

# Bear and Chook by the Sea

AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR NOTES

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Written by Lisa Shanahan

Illustrated by Emma Quay

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## Author notes from Lisa Shanahan:

For some time after I had written *Bear and Chook*, people encouraged me to think about a sequel. For ages, I had been wrestling with what would happen next. Then one day a phrase drifted into my head ‘Bear and Chook were fast asleep when a breeze came sniffing and licking.’

Funnily enough, I later realised that the answer to where Bear and Chook would go next could be found in the first book, if only I had the eyes to see it, from the moment Bear climbed the mud castle and waved from the turret, saying to Chook, ‘I can see the sea...’.

To get to the sea, of course, there has to be danger along the way. They have to leave the pond, their familiar home. There is a bridge, a forest, a mountain. Places they have to travel under, through and over before they finally arrive. This part of their journey has the echo of a quest.

I wanted *Bear and Chook by the Sea* to reflect the style of the first book, which is why the sequel has similar sorts of poetic rhythm. I knew that children loved the repeated refrains in *Bear and Chook* and I wanted to give them something similar to hold onto in *Bear and Chook by the Sea*. I wanted *Bear and Chook by the Sea* though to be a different reading experience. So I wrote the text as a circular story because it captures so well two characters journeying from home to the sea and then from the sea back to home. I included a pattern of onomatopoeia to capture the rhythms of the journey. On the return journey though, this sequence changes slightly, which speaks not only to Bear’s wild panic, but also subtly to the greater theme that although Bear and Chook come back via the same path to their home, they are in some way slightly different, thanks to their experience by the sea.

*Bear and Chook* and *Bear and Chook by the Sea* are both meditations on the nature of friendship. When I was a child, I wanted a best friend desperately, that one person who I could laugh with and share secrets with, that one person who would be with me wherever I might go, in real life and in my imaginary world. And the memory of that desire, I think is at the heart of both books.

In a way, both books explore the idea that friendship is one of the best frameworks in which we can make sense of this world and the questions we face. In *Bear and Chook* the eternal question Bear and Chook

face (and the question children everywhere face) is ‘What will I be?’ and in *Bear and Chook by the Sea*, the question they face is ‘Where will I go?’

True friendship is a beautiful thing but it's also a little scary. Being a true friend always requires more courage than we think we have and more kindness than we think we need. The thing I hope children will see in *Bear and Chook by the Sea* is the truth that deep friendship has this amazing capacity to make us more than we will ever be, just on our own, no matter where we go.

Thanks to Bear's irrepressible confidence, Chook is given a gift in *Bear and Chook by the Sea*. Chook learns to face his fears because Bear's example encourages him to be brave. This allows Chook to eventually enjoy the sea; to find the perfect sea shell, to scratch, peck and poke, to relish the feel of crunchy sand, and the mysteries of a rock pool. Thanks to Chook, when Bear's irrepressible confidence is finally dashed in the sand, Chook is able to encourage Bear with the right sort of comfort, at the right time which is a very difficult thing—primarily because the type comfort that Chook has to offer comes through the experience of being little and in danger nearly every day. This is the gift he gives back to Bear.

I hope children delight in the deepening empathy between Bear and Chook. And I hope they enjoy the delicious comfort of seeing the story end in a familiar way, with the two friends lying by the pond, watching the moon, considering the day just past.

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### Illustrator notes from Emma Quay:

When I first read Lisa's text, I thought the language was beautiful. I loved the fact that Bear is just as enthusiastic in this story, but Chook get to show a little more gusto and courage this time. I liked the way she had inconspicuously woven in elements from the first book, but this story also stood perfectly well on its own.

I was commissioned to illustrate *Bear and Chook by the Sea* some time before I was able to begin the project. In the meantime I was working on *Emily and Alfie* and *Cheeky Monkey*, but Bear and Chook's new adventure was always in the back on my mind. I knew I was going to have to depict Bear and Chook's home. It hadn't been shown in the first book, but this story began and ended at home, beside the pond. I wondered what their home was going to be like. I knew it would have to be ramshackle—its contents thrown together from various elements, as the characters recycle scrap, household objects and toys for their projects in the first book. I also knew that Bear would need to be able to see the stars from where he was lying in bed, and to feel the breeze on his face. Bear and Chook could have been sleeping outdoors, but they needed a home to return to at the end of the book. Perhaps they could have lived in a cave, as bears do, but I wanted Bear to look up at the night sky. Instead I made them a small stone hut,

with a hinged corrugated iron roof. Bear can use a long bamboo prop to lift the roof and see the stars without even getting out of bed.

