



NATIONAL CENTRE for
AUSTRALIAN
CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE^{Inc}

BEHIND THE IMAGINED

I S S U E

04

2020

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Editor: Jane Carstens

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All enquiries should be addressed to:

National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc
The Library
University of Canberra
11 Kirinari Street
BRUCE ACT 2617
AUSTRALIA

You may also contact us by email at director@ncacl.org.au or info@ncacl.org.au

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For more information, please contact Dr Belle Alderman AM, Director, on (02) 6201 2062 or by email at belle.alderman@canberra.edu.au.

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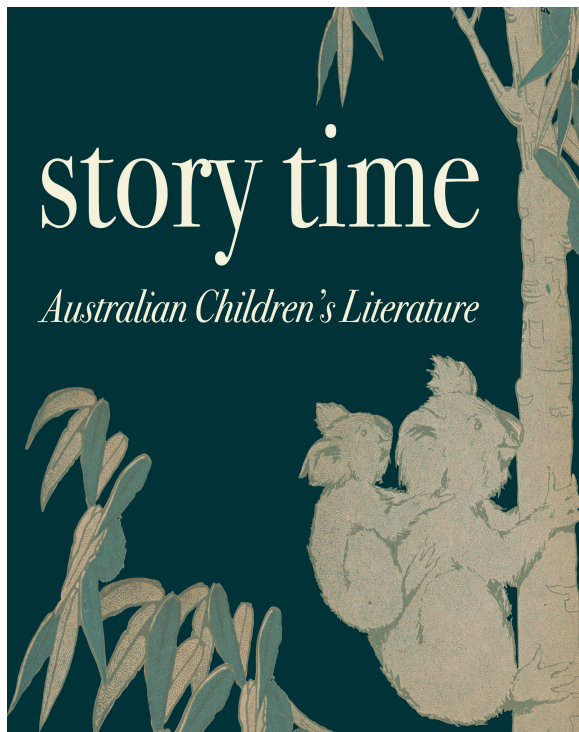
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Welcome from the Editor

As I write this introduction the world is in the grip of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Many international and national borders are closed, people are in lock down, non-essential businesses are closed, and social distancing is the new normal. It's a strange time. How wonderful to have the stories in this journal to take our mind off these events for just a little while.

We start with three wonderful articles about Sharing Stories, IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) events and Story Time exhibition. Our director, Dr Belle Alderman, gave us an insight into how this event came about.



Design adapted from: Koala Shape Book,
(Sydney: John Sands Ltd., 1931),
nla.cat-vn4272738

The idea for Story Time: Australian Children's Literature, came about three years ago over a pleasant lunch hosted by the University of Canberra's Vice Chancellor Stephen Parker. Board members of the Centre discussed ways to promote our joint interest in Australian children's literature with Gerard Vaughan, then Director of the National Gallery of Australia, Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, then director of the National Library of Australia, author Jennifer Rowe OAM (aka Emily Rodda), and various members of the ACT Government tourism departments. We collectively wondered, 'Why not have an exhibition showcasing our collective strengths? And there must be promotional activities too!' So Story Time came to be.

We were also fortunate to secure the copy of Emily Rodda's opening address for the Story Time exhibition held at the National Library of Australia in Canberra from 22 August 2019 to 16 February 2020. Libby Hathorn has given us an incredible insight into her writing life. And we finish this 'pandemic edition' with a Q&A interview with Hazel Edwards. We hope these articles make you smile in these challenging times.

Jane Carstens



Bringing Sharing Stories to Life

by Professor Belle Alderman

The previous issue of *Behind the Imagined* presented three talks about Australian children's books in translation. A rights publisher, a translator and an author gave their perspectives. Their talks were part of a wider series of events, projects and a travelling exhibition based on the theme *Sharing Stories*.

Sharing Stories was inspired by UNESCO's declaration that — from 2018 — there should be a worldwide celebration of 'professional translation, as a trade and an art, [as it] plays an important role in upholding the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, bringing nations together, facilitating dialogue, understanding and cooperation, contributing to development and strengthening world peace and security'.

