

Reviews – Elephants Have Wings

## Tasmanian Times

[New children's picture book, 'Elephants Have Wings', promotes peace and social inc](#)

Acclaimed author Susanne Gervay's new children's picture book, *Elephants Have Wings* (Ford Street Publishing, H/B \$26.95,) is inspired by the ancient story of the blind men and the elephant and promotes the importance of peace and inclusion to younger readers.

Inspired by Susanne's journey to India and South East Asia, she returned imbued with the cultures of India and Asia and the parable of the blind men and the elephant with its spiritual traditions in Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Sufism and modern philosophy. As the child of refugees, Susanne wanted to open a discussion about pathways to peace by creating an illustrative text that gave young people positive ways to navigate a world torn by conflict.

Beautifully illustrated by Anna Pignataro, *Elephants Have Wings* follows the story of two children, riding on the wings of a mystical white elephant, embark on an extraordinary journey to discover the meaning of the parable of the blind men and the elephant, and the humanity in all of us. Endorsed by the esteemed Blake Society and created by the award-winning picture book team of Susanne Gervay AO and Anna Pignataro, *Elephants Have Wings* is a remarkable book that promotes peace and understanding to young readers.

<http://tasmaniantimes.com/index.php?/books-article/New-childrens-picture-book-Elephants-Have-Win/>



### **Elephants Have Wings**

*Elephants Have Wings* by Susanne Gervay, illustrated by Anna Pignataro (Ford Street Publishing)

HB RRP \$26.95

HB ISBN 978-1925000399

PB RRP \$16.95

PB ISBN 978-1925000405

Reviewed by Francine Sculli

When writer Susanne Gervay and illustrator Anna Pignataro teamed up a couple of years ago to deliver the impeccable book *Ships in the Field* it was evident that their union was destined to bring deep thought on important topics to the picture book world. Their latest offering,

*Elephants Have Wings*, cements them as a powerhouse duo, bringing something different to the page.

*Elephants Have Wings*, is a beautiful tale rich with the tapestries of ancient storytelling, spirituality and mythology. Placed in the Asian-Indian region, the book starts with two children asking their father to tell them *the* story – their grandfather’s story. The father commences, telling the wide-eyed children how their grandfather sent him and the other children out one night to look for “the secret”. All of the children saw different things and argued about who is right and who is wrong, until the grandfather came out and circled his light through the night, revealing a majestic elephant and showing that all the children were right but wrong at the same time.

The two children ask their father to tell them what their grandfather’s secret was, but he tells them that they must discover it themselves. The children spur each other on, willing on the vision of the elephant, who takes them on a journey through the air, over the wilderness, red deserts and snowy peaks, and through the sparkling stars to another place, high and faster and farther away. Bringing them home, only when the children have learnt their grandfather’s secret: “Everyone is different, but we’re the same, too. The elephant is in all of us.”

In many ways, this is a complicated picture book that explores rather esoteric themes, often difficult to articulate. What Susanne Gervay and Anna Pignataro do so well together, is bring these themes to life in a magical way that taps into children’s natural ability and openness to journey through the terrain of social inclusion, spirituality, unity, empathy and understanding. With roots in the ancient story of the blind men and the elephant, *Elephants Have Wings* is a wildly imaginative tale that is multifaceted. While younger children can lose themselves in the imaginative and magic journey of the children riding on the back of the elephant, older children can lose themselves in the mythology and modern importance of this tale.

And like *Ships in the Field*, Susanne has penned effortlessly poetic words that take us right through the sparkly stars with the children and Anne’s illustrations perfectly compliment this poeticism with pages of expressionistic watercolours and collages, whimsical in tone, that capture the peace, serenity and ethereal nature of this book.

A must read for those with a thirst for something different, unique and beautiful.

<http://www.buzzwordsmagazine.com/>

## **BOOMERANG BOOKS**

Review by Julie Fison

<http://blog.boomerangbooks.com.au/susanne-gervays-elephants-have-wings/2014/10>

Susanne Gervay is an award-winning author, speaker, recipient of the Order of Australia and all-round dynamo. She rushed into my life last year at the Central Queensland Literary Festival. I had the pleasure of sharing an apartment, and lots of stories with Susanne during

our week-long visit to schools in Rockhampton and Emerald. Her energy was infectious whether we were visiting schools, snorkelling at Great Keppel Island or discussing stories.

Today she joins me to chat about her beautiful new picture book, [Elephants Have Wings](#), which explores the humanity in all of us. The book is illustrated by award-winning illustrator, [Anna Pignataro](#), who has created more than fifty books for children.

## Interview

**JF: Congratulations on your new picture book. Tell us about the inspiration for *Elephants Have Wings*?**

SG: Inspired by my journey to India and South East Asia where I spoke in Delhi, Goa and Singapore, I returned imbued with the cultures and spirituality of India and Asia. I experienced the Baha'i Temple in Delhi where I was part of a service under the open-air lotus roof of the temple. Five young people read from their holy books from five different faiths.

I also became aware of mystical stories. One was the parable of the blind men and the elephant which is part of Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sufism. Another was in Hindu mythology, that during the monsoon rains which refresh the earth, the clouds are regarded as the wings of elephants.

Young people today are overwhelmed with media reports of terrorism and religious conflict, and it is time to reach out and create a safer world for our kids. *Elephants Have Wings* came out of this. It would be a gentle, nurturing picture book celebrating family, inter-generational story, beliefs in a world that is both beautiful and threatened, opening discussions of harmony, inclusion and peace.

As the daughter of refugees, action for inclusion and peace are personal. I was privileged that Anna Pignataro, also the daughter of refugees, would go with me on this journey.

**JF: This is your third picture book. What appeals to you about this type of writing?**

SG: I used to write poetry as a child and also adult. Writing picture books is like a return to this old love. An idea grabs my mind and heart, and with careful words laden with meaning, character and narrative, I use this spare form of writing to create story.

However the real gift of writing picture books is working with a talented illustrator. Anna Pignataro and also Serena Geddes (illustrator for [Gracie and Josh](#)) bring their narrative story to my words, making the picture book richer, expanding and extending ideas, bringing in their own narrative as well.

**JF: It's your second book with illustrator Anna Pignataro, can you give us an insight into that relationship?**

Anna Pignataro and I collaborated closely on both *Ships in the Field* and *Elephants Have Wings*. Both are very complex books thematically. [Ships in the Field](#) is about a refugee family finding home, while *Elephant Have Wings* is the search for truth and harmony.

We discuss every aspect from ideas, design, symbolism, colour, characters, without constraining each other's creative style. It is a wonderful collaboration.