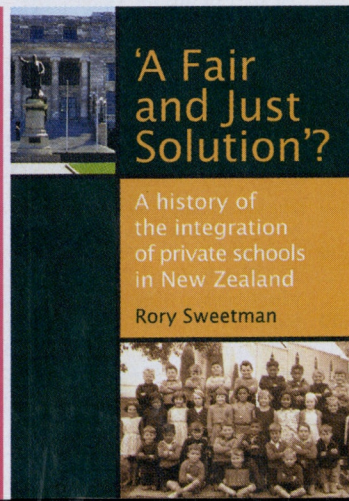
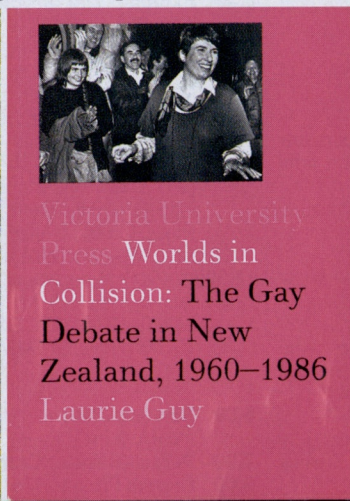
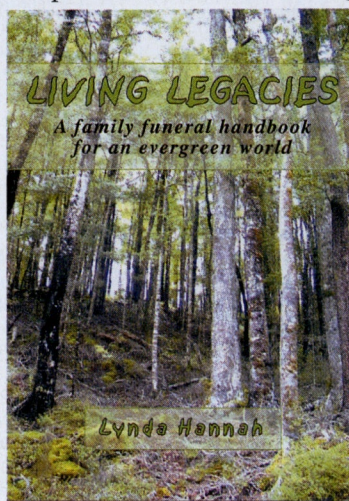
The staff descended, the draw was made. Homes were found for popular authors Anne Rice, Scott Turow, Stephen King, Dean Koontz. Two blokes fought for the *Kama Sutra*. As a consolation, I gave the guy who lost out the copy of *Cannabis on the Brain*. There was popular demand for science fiction, fantasy, self-help

books and other similar nonsense.

All well and good. But what sadness it was to survey the 30 unclaimed books – the leftovers, the dregs, the books I literally couldn't give away. It's so damned unfair. The authors would have worked hard and with good intentions. They deserve better than this wretched fate.

In short, could someone please take them off my hands? There are books no one ever wants – poetry, and young adult fiction – but also a variety of non-fiction titles that are quite, you know, interesting. For example:

for this I give thanks to God," writes Guy, a lecturer in church history. Good on him. One can only imagine the deep personal enrichment he got from writing 1437 appendices. Guy's study reminds us of Simon le Vay's four experiments to determine sexual orientation. "The first is physiological response to potentially erotic stimuli. For males this means penile wiring to a meter, something which may be possible for an individual, but hardly applicable for assessing a society." Well, I don't know. Saddam Hussein probably tried it on.



Free to a good home: three lost classics.

**LIVING LEGACIES: A family funeral handbook for an evergreen world**, by Lynda Hannah (PO Box 140, Motueka, \$35). This slim, practical guide to how to dispose of the dead sometimes makes for a lively read. Hannah, who runs her own environmental funeral company near Motueka, recommends cardboard coffins (her firm charges \$100), and gives very clear instructions about laying out a body in the home: "Ice should be placed underneath the body soon after a person has died ... You may need 20-30kg for a three-day vigil depending on the size of the person." And did you know there is a New Zealand Day of the Dead, held on the first Sunday in November? Hannah comes up with a list of incredibly boring suggestions of how to celebrate that day: "Change the batteries in your smoke alarm ... Have a medical check-up ... Give a copy of this book to someone you care about."

**WORLDS IN COLLISION: The Gay Debate in New Zealand, 1960-1986**, by Laurie Guy (Victoria University Press, \$39.95). "I have been deeply enriched personally by this study and

**'A FAIR AND JUST SOLUTION?': A history of the integration of private schools in New Zealand**, by Rory Sweetman (Dunmore Press, \$34.95). Look at this for a great first sentence: "Anyone attempting to write the history of so contemporary and controversial an issue as the integration of private schools into the state education system should remember the adage that those who follow too closely on the heels of history risk having their teeth kicked in." And it gets better! Probably. Mr Sweetman wrote me a letter in November suggesting three possible reviewers, but it's my understanding that they have all died.

Okay. I'll chuck all the books in a box and pay for the postage. Simply write to: "Invisible Ink", c/o the *Listener*, PO Box 90783, Auckland Mail Centre. I'll draw the winning envelope from a hat, although I suspect I won't need a particularly big hat. You don't have to answer a question or fill out a form. All I ask is that you do not under any circumstances send them back. ■