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Bay author releases short stories collection

A new collection of short stories by Central Hawke's Bay writer Helen Waaka, called *Waitapu*, will be launched in Napier at Beattie and Forbes on Friday, December 4.

For Helen, who also works as a nurse at the CHB Health Centre, it's the first time she has had her work published exclusively under her own name.

The former recipient of a Pikihiua award for the Best Short Story in English, her work has previously appeared in a short fiction collection, *Huia Short Stories 9*, as well as *Huia 10* and *11* anthologies, but it's a different feeling being out on her own, she says.

The culmination of four years' hard work, writing, adding and refining to produce the finished result, an interconnected set of 18 stories based in the small fictional rural town of Waitapu and centred around two sisters, Ruby and Rowena.

Helen says the book spans about 40 years of the girls' lives starting from their teens, but also brings in other points of view with different characters.

"There are teenage girls and boys, a young boy aged around eight or nine, an elderly woman who goes missing from a rest home, an elderly couple with failing health.

"There are also different themes — community, connection and a sense of belonging — all inevitable in a small town.

"In small towns everyone knows your business whether you like it or not and sometimes others know more about you than you do yourself — there's nowhere to hide, but when trouble strikes it's the community that steps up supporting and doing whatever needs to be done. That happens in larger towns and cities too but it's the essence of small towns."

Described as an unsentimental portrait of rural life, issues such as ageing, deprivation and family violence are addressed with compassion, and ultimately hope.



PUBLISHED: Bay author Helen Waaka.

"I've worked in women's health and I know the strength and courage it takes to overcome childhood family violence — any violence for that matter," Helen says.

The Napier book launch will be held at Beattie and Forbes, 72 Bridge St, Ahuriri, from 5.30pm to about 6.30pm.

Helen and a representative from the publisher Escalator Press will be speaking and there will be copies of the book for sale.



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