

Grief, grit and Fiordland truths

TRACEY ROXBURGH

QUEENSTOWN author Peta Carey has one piece of advice for anyone sitting down to read her fourth book, *The Hollows Boys*.

“You’ll probably need some tissues.”

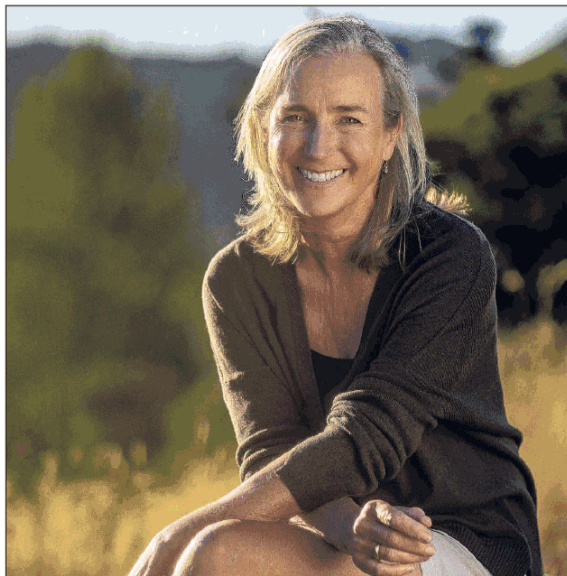
Launching quietly in Te Anau next Wednesday over a few beers with mates, the book — which tells the story of the helicopter deer recovery era in Fiordland through the lives of three brothers, Gary, Mark and Kim Hollows — has taken about six years to come to fruition.

Published by Potton & Burton, it’s a deeply personal story.

Carey’s late partner, Dave Comer, knew the Hollows boys well, particularly Kim, while Carey’s known them for about 40 years.

But birthing the book has been a particularly tough process for Kim and Mark.

The latter was piloting a helicopter on September 15,



Deeply personal story: Queenstown Peta Carey will release her fourth book, *The Hollows Boys*, next Wednesday

1989, in which Gary was the shooter.

Following an incident on the top of the Cameron Mountains, Gary was killed.

Mark stayed with his body, and a wrecked chopper, for over seven hours, using all his ammunition to keep kea away from Gary, before they were found.

Carey says one of the reasons she was drawn to write the book — which she wasn’t commissioned for — was to provide an accurate portrayal of the venison recovery era in Fiordland.

“Every other book that had been written about it was kind of, ‘oh, look at us, jolly-ho, we’re the cowboys, aren’t we legendary?’,” she says.

“There’s nothing legendary about it.”

One of the themes that intrigued her while writing the book was the widespread PTSD left in the wake of the 25-year helicopter venison industry, and its legacy of grief, trauma and sometimes guilt.

One particular shooter, she explains, chain-smoked and shed tears through an entire interview.

Carey, who’ll discuss the book with journo Mike White at Te Atamira on October 31, during the Queenstown Writers Festival, is effusive in her praise for Mark and Kim’s courage in telling their story.

For Mark, in particular, it’s been difficult to “look in the rear-vision mirror”, she says. “I cannot state more strongly how courageous and brave Mark was in giving his story, particularly of the time Gary died.

“It’s not pretty.”

Another theme Carey became intrigued by was the “the roll of the dice” — why one pilot or shooter would die, and another wouldn’t — noting it’s something that applies to all of us, and something we all wrestle with coming to terms with.

Then there’s the “elephant in the room” conversation about the conservation implications without helicopter venison recovery, noting Fiordland now has a deer population bordering on what it was in the 1960s.

Back then, deer were so widespread, the entire under-story was eaten out.

History is, seemingly, repeating.

“Yes, we can protect birdlife and restore the canopy by controlling stoats, rats, possums, and let’s not forget cats, but there will be no forest one day soon, because all seedlings are being taken out — every broadleaf, rata or five fingers, every palatable seedling in the forest, is being razed to the ground.

“And no, ground hunters cannot control the population.”

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● *The Hollows Boys*, \$39.99, available in bookstores nationwide from next Wednesday