NCACL's *Sharing Stories* involved a series of events, public art exhibitions and a travelling exhibition of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) IBBY books. The IBBY books included 191 children's books in translation from 61 countries around the world in 50 languages plus IBBY Australia's 48 Honour Books from 1962-2018.

The Australian IBBY section annotated for the first time its 48 books featured in the IBBY Australia Honour Books from 1962-2018. These two collections travelled and were exhibited together. The Woden Public Library planned programs around these collections, and all the public libraries in Canberra featured displays of the IBBY Australia honour books.



**IBBY books at the
Woden Public Library, Canberra**

We organised for the IBBY books exhibition to travel to a small number of libraries around Australia over 12 months from October 2018 through October 2019. It was first exhibited at the Woden Public Library from 2-20 October. Each of Canberra's public libraries featured displays of the IBBY Australia honour books along with mini-exhibitions of NCACL artworks at the Woden, Dickson and Tuggeranong Libraries. The IBBY books were then

exhibited from 9-17 May at Lost in Books, a bookshop in Fairfield, Sydney, which specialises in children's books in translations. The exhibition was then showcased at the national Children's

Book Council Conference in May, then travelled to Thebarton Senior College in Adelaide, South Australia, for three weeks. It then concluded its travels to Coober Pedy Community Library in South Australia. The IBBY books are now travelling in Europe.

This issue includes reports from Lost in Books and the Coober Pedy's Community Library. These detail how their culturally diverse communities experienced the IBBY Books exhibition.

During this time, NCACL also pursued an ambitious goal to identify Australian children's books that featured Australia's culturally diverse population. This database became the world's third such database (after the US and Canada) with its launch on 31 March 2019.



The NCACL's Cultural Diversity Database features annotations for 340 Australian children's books.

Each book is linked to the Australian Curriculum, the Early

Years Learning Framework, and then further linked to key concepts explored in the books. Books can be searched by author, illustrator, title, publisher, publication date, audience and annotation, and a combination of these.

The database has been well received by organisations and individuals:

<https://www.ncacl.org.au/resources/databases/reviews-and-media-coverage/>

How the Cultural Diversity Database was developed is described here:

<https://www.ncacl.org.au/resources/databases/welcome-to-the-ncacl-cultural-diversity-database/>

We invite you to visit our freely available Cultural Diversity Database here:

<https://www.ncacl.org.au/ncacl-cultural-diversity-database/>



IBBY 'Sharing Stories' Exhibition Report

by Judy Griffiths (Coober Pedy) and Amelia Beatty (Adelaide)

Judy Griffiths is the Teacher Librarian at Coober Pedy School Community Library. Amelia Beatty is a Project Officer for the Public Library Services Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

Introduction

In partnership with the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, Public Library Services facilitated the Sharing Stories IBBY Project, a travelling exhibition showcasing and celebrating outstanding children's literature from all over the world. The exhibition included 191 books in 50 different languages from 61 countries. Coober Pedy School was chosen as the exhibition destination for its ethnically diverse community.

Coober Pedy Demographics

Coober Pedy is a major regional service centre for Outback South Australia. The District Council of Coober Pedy estimates the population to be around 2500. Approximately 60% of the people are of European heritage, having migrated from southern and Eastern Europe after the Second World War. In all, there are more than 45 nationalities represented creating an ethnically diverse community.

Coober Pedy Area School is a complex and unique school catering for approximately 240 students from Foundation (Reception) to Year 13. Their students represent 49 different cultures, with more than one-half of enrolments being made up of Aboriginal students. The school has a major focus on literacy and a school wide motto "Everybody Reads".

The Coober Pedy School Community Library exhibited the 'Sharing Stories' collection. The library is a joint-use library located within Coober Pedy Area School and it serves both the school and the Coober Pedy community. The library also attracts temporary residents and visitors due to the four main industries being opal mining, tourism, primary production and support services.



