

Friendship knows no bounds

FIONA PURDON

AS A teacher in Queensland schools for the past 27 years, Richard Yaxley (pictured) has mentored his fair share of troubled teenagers.

And it's these experiences he drew on to create Ashleigh Summers, a lead character in his new young adult novel *Joyous & Moonbeam*.

"In my previous job at Hervey Bay I was in an administrative role so I was working directly one on one with kids and when you are in a job long enough you hear about a range of experiences," Yaxley says.

"You get really conscious as a teacher that in a group of 30 kids, behind all the smiles and eyes, anything could be happening in their lives and every one of these kids has a backstory."

Ashleigh – also known as Moonbeam – is a disillusioned 15-year-old from a dysfunctional family that has suffered tragedy. Moonbeam has become disconnected from her grieving parents following the death of her baby brother Jamie.

After a string of offences, Moonbeam is taken by the school to a workshop shelter to help her learn about giving back to the community.

It is at the shelter that she meets Joyous, a mentally disabled man, and Moonbeam becomes attracted to her new friend's genuine joy of life, simple philosophies and caring spirit.

Yaxley says he wanted to write a book about a friendship which crossed society's barriers but he also delves into Moonbeam's inner thoughts and offers letters from Joyous's mother to cover his history. The book opens with Joyous's unique voice, which came easily to Yaxley.

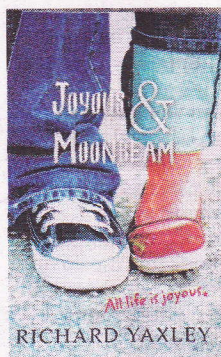
"Joyous has an idiosyncratic voice which some may find initially

confronting but hopefully rewarding ... like learning to read a new piece of music," he says.

"Moonbeam's voice took a lot longer to evolve because teenagers are so changeable. I wanted genuine teen speak, an articulate presenter of the story but I didn't want Facebook dribble."

Yaxley, who moved to Brisbane two years ago to become academic leader of languages at Carina's San Sisto College, started *Joyous & Moonbeam* seven years ago. He put the manuscript away after finding no interested publisher.

Then, after winning the 2010 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction for his verse novel *Drink The Air*, he found renewed interest in his manuscript and finished it in 18 months.



Joyous and Moonbeam

Richard Yaxley
Scholastic, \$16.99