I decided to give Bear a big, old, tasseled hammock to sleep in. It has seen better days—it’s rather frayed at the edges, and held up at one end by a knotted skipping rope. He is lounging on several comfortable cushions. By contrast, Chook has made up a bed in a small hand basket. Chook’s basket dangles by the handle from the knotted fringe of Bear’s hammock. I wanted their sleeping arrangements to be symbolic of their relationship. In the first *Bear and Chook* book, Chook always comes out rather the worse for wear in Bear’s ventures. Here, even in repose, Chook’s comfort is at the mercy of Bear’s every move. If Bear turns over in bed, Chook’s little basket bed will swing precariously. When Bear gets out of bed, Chook will plunge to the floor!

The story starts in the early morning, when it’s still dark. Bear and Chook walk through the dawn and see the sun rise over the sea, they play at the beach all day in the sun, walk home at dusk, arriving after dark, in time to lie by the pond and watch the moon again. There were going to be so many different lighting conditions in the illustrations, I knew it was going to be a challenge. I also knew this would give the book quite a different look and feel to the first book, although I intended to keep some reassuring similarities. I didn’t want the early pictures in *Bear and Chook by the Sea* to be too dark for us to see what was going on, so I dimly lit Bear and Chook’s room with a string of old party lights, hanging from the rafters. Light and warmth gradually creep into the illustrations from then on, until we enjoy the heat and sunshine of a day at the seaside.

I used acrylics paints again for the illustrations, just as I did in the first book. It had been eight years since I’d painted Bear and Chook first time around, but luckily I’d kept notes on the shades of paint I’d used for everything, so I was able to dig out that list and make the two characters exactly the same colours in the second book—a nice watery Australian Sienna with touches of Red Oxide for Chook’s feathers, and washes of Cobalt and Cerulean Blue on Bear. Some new colours were introduced and repeated throughout the book—the citrus green of the inflatable lilo, and the narrow royal blue stripes of Bear’s beach towel (which also appear on the endpapers). The deep aquamarines of the ocean and sandy ochres of the shore add a different atmosphere to the setting of this story.

When the friends get to the beach, Bear is excited, looking out to sea. Chook, however, is looking down—focusing on the texture of the sand under his feet, a scrap of washed-up seaweed, a crab in a rock pool. As I did in the first book, I decided to play with scale and to sometimes bring Chook into the foreground, making the diminutive character much larger on the page than Bear and therefore focusing our attention on him. When Chook finally lifts his head to look out to sea, he is horrified. Bear is going in. Chook’s anxiety is elevated when Bear fool-hardily plunges into the waves with only a floppy inflatable lilo for buoyancy. In this book I added a double page spread with multiple Bears, when Bear is rolled and dumped in the surf.

However, when Bear’s confidence is dented and he wants to go home, it is Chook who rises to the occasion. In contrast with the friends’ outward journey (where Chook was the reluctant traveller), on the walk home Chook is the stronger one. I painted him coming up from behind to walk in front of Bear—to be the leader, encouraging and guiding Bear home, in the fading light. Chook manages to lug the bulky bag and unwieldy lilo along (despite their being bigger than him) whilst also holding Bear’s hand—all the way home. A long way for a chook. What a great friend – he must have been exhausted, but he still made Bear some delicious comfort food when they got home.

At the end of the story, the two friends again lie by the pond to watch the moon. I knew I wanted the illustrations on the closing spreads to be reassuringly similar to the corresponding scenes in the first book, but not to replicate them. I wanted children to have the thrill and satisfaction of recognition, of familiarity, like spending time with old friends. Bear and Chook again lie in the grass and look at the moon over the water, but this time they use the semi-deflated lilo as a pillow, Bear’s damp towel hangs in the branches of a tree to dry, its fringe catching the breeze, and the moon is a crescent.

Illustrative technique: Black Chinagraph pencil and acrylic paints on cold press watercolour paper. You can see some of the artworks in progress on the ILLUSTRATING PICTURE BOOKS page at Emma Quay’s website: [www.emmaquay.com](http://www.emmaquay.com)

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