Exhibition Reflection

The 'Sharing Stories' exhibition was held from 28th August to 16th September 2019. Judy Griffith, the Teacher-Librarian at Coober Pedy Area School, provided the following reflection about the exhibition:

The IBBY Exhibition was anticipated by the Coober Pedy School Community Library with great excitement. This multi-cultural community has rarely had the opportunity to view something of this standard and so far reaching in that the books were from so many countries around the world.

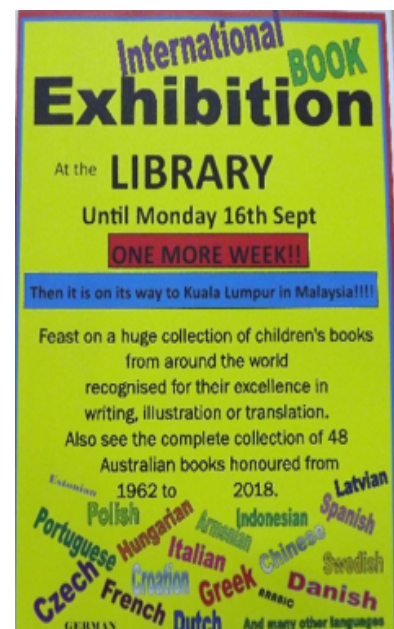
The arrival of the IBBY exhibition was not without stress as it arrived later than expected. This notwithstanding, we enthusiastically set about opening containers to see what they held and setting up the books. It was very difficult not to stop and look at each book, but we were under time constraints to get the exhibition open.

The exhibition was advertised via posters in shopping areas, on the local 'Dusty Radio', on the big screen at the drive-in, flyers, as well as in the library with staff encouraging patrons to engage in the experience.

The statistics may not seem very significant, as many are single digit. However, given the size of our community and past responses to events, this was an outstanding result. Some patrons returned for another opportunity to read or look at the books and some lamented that they did not have enough time.

We had a mid-launch rather than an opening event due to the late arrival of the exhibition. Invitations were distributed at every opportunity and on the evening we had 19 attendees, which was a pleasing result and far above anything we had achieved before.

Prior to the mid-launch, two books were chosen: *Drveni Neboder (Wooden Skyscraper)* by Ivana Guljasevic from Croatia, and *E Aplisti Chelona (The Greedy Tortoise)* by Kelly Matathia Covo from Greece. I spent time with my Community Library Assistant, Maria (bilingual- English and Greek) and a local lady Veronika (bilingual- English and Croatian) while they translated the texts and I scribed.



Exhibition flyer



**Mid-exhibition launch – Veronika reading in Croatian
with Judy providing the translation**

The intention was for them to read the stories in language and I read the translation page by page. The result was a great success. Listening to the story in its original language and then hearing the interpretation was very powerful. And of course the illustrations supported the tales.

The Croatian story particularly had a strength and intensity, even without the translation. Our narrator, Veronika, was expressive and very skilled at story telling. It was mesmerising to hear the

musicality, flow and expression of Croatian. It was quite emotional, even though it was a children's story, particularly the ending where the Moon is revealed as the narrator, which resulted in some tears. It is very difficult to explain why this happened but it was a very poignant moment.

The audience was very appreciative of the readings and both readings were done twice during the evening to accommodate people early or late to the exhibition. We also served a late afternoon tea.

Throughout the exhibition, many students were taken in small groups to attend the exhibition and to experience a story read in a different language (with translation). Several students were very engrossed in finding books that related to countries from family lineage and enjoyed the exhibition experience more than once. They spent considerable time searching for books and sharing with others what they had found. Some could read a little in their parents' first language and were quite excited by this.

We had many positive comments about the exhibition and people often underestimated its interest and power until they spent time and investigated the books. The Coober Pedy community and students are all the richer for experiencing this unique exhibition.

The Coober Pedy School Community Library and the Coober Pedy community thank you



sincerely for the opportunity we were given to showcase this wonderful exhibition.

