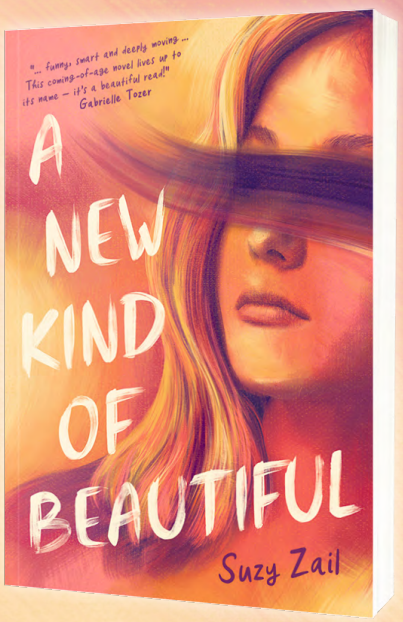
Hi, thanks for your interest in *A New Kind of Beautiful.*



The novel tells the story of Paige Wilding, a young artist who has her future mapped out, winning the Year 10 Art prize and securing a coveted spot in an elite art school in New York. But when she's diagnosed with an incurable eye disease, the perfect life she's sketched starts to blur. Holding onto 'normal' as long as she can, she tells no one about her eyes, except her best friend Jazz, who helps her cram a lifetime of colour into a single year – living louder, loving wilder, and painting like her life depends on it.

But as her sight fades and painting feels impossible, it's loner Zac, her rival for the Art prize, who helps Paige find a way back to her art. No longer chasing perfection or airbrushing reality, Paige picks up a cane and returns to the canvas to paint life as she sees it: messy and imperfect but also wilder, deeper, and unapologetically real. A new kind of beautiful.

The story is fictional, but also deeply personal, inspired by my husband's aunt Lil, who lost most of her sight by the time she was sixteen. Born in South Africa in the 1930s, her parents hid her away, a ghost in her own home. It was only after her parents died, and she joined her sister in Australia, that she learned to read braille, use a cane, cook a meal. It was the first time she lived in a home she could call her own. The first time she fell in love. She was sixty.

I asked her once what her childhood was like and received a one-word answer: Fine. Lil didn't have the words to describe what grief felt like any more than she could explain how freedom felt. Growing up, no one had ever asked her how she felt. She hadn't been encouraged to access the parts of herself that felt anger, fear, sadness or confusion.

What would it have been like for 16-year-old Lil, I found myself wondering. And what was life like now for a teen with low vision. Was the world still inhospitable?

Writing this story helped me find the answers. Spending time with, and learning from, people who were losing, or had lost, their sight allowed me to write a novel inviting teens to think about how they see the world, and how together, we might create a better, more inclusive one. A world in which disability is not a tragedy, just a part of being human. A place where 'real' is valued over 'perfect' and being different is celebrated.

What do I hope for your students? I hope reading the novel illuminates what life might be like for a person with low vision and acts as a reminder that everyone carries invisible challenges. And for anyone living with a disability, I hope it allows them to see themselves within the pages of a novel and know that their stories matter.

There are so many ways to live, lose, grieve, and grow. Each of us hurt, and heal, differently and my hope is that, like Paige, we all come to understand that by opening ourselves up to new ways of seeing, a deeper, more textured kind of beauty reveals itself, one that embraces the messiness of being human.

There are lots of themes for teachers to dip into: Love, loss, belonging, friendship, identity and acceptance, disability and ableism, art and beauty, family relationships, grief and resilience. I've developed close connections within Guide Dogs Victoria, as well as meaningful relationships with many of the people I interviewed, so when visiting your classroom, can offer an immersive experience about the power of storytelling while my co-presenter – a person with low vision – sheds insight into the lived experience of sight loss.

At a time where AI is asking us to think less and feel less, books that make our young people feel more are especially important, so thank you for considering *A New Kind of Beautiful* as a text you might share with your students. I'm so excited to have the story out there.

Suzy Zail

Suzy Zail, 2026