

Always My Sister



A PLAY BY

Michelanne Forster

**A story of love and violence,
poverty and vengeance.**

Wednesday November 6, 2013, 5.30 pm

**The University of Auckland
Drama Studio**

**Presented by The Holloway Press and
the Michael King Writers' Centre**

Author's note

Maggie Reardon was the first and only woman in New Zealand to be transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) to serve a seven year sentence for perjury. She lied to protect her common-law husband, Joe Burns, a vicious murderer, abusive and cunning in equal measure. I wanted to imagine Maggie's descent into degradation and terror without false sentiment, and to explore the effect her choices had on her sister, Sophia Aldwell. I like to think that the bonds between them ultimately did help Maggie salvage her life.

The play is brutal but, ironically, is printed in book form by The Holloway Press within some of the most beautiful pages I have ever had the privilege of being published in. It is a joy to handle this handcrafted work of art, of which there are only fifty copies. To approach the terrors of Maggie's story from the comfort and security of my writing desk at Auckland University, with this exquisite publication as the end result, has been a real privilege.

I began writing this play while I was the Michael King Writing Fellow at Auckland University in 2011. The story, based on actual events, caught my eye after reading *Hill Standing Above: Mt Victoria Takarunga and the Signalman's House, A History* by Karren Beanland.

The Actor's Programme and Unitec School of Screen and Performing Arts helped read aloud an early draft.

I am grateful to my colleagues Michele Hine, Tessa Duder, Peter Simpson, Paul Barrett, Claire Van Beek, Colleen Davies, Josephine Stewart-Te Whiu, Jonny Brugh, Jordan Selway, Lauren Gibson and Torum Heng who supported me by reading aloud subsequent drafts.

Michelanne Forster



Michelanne has written prize-winning plays for adults and children, children's books and television scripts, short stories, and non-fiction books. Her plays have been performed professionally by theatre companies throughout New Zealand, and in the UK, Australia, and the United States. She has been awarded The Buckland Prize for Literature, The Ursula Bethell/ Canterbury University Writer in Residence and the Michael King/University of Auckland Writing Fellowship. After a decade working for Television New Zealand as a script editor, director and producer in the Children and Young Person's department, Michelanne was co-opted by the New Zealand Broadcasting School at the Christchurch Institute of Technology (CPIT), where she supervised academic and applied research projects in film and television. She also taught creative writing at Continuing Education at both Canterbury and Auckland University. Her latest project *20 NZ Playwrights*, written with Vivienne Plumb, will be published by Playmarket in November 2013. She has a new children's play in development, commissioned by the National Children's Theatre, and two books of plays (*Always My Sister*, and *Downfall: Three NZ History Plays*) coming out at the end of the year.

Cast of Characters

Maggie Reardon, an Irish immigrant, early 20s.....Laura Daniels

Sophia Aldwell, her older sister, mid 20s.....Lauren Gibson

Joseph Burns, a ship's carpenter from Liverpool, late 20s..... Paul Barrett

Lights.....Andrew Malmo

The play is set in Auckland, New Zealand between 1843 and 1848.

The name of the traditional Irish song used in the text is *As I roved out*.

The Actors



Lauren Gibson first appeared on stage in Wellington at Circa Theatre in 2007's *Blackbird* and returned to the company in 2011 for her Chapman Tripp award-winning performance in *August: Osage County*. Lauren graduated from Victoria University the same year after completing a BA in Theatre and Media Studies, and also performed in two of BATS Theatre's Young & Hungry Festivals during her time at University. Lauren made the move back to Auckland in 2012 after 14 years in Wellington to study at The Actors' Program, where she completed her diploma last year. Her recent credits include *Elevator* at The Basement, *Apocalypse Z* for Royale Productions, *Anne Boleyn* and *The Heretic* for Auckland Theatre Company.



Laura Daniel finished her studies at Unitec last year with a Bachelor in Performing and Screen Arts. Along with finishing her degree she has performed in *Why Are My Parents So Boring?* at the Court and Fortune Theatres in Christchurch and Dunedin, *The Sex Show* at the Auckland Town Hall and *An Awkward Family Christmas* at The Herald Theatre. Laura has toured with Echelon Productions performing educational musicals and has done several short film projects. She currently performs in a regular late night *Comedy Improv* show at The Basement Theatre on Friday nights.



Paul Barrett is an actor, musical director, vocal coach and voiceover performer. He made his professional debut in 1980 in Wellington, and has subsequently performed in over 150 productions throughout New Zealand and in Australia and Britain. Paul has narrated dozens of books for the Blind Foundation and was voted Narrator of the Year in 2004. In 2009 he and Michelanne wrote a solo show with grand piano called *Tic Tic*, dealing in a humorous way with Paul's lifelong relationship with Tourette's syndrome.

***Always My Sister*, published by The Holloway Press**

This limited-edition book published by The Holloway Press will be launched after the reading of the play. *Always my Sister* is letterpress printed on a Littlejohn cylinder press and bound by Tara McLeod. The type is linotype Granjon 2pt leaded, set by Longley Printing Co. Ltd. Paper is 104gs VIA cream. There are 50 copies. Price: \$150 or \$120 if purchased at the launch.

The Holloway Press

The Holloway Press was established at The University of Auckland in 1994. It is named after Ron Holloway (1909-2003) of The Griffin Press, Auckland, who donated equipment, books and archives to the University. The Press was set up in the Library of the Tamaki Campus under the management of Alan Loney, poet and printer. All books published up to 1998 were designed and printed by Alan Loney. Most Holloway Press Books are now designed, printed and bound by Tara McLeod. The publication policy is to publish a range of texts appropriate to the technology of hand-printing which have unusual literary, artistic, scholarly and/or historical interest and which are unsuitable for commercial publication. After some years of inactivity since Alan Loney's retirement in 1998 the Press resumed an active publishing programme in 2001. The Director is Dr. Peter Simpson. *Always My Sister* is the second in The Signalman's House series initiated by The Press to celebrate the work of writers who hold The University of Auckland Residency at the Michael King Writers' Centre.

The Michael King Writers' Centre

The Michael King Writers' Centre is based in the old Signalman's House on Takarunga Mt Victoria in Devonport. It has a programme of supported writers' residencies, accommodation for visiting writers, and offers an annual residential workshop for mid-career writers as well as programmes for young writers. Its role is to support New Zealand writers and promote high-quality writing. The centre has a partnership with The University of Auckland and its residencies are supported by Creative New Zealand. Other funders are the ASB Community Trust, Lion Foundation, the Joyce Fisher Charitable Trust and the Chisholm Whitney Family Charitable Trust.

