

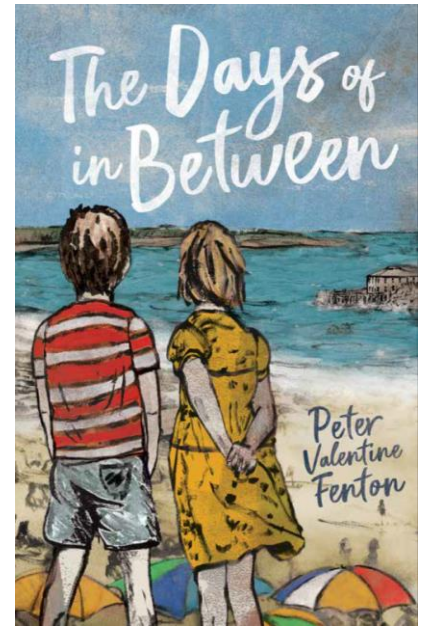
# The Days of in Between

Author

Peter Valentine Fenton

Illustrator

David Bromley



## Synopsis

In the summer of the year between primary and high school, Toby's life has suddenly brought more change than he knows how to deal with. A new house in a new area, a new stepmother, and the looming terror of next year attending a new school filled with strangers. In the midst of all this newness, Toby has been clinging to the idea of time spent in the same small coastal town where his family has always had a caravan in a beachside caravan park. The idea of the same beach, the same shops, nights spent sleeping in his same old bunk, and days spent fishing with his father all hold a promising allure of a familiar happiness for Toby. Meanwhile, Tara too is having to deal with change in her life. The big and horrible changes took place years ago, but Tara will never stop missing her mum, and her father's increasing protectiveness and her brother's ever-growing irate distance from her leaves her feeling progressively more isolated and bereft. Like Toby, Tara too has looked forward to summer. She loves living in a sleepy tiny seaside town for most of the year, but adores the swelling vibrancy and bustle that the annual influx of summer holiday-makers brings. For both Toby and Tara, the summer will turn out to be full of events and exposed secrets that they never expected, and as they help each other navigate the murky waters of family relationships and unexpected revelations, they each succeed in finding a new and unexpected place of hopeful contentment as they leave the dubious protection of childhood and set out on their journey towards adulthood through their days of in between.

## About the Author

Musician and actor Peter Fenton came to attention when his band Crow forged a reputation as one of the most important Australian bands of the 1990s. Peter also starred in the critically-acclaimed film *Praise*, adapted from the Vogel Award-winning novel by Andrew McGahan and the ABC TV drama *Love is a Four Letter Word*. His short film as co-producer/actor, *Bunny New Girl*, has won fifteen awards, and screened in over 25 countries at 110 festivals and is now a veritable viral phenomenon on the Internet. *The Days of in Between* is his first novel.

## About the Illustrator

David Bromley is one of Australia's most collectible and successful artists. He exhibits his work widely internationally and has been a finalist at the Archibald Prize six times.

## Themes

Key themes include: Family, friendship, honesty, secrets, growing-up, loneliness, love, compassion, and hope.

## Writing Style

Written throughout in the third person, the viewpoint alternates between Tara and Toby. Tension builds slowly in Tara's story, with her character both more enigmatic, and her past less transparent than Toby's. Her actions are driven in large part by her personal history, and reader-suspense is created by the interaction between the revelations of her past experiences and their unpredictable effect on her current choices. In contrast, the tension in Toby's story is present from the beginning, his past is clear and unambiguous, and the increasing plot-tension relies on his internal distress at the behaviour of his father and step mother, his feelings of abandonment, and his fear of what the future will bring with him living in their house and attending a strange school.

## Illustration Style

David's artwork, featured on the cover and chapter headings, is highly evocative, capturing in the simple lines and soft-toned palette the essence of summer and of childhood. The interior artwork is uncoloured, and the recurring motifs bring an added depth to the story, hinting at the plot features contained within each chapter. David's choice to portray the characters exclusively in rear view creates an illusion of looking forward, and includes the reader as an observer in their activities much as they are observing the world around them as the novel progresses.

