

Elizabeth Laird was born in New Zealand of Scottish parents. She trained as an English language teacher, and her first job was in Addis Ababa. She has always retained a strong interest in Ethiopia, and has written several books set there, including CILIP Carnegie Medal shortlisted *The Fastest Boy in the World*. Later, while she was working in London, she was invited by the British Council to teach a summer school in India. The flight from Bombay to Bhopal was bumpy, and she was horribly airsick. The man in the next seat looked after her with great kindness. His name was David McDowall, and he made a deep impression on her. They married a year later. That was forty-two years ago, and they've been looking after each other ever since.

David was working in Iraq for the British Council at the time of their marriage, so that's where they started their married life. They travelled widely, down to the Marshes and up into Kurdistan, where Elizabeth would later set *Kiss the Dust*. After a stint in London, David started working for the United Nations. They moved to Beirut, along with their first son. A fierce civil war was in progress, which formed the backdrop for her novel *Oranges in No Man's Land*. After a year, the situation became too dangerous, and they were evacuated to Vienna, where their second son was born.

Returning to London, they decided to try to earn their living as writers, and took in bed and breakfast for a while to make ends meet. When the children were old enough, Elizabeth began to travel again. She returned many times to Ethiopia, but also visited Palestine, running workshops for writers in Gaza and the West Bank, and visiting several refugee camps. These experiences inspired *A Little Piece of Ground*. Indignation at the invasion of Iraq sparked *Crusade*, a historical novel set during a previous disastrous attempt to conquer a Middle Eastern country a thousand years earlier.

The plight of refugees as a result of the Syrian war deeply affected Elizabeth. She was invited by the Norwegian Refugee Council to run writers' workshops in two Syrian refugee camps just across the border into Jordan. Spending time in Amman, and meeting other refugee families, she put those voices and experiences together into *Welcome to Nowhere*.

Inspired often by her travels, Elizabeth has also written novels set in the UK, and several historical novels as well. She has won the Children's Book Award, been shortlisted six times for the CILIP Carnegie Medal, as well as every other major children's book award. She lives in Britain now, but still likes to travel as much as she can.