

# Herts and Essex old girl has a story to tell about dreams

Author Rachel Rivers Porter returned to her old school when she did a workshop with Year 7 and 8 girls at Herts and Essex High School.

The Bishop's Stortford-born former English and RE teacher was Rachel Tee when she attended the Warwick Road girls' school from 1970 to 1977.

At the age of 58, Rachel is launching into a new career as a writer, having completed a course called 'Constructing a Novel' with publisher Penguin Random House in 2015.

Her debut novel, *Kiss of the Tsunami*, was long-listed in The Times/Chicken House Children's Fiction Competition in 2016.

The fictional adventure was inspired by survivor stories after the Boxing Day 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami which killed at least 230,000 people and affected a dozen countries.

It tells the tale of two teenagers from different cultures who are torn apart from their families and whose destinies become entwined.

The dual narrative alternates between Marti, a native Thai sea nomad, and Krista, an English girl on holiday in Thailand, who are caught up in the cataclysmic event.

Rachel was fascinated to discover that Thailand's indigenous Moken sea gypsies escaped the tsunami, or 'laboon', having recalled ancient folklore, and so her character, Marti, was born.

"The laboon once swallowed whole villages. When the crabs crawl to the forest and the birds stop singing and the tide disappears into the mist, you must run!"

As a pupil at Herts and Essex, Rachel was known as creative but definitely not technical.

"I failed every single maths exam until my O-level, and now I tell pupils that if at first you don't succeed, work hard and one day you will achieve your dream," she said.

Rachel enjoyed writing comic poems and developed a taste for acting. "One role was Dick Whittington's cat... guess what my only 'word' was?" she said.

She used her pocket money to buy the whole *Swallows and Amazons* series, as well as popping into the bakers on her way home from school.

She was often accompanied by the then Barbara Joscelyne, now Roach, who went on to represent Great Britain in disabled sport, winning six gold and silver medals

Author and ex-Herts and Essex High School girl Rachel Rivers Porter talking to Year 7 and 8 girls. Picture: Vikki Lince



in the Paralympics, and who now works at the school as its curriculum information and examinations manager.

Rachel recalls being in the choir with Miss Cousins and playing hockey under the expert tuition of Miss Coleshill.

After gaining three A-levels at Herts and Essex, Rachel graduated from St Andrew's University, then completed a PGCE (postgraduate certificate in education) teacher training qualification at Durham, where she later taught English and performed in musical theatre as a hobby.

Seeing pupils excel in their creativity and confidence

strengthened Rachel's desire to become an author.

"I find inspiration in what I see around me," she said. "A conversation may spark an idea and a whole new world rushes into my mind which I can't wait to explore."

Her next novel is the first in a comic series for younger readers.

Rachel lives in the North East with her husband, Stuart Porter, an engineer. They have three children.

■ *Kiss of the Tsunami* is available to buy via the Amazon website.

Rachel Rivers Porter pictured in around 1974 as Herts and Essex High School student Rachel Tee



## A woman from true Stortford stock

As a schoolgirl at Herts and Essex in the 1970s, Rachel Rivers Tee lived in Barrells Down Road with parents Alec and Audrey and elder brothers David and George.

Alec and his brother Jim were partners in Stortford law firm Stanley Tee & Co, which their father, Stanley, had founded in 1913. Audrey had attended Herts and Essex High School. Her brothers went to Bishop's Stortford College. David, who now lives in Derby, went on to

teach at his old school while George, who initially joined the family law firm, quit to become a man of the cloth and now leads a church in Lyons in France. Rachel's paternal grandparents, Stanley and Molly, used to live in a house called Pines Corner, opposite Herts and Essex High School in Warwick Road. Her great-grandfather was Major William Holland, who in 1870, with business partner Alfred Slapps Barrett, formed Holland and Barrett in North Street,

selling groceries alongside men's and women's clothing. By the 1970s the grocery business had evolved into the nationwide chain of health food shops. Rachel's maternal grandfather, Prof Sir Ralph Turner, wrote the Nepali dictionary and the Comparative Dictionary of Indo-Aryan languages. He was principal of the School of African and Oriental Studies, and a verse from one of his poems is engraved on the Gurkha statue in London.