## TEACHERS' NOTES

- 1) Before reading the novel, as a class discuss the cover and title of the story. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - What does the image on the cover show?
  - Who do you think the story might be about?
  - What can we tell about the people on the cover from the artwork – where are they, what time of year is it, and how old do they look?
  - What does *in between* mean, and what do you think *The Days of in Between* might refer to?
- 2) How does the author set the scene in the opening chapter? After reading the first chapter, in small groups make a list of facts that you now know about Toby and his life. When making your list bear in mind all the 'wh- questions' asked and answered by reporters: *Who, what, where, when, why and how*. Think about what has already happened, what is happening now, and what will happen next. Consider the difference between stated and implied facts. For instance, what does the fact that it is happening just after Christmas, and it is summer, tell us about where it is set?
- 3) Based on the information in the story, draw a map of how you visualise the layout of the small seaside town where Tara lives and Toby's family has their caravan.

- 4) Toby's father fought in the Vietnam War, and since he has come back he has been finding life hard in a lot of ways. When was the Vietnam War, and in what way was Australia involved?
- 5) Toby is concerned about starting at a high school next year where he doesn't know any of the other students. Starting at a new school can be stressful and confusing, and the attitudes and behaviour of the students who are already there can make a big difference to how a new student feels. As a class discuss how it feels to go somewhere filled with unfamiliar people, or to start at a new school. Brainstorm and think of some of the things that you might do or say to a newcomer to your school, that could help them feel more comfortable and welcomed.
- 6) Using paint, sand, twigs and leaves, and scraps of paper and cloth, create a collage of a beachside scene based on one of the descriptions in the novel.
- 7) When Toby and Tara walk up the mountain they observe a huge variety of different things, and Tara collects at different times both berries and a discarded wetsuit. Go on a bush walk in a local park, reserve, or other bushland area, take photos of any interesting wildlife or plants that you see, and help clean up the area by (carefully) collecting any rubbish that you see on your walk. Be sure to wear protective gloves when collecting litter, and ask an adult to pick up anything that may be sharp. When you return to class, write a recount of your bush walk and what you found, both the litter and the plants and animals.
- 8) As a class, re-read the first paragraph on page 56 describing the beach as Toby sees it. Discuss the variety of different images that the author has created in this one short paragraph, and how he has done it. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - How many different objects, people, and places is the author including in his description?
  - How many different senses does the author appeal to in his descriptions?
  - What are the descriptive words (the adjectives and adverbs) that the author has used in his descriptions?
  - What literary techniques – such as metaphor, simile, personification, alliteration etc – are used in this description?
  - How does the author describe the transistor radios? What impact does this description have on how you perceive the mood of the people on beach?
- 9) Write a paragraph describing a scene based on one of your favourite summer memories. Think about both what you are describing and how, and try to use some of the different techniques you identified in exercise 8 above.
- 10) After reading the story, look carefully at the artwork at the start of each chapter and as a class discuss the symbolism and meaning of each picture. As a class discuss what you think the meaning of each picture is, its relevance to the story as a whole, and if and how it encapsulates events that occurred in that specific chapter. Some things to include in your discussion are:
  - What do you think each picture means?
  - Who is shown in the different pictures?
  - Which images repeat throughout the novel?
  - How are the different images or motifs combined?

- Why do you think the different elements are combined as they are, and what is their relevance to the story overall and the chapter in particular?
- How well does the artwork at the start of each chapter represent the events that occur in that specific chapter?
- Why do you think that the figures are consistently facing away from the viewer – what is the impact of this on the reader, and what might it imply about the characters in the novel?
- What does each picture have in common with the others, and in what ways are they all distinct from each other?

11) Choose one of the events in the novel which is not featured in the illustrations, and create an artwork illustrating that event. Use the artwork on the cover and in the chapter headers for inspiration, and try to draw and colour your piece in a similar style.

12) Toby feels as if he is living in *The Days of in Between*. If you had to write a book about yourself set during the most recent school holidays, what type of days might you describe them as having been? Think of an appropriate title using the form Days of \_\_\_\_\_ for your imagined novel, and create a cover page for your story. Write a paragraph to caption your cover art, sharing your reasoning behind your title choice, and describing where your book is set.