Conclusion

The objective of bringing communities and cultures together through sharing the world's best books in translation was achieved through the IBBY 'Sharing Stories' exhibition, along with its associated library creative programs at the Coober Pedy School Community Library. Evidently, the exhibition had a powerful impact on the Coober Pedy community members who attended the exhibition, encouraging a greater engagement in reading and improved literacy outcomes for the Coober Pedy community.



People browsing at the exhibition



IBBY Honour List 2018 visits Australia

by Liz Page

In 2018 the then IBBY Australia president, Robin Morrow, approached IBBY with a request to host the 2018 IBBY Honour List traveling exhibition. Belle Alderman AM, the Director of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc (NCACL) became the organiser and incorporated the IBBY exhibition with a bigger project she was coordinating called Sharing Stories. This was the first time that the exhibition has travelled to Australia and it was a very exciting development.

On 22 August, a national exhibition of Australian children's literature opened at the National Library of Australia, closing on 9 February 2020. It featured 270 objects, 50 of which come from the collection of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature.

This exhibition, *Story Time: Australian Children's Literature*, was three years in the making. Simultaneously the 2018 IBBY Honour List was shipped to Australia from Basel and joined the *Story Time* events.



The multilingual bookstore, Lost in Books, in Fairfield, Sydney carries children's books in translation along with many associated programs. They borrowed the two IBBY book exhibitions for 3 weeks in May 2019. Not only is Lost in Books a multilingual children's bookstore, but also a creative space and a social enterprise project of the Think + Do Tank Foundation, a not-for-profit foundation.



Robin Morrow AM

To celebrate the IBBY collection of books and excellence in world children's literature, Lost in Books displayed the books in the shop and staged three events to welcome different audiences to experience the exhibition. It was a great joy that the books could be held, read and enjoyed by a very multilingual audience.

Robin Morrow AM, and the IBBY Honour Books Coordinator gave the first address at the opening night. Robin's reflections on the bridges created by children's books were inspiring and interesting.

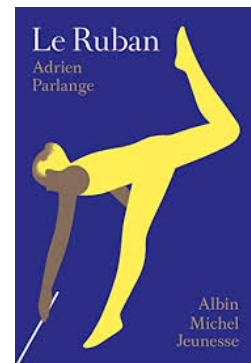
Lost in Books has also taken great inspiration from the IBBY Children in Crisis Fund's work including the Silent Books list, which the book store has used as a starting point for a collection of Wordless Picture Books in their stock:

<http://shop.lostinbooks.com.au/wordless-picture-books-c1532>.

Robin finished her speech urging the audience to make three resolutions:

- Spend time reading and sharing books with the young people in your life
- Support independent bookshops
- Support libraries

Another activity was Family Day when children and their families were invited for a fun day at the bookstore. There was a scavenger hunt through the book collection to encourage a deeper connection to the books as objects, two Forked Tongues multilingual storytellers read books from the collection in Arabic and Spanish and there was a craft session inspired by the French HL book *Le Ruban* (*The Ribbon*) by Adrien Parlangue, where children were given found objects to incorporate into new illustrations of their own.



The HL books then went to the Thebarton Senior College (in Adelaide, South Australia) where refugee teenagers had just arrived. The young people were very moved to see the IBBY books in their own language. The books were included in the New Arrivals Program (NAP) of the college.



Thebarton Senior College

Students read aloud from picture books in their first language. This was highly valued by the college visitors as the students also explained how important it was to them to be reading books in their own language.

