**Elizabeth Laird**

I always wanted to be a traveller. A railway line ran past the garden of my childhood home, and I used to lie awake listening to the trains chug by, wishing I was on one of them.

I was born in New Zealand in 1943. My father was a ship's surgeon from Scotland, and my mother's forbears were all Scots too. They met after a great earthquake in 1933. I was the fourth of their five children. We all returned to live in Britain in 1945, and I grew up in South London.

My first big adventure was teaching in a school in Malaysia when I was eighteen. I went trekking in the jungle, and decided that an adventurous life was for me, even though I went down with typhoid and was bitten by a sea snake.

After I'd been to University (in Bristol) I got a job in Ethiopia, teaching English in Addis Ababa, the capital. I had too many adventures to recount. In the vacations, a friend and I would go off into the remote areas, hiring mules when there were no roads to travel on. I loved Ethiopia, its beautiful countryside and brave, stoical people.

After a spell at Edinburgh university, I worked for a summer in India. I had to travel by air from Mumbhai to Bhopal, and was horribly airsick. The man in the next seat was extremely kind to me. His name was David McDowall. I liked him at once, and we got married soon after. It was the best thing I ever did in my life.

David had been working in India, but was transferred to Iraq, so that's where we began our married life. We visited the Marshes, and the Kurdish region. Some time later, after our first son, Angus, was born, we moved to Beirut, in Lebanon. A civil war was raging at the time. The fighting became so bad that eventually we were evacuated to Vienna, where William, our second son, was born.

We finally decided to take a great risk and see if we could earn our living as writers. We had luckily bought a house in London while we had been working abroad. We came home, settled down, and wrote. Being rather hard up, we took in bed and breakfast, and did various kinds of jobs to make ends meet, but our books began to sell well, and we have never looked back.

I went back to Ethiopia thirty years after I'd left, in 1996, and fell under that lovely country's spell again. I set up a project with the British Council collecting folk stories from traditional story tellers, and made many journeys to the farthest corners of Ethiopia. I travelled extensively in Kenya too, in order to write the Wild Things series. Other projects have taken me to Palestine, Khazakhstan, Iran and Russia. These days, I tell myself that I'm too old for big adventures. I should spend my time sitting in my London study, snoozing by the fire, or pottering around in Edinburgh, where we spend part of our time. But if an invitation should flutter through the door, or an idea, or a mad, mad inspiration, I know I'll be off again, just as soon as I've packed my bag.