

Kate Constable,  
Author of *Winter Of Grace* (GF10) writes

### **The story behind the book**

The idea behind *Winter Of Grace* came to me quite early on – the story of a friendship between two girls where one friend “gets religion” and the other is horrified by the thought. I wanted to write something about young people and spirituality, because I feel it’s a neglected area. Exploring religion and God and spirituality (and politics) is just as important to some young adults as finding their way round sex and drugs and cyberspace, but it doesn’t get nearly as much attention.

The initial idea came quickly, but for a long while I wasn’t sure who was going to tell the story. Originally it was going to be from the point of view of Stella, the horrified friend. But gradually I realised that it would be more interesting for me, as a curious but fairly non-religious person, to get inside Bridie’s skin and tell the story through her eyes.

In fact, I feel that I’ve swung back and forth between both sides of the Stella-Bridie divide. I grew up in PNG in the 1970s, where missionaries of all varieties were thick on the ground. My best primary school friend, Eva, was the daughter of Finnish missionaries, who had travelled literally to the other side of the world to bring the word of God (as they saw it) to the people of PNG. I remember trying so hard to feel the ecstatic certainty of being “saved,” but never managing to hold onto that feeling for long.

Eva and I lost touch when I moved back to Australia and her family moved to the US, but she wrote to me again when we were about 14. She was still a keen member of the church and covered her letter with “Jesus loves you” stickers. Alas, I felt I had to break it to her that I was now a committed atheist, and worse, a convinced socialist. I never heard from her again.

Maybe Eva would have smiled quietly to herself if she’d known that a few years later, when I was at university and feeling rather lost, I spent some time “church-crawling,” rather like Bridie. But unlike Bridie, I never found a church that felt like home for me. I’ve come close to joining church groups since, but always shied away at the last moment.

While I was writing the book I felt very close to Bridie and sympathetic to her experience, but since finishing it, I feel I’ve drifted back toward the Stella position. I guess the truth is that Stella and Bridie represent two parts of myself that have been sparring since my early teens, and like the girls, I have to accept that one is probably never going to convince the other. All I can do is take what’s best from each of them and hope they find peace in my warring heart (or soul!).