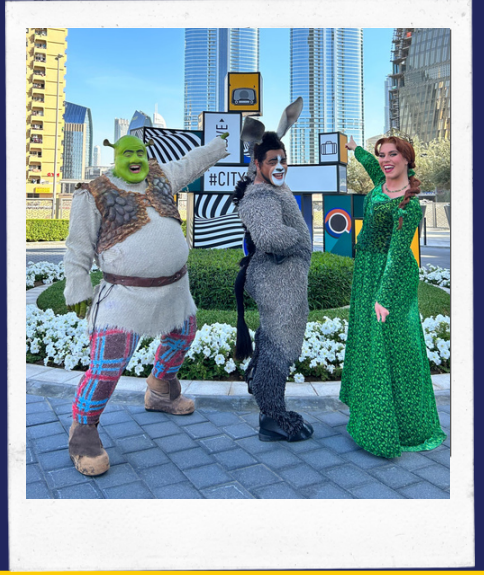


Falstaff Dowling-Mitchell

Class of 2000

Teacher, Stage Actor, Scriptwriter,
and Author



Falstaff's Story

"Back yourself, or it will never happen. Listen to yourself. So many people will try to tell you what to do. But just have the guts to do what feels right for you."

A primary school teacher by trade, Falstaff is an accomplished author, scriptwriter and stage actor. There's quite a list of accolades and accomplishments with his name on it.

Lately, he's been touring New Zealand and the Middle East as the lovable ogre 'Shrek' in the musical of the same name. He had been doing amateur theatre since he was a kid with the Hamilton Operatic Society. His first pro gig was a singing role as the hypochondriac giraffe Melman in Madagascar; and he's been on stage in Australia and New Zealand with Cat in the Hat.

But acting is just one part of Falstaff's creative journey.

In 2019, he released his book *White Lies, Maori Legends and Fairytales*. He wrote it as a tool for the students he was teaching at the time (at a decile 2 school, with an 80% Maori role) - with characters, dreams and aspirations they could relate to. This story is now read in over 300 schools across Aotearoa as part of the curriculum, including at St John's College.

He's also written the script for the short film [Small Waves](#), a 20-minute movie based on that same story. Directed by Matthew Walker and with funding from Creative Waikato, *Small Waves* was [shot at Nawton Primary School](#) and has won several overseas awards since its release (Falstaff's teacher training came in handy during auditions, wrangling a lot of very excited aspiring young actors). Currently, he's part of a team developing a 6 part mini-series based on his book.



"Acting is a lot about courage and taking the risk to be seen - and judged - by others. There's also the pressure of knowing that a ticket at the Dubai Opera House is \$300 and audience members have paid that much to see you perform."

Falstaff Dowling-Mitchell

You would think with such an evident knack for storytelling and an abundance of creativity and drive, Falstaff's pathway from school to career would have been straightforward. But, instead, it's taken him quite a few turns and a lot of courage to get to where he is today.

He'd dreamed of being a writer. However, his first attempt at storytelling didn't have the hoped-for effect. The feedback from his SJC English teacher, Mr Hetet, was pretty short: "Pick up the pace if you want to keep the reader interested". By the time he left high school, he wasn't sure what he wanted to do and ended up working in a bar and reading metres in Melbourne before training as a primary school teacher at Waikato University at 24.



"There were always good rules in place and values that made you feel grounded and safe."

For Falstaff, memories of St John's centre around its community, people, and camaraderie. He claims he wasn't a top PE student, but playing school rugby and basketball taught him about team spirit and allowed him to see the teachers differently outside the classroom. In addition, being involved in school productions (The Fiddler on the Roof and My Fair Lady) meant being part of a tight-knit group with friendships long outlasting high school years. He still keeps in touch with 4 or 5 Johnnies Boys; one was a groomsman at his wedding. Falstaff readily admits he was never the perfect student, but looking back, he acknowledges there were always good rules in place and values that made you feel grounded and safe.

Falstaff is halfway out the door to go for a run when we catch up with him. "Acting can be stressful mentally and physically, so I need to keep fit and find balance. I go to the gym and play social sports whenever possible". To give an example of just how physically demanding a stage show can be, he mentions the jacket full of ice packs he wears under his Shrek costume just to keep cool - come halftime, they are completely molten!

This is the first year he's left teaching to pursue his acting career full-time. Not a light-hearted decision - he's got a young family, and acting roles are hard to come by. In New Zealand, the rejection rate is 90%, even for top actors. For the stage production of Shrek, 250 people auditioned for 15 roles. That said, it doesn't sound like he's going to be out of projects - and ideas - any time soon.

Break a leg!