Below is an article from one of the college teachers Shoma Roy about her experiences when her New Arrivals Program class attended the exhibition:

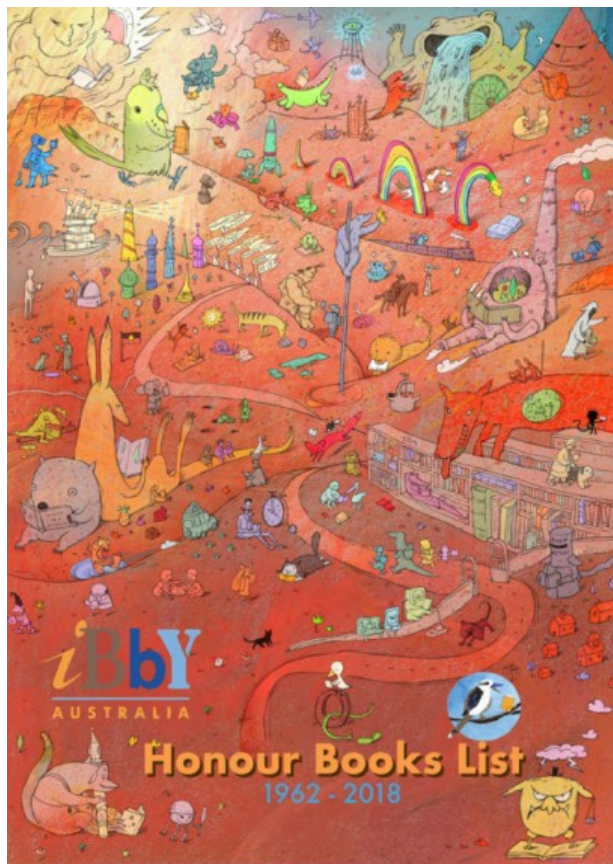
Recently, the Library hosted the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) display, which was a travelling exhibition of about 191 books, chosen by the IBBY member countries, to showcase a representative books from these respective countries.

NAP class 314 attended this exhibition, not fully comprehending the significance of the exhibition until it was explained further by Linda Guthrie, the Library Coordinator. The students walked slowly around the well-arranged display of the exhibited books. They came to gradually appreciate the quality of the books as they perused the beautiful illustrations of the picture books. Their

pleasure increased when they discovered amongst the display, an Afghani folk story in Dari – familiar to all of them. A young male student encouraged by his older peers volunteered to read aloud the story in Dari to the class. Peels of delighted laughter punctuated the air, as the reading unfolded the story. Faces lit up and smiles appeared as they warmed to the joy of reading.

Needless to say, the English translation for the benefit of the teachers, took place thereafter.

This is a heart-warming account of the power of books and the magic of the IBBY Honour List collections.



 The IBBY Honour List <small>For this biennial list, National Sections of IBBY are invited to nominate outstanding recent books that are characteristic of their country and recommended for publication in different languages. One book can be nominated for each of the three categories: writing, illustration and translation. In 2016, for the first time IBBY Australia nominated a translator—John Nieuwenhuizen for Nine Open Arms.</small>																																																			
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IBBY Best Books of the World at LOST IN BOOKS

