



BETWEEN THE lines

CARLENE ELLWOOD

Trust
by Kate Veitch
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KATE Veitch left home at 15 to follow her own dreams rather than to escape any great family problems.

However, after a successful career in print and broadcast journalism, it is family life and all its complexities that have inspired her late-flowering career as an international bestselling novelist.

Veitch's 2006 debut novel, *Listen*, was a heartfelt story of a family shattered by a mother's desire for a life elsewhere.

Her new novel looks at what it takes a woman to be a good wife and mother — and also what this takes from a woman.

At the heart of *Trust* is art teacher Susanna, who has devoted 20 years to being the wife of Gerry, a handsome, ambitious Melbourne architect, and is the mother of two strong-willed teenagers.

Susanna is also the "good" daughter who earned her mother Jean's approval in giving up her artistic ambitions for a solid career while her younger, free-spirited sister Angie, a drug addict, "broke her father's weak heart". She must be the peacemaker between the unforgiving Jean and single-mum Angie, now a born-again Christian seeking more than salvation with a gospel singer named Gabriel.

Behind the facade of this seemingly ordinary family lie secret yearnings and disturbing truths that will tear it apart in extraordinary circumstances.

The fault lines are exposed when Susanna, with little support from her husband, begins work on an art exhibition to meet academic requirements. Gerry may be a loving father but, with his "connective interstitial envelopment" architectural concepts and drive for recognition, he sees himself as the clever partner. He also lives for his secret adventures at international conferences, a life he feels has nothing to do with his family.

Veitch is a page-turning author, interweaving other stories of betrayal and torment — the abuse of Angie's young son by the not-so-angelic Gabriel, Susanna's son facing a sexual identity crisis, Jean's anguish and Angie's revenge — until a tragic accident changes the family forever.

Picking up the pieces, Susanna faces the challenge of finding the courage to begin a new life.

Veitch, 55, says she finds families a compelling subject for fiction.

"Families are the most fascinating things to me," she says. "Families are what draw you in and drive you away. They are what form you and also what you form. And they're also absolutely universal, at the core of every person's experience.

"And to be perfectly honest, I think what all families have are secrets. But what those secrets are and the way they are handled will always be different. And it's that difference that fascinates me — what it is that is allowed to be revealed, and what it is that is required to be silent about."

Veitch's skilful narration allows readers to eavesdrop constantly on what is happening in the minds and hearts of her characters. Susanna, in a moment of panic as the chasm between her and Gerry widens, asks herself: "If I am not the person you married, who have I become? If I am not your wife, who am I?"

Through Susanna, Veitch wants to show whether a woman who has bought the notion of being a good woman in all its manifestations is being true to herself.



INSPIRED: Kate Veitch finds families a compelling subject for fiction. Picture: PONCH HAWKES

Delving into family secrets

"What do you give away, what do you relinquish in the name of goodness, and is being good in those terms really a good thing?" Veitch says.

"That is a huge question for women. I think there is a code of goodness prescribed for women which can be very limiting, even in what is thought of as the post-feminist age."

This does not mean that women should be more like men: "A lot of the characteristics that Susanna shows, the attention to other people's needs and the willingness to be helpful and to serve other people are not bad things, but when a relationship is too one-sided, when one partner is doing all the giving and the other all the taking, that's when it's destructive — for everyone."

Veitch is also fascinated by Sigmund Freud's investigation of the tendency for people to give over the control of their lives to other forces they see as greater than themselves — to a tyrant, to addictive substances, to religion, or to romantic love.

"I do see this as a strong human tendency, one that women tend to live out more than men as though having responsibility for your own life and not being told what to do by some higher power or greater

compulsion is more than what a lot of people can bear," she says. "Especially when it comes to romantic love, women seem very prone to just giving over their lives to men."

Veitch, born to journalist parents in Adelaide, grew up in Melbourne. She says her parents weren't particularly suited to each other and their marriage became less happy. She left home because she craved independence and the 1970s were a time when it was easy to find work.

After her son Felix, now 28, was born in Darwin, Veitch co-authored a non-fiction book on parenting and began working as a book reviewer and a freelance journalist for Radio National, making programs about modern family life and women authors.

She now divides her time between Melbourne, where Felix and her two older brothers live, and San Francisco, where her partner of six years, writer and publisher Phillip Frazer, works.

And if Veitch is ever in need of feedback and support for her writing, she says she can depend on her youngest brother and fellow author Michael, now a presenter with ABC Radio in Hobart.