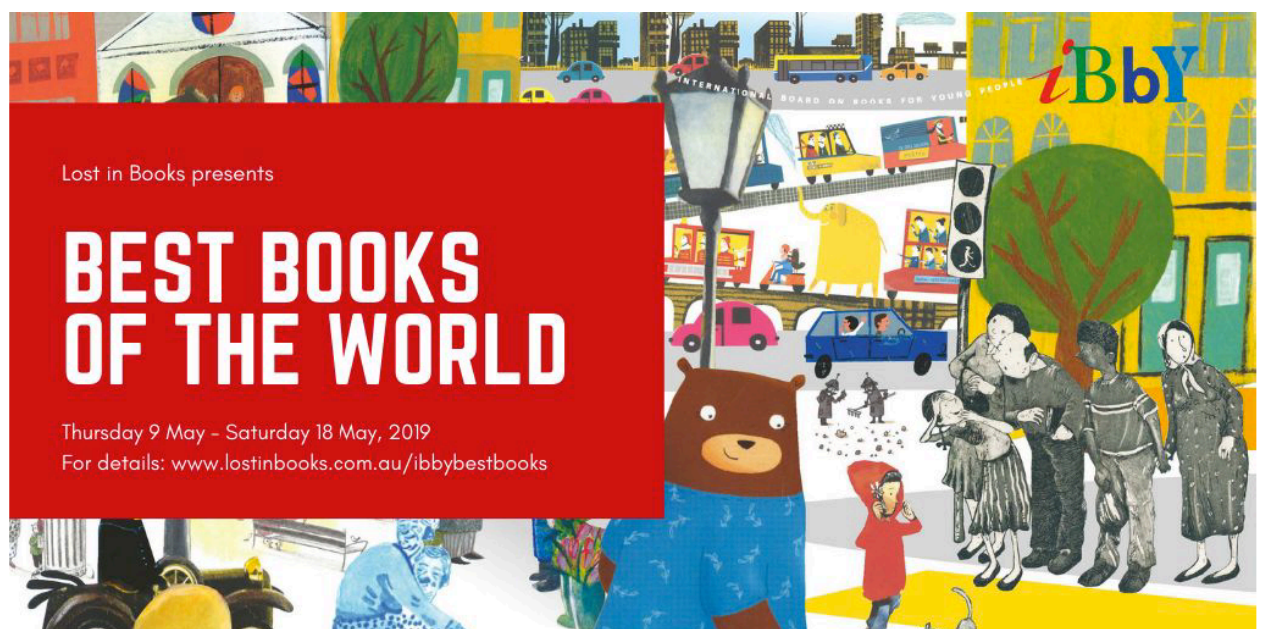
by Jane Stratton


LOST IN BOOKS was delighted to host the IBBY International 2018 Honour Books and collection of Australian Honour Books in May 2019.

LOST IN BOOKS is a multilingual children's bookshop and creative space in Sydney's South-West. It is a social enterprise project of the Think + Do Tank Foundation, a not-for-profit foundation.

To celebrate the IBBY collection of books and excellence in world children's literature, LOST IN BOOKS displayed the books in the shop and imagined three events to welcome different audiences to experience the exhibition. It was a great joy that the books were able to be held, read and enjoyed by a very multilingual audience at LOST IN BOOKS.

The following two images show some of the creative promotional material designed to support the exhibition.








LOST IN BOOKS PRESENTS

BEST BOOKS OF THE WORLD

An exhibition of 191 Honour Books from 60 countries in 50 languages selected by the International Board of Books for Young People.

Feast on a huge collection of children's books from around the world recognised for their excellence in writing, illustration or translation. Also see the complete collection of 48 books honoured by the Australian chapter of IBBY since 1962.



Visit
www.lostinbooks.com.au/ibbybestbooks
for details of special events.

The following images show the way the collection was exhibited.



Three events were developed for a variety of audiences:

Opening Night

We were delighted to be able to present an opening address by Dr Robin Morrow AM, IBBY Honour Books Coordinator. Robin's reflections on the bridges created by children's books were inspiring and interesting.

Particularly poignant for the audience at LOST IN BOOKS was her story about a child finding a book in a recognisable 'language from home' in the International Youth Library in Munich. This is what LOST IN BOOKS aims to do every day for children who are new arrivals to Australia. LOST IN BOOKS has also taken great inspiration from the IBBY Children in Crisis Fund's work including the Silent Books list which we have used as a starting point for a collection of Wordless Picture Books in our stock:

<http://shop.lostinbooks.com.au/wordless-picture-books-c1532>



Dr Robin Morrow speaking at the opening of the exhibition

Robin finished her speech urging the audience to make three resolutions:

- Spend time reading and sharing books with the young people in your life
- Support independent bookshops, and
- Support libraries.





Prof Alyson Simpson, Ms Claire Stuckey, Dr Robin Morrow AM, Ms Margot Lindgren
(members of the National Executive of IBBY Australia)



Danni Townsend, Jane Stratton and Asmaa Yousif from Lost In Books

Educator's Evening

LOST IN BOOKS invited local teachers, education students and early childhood specialists to join us for a special viewing of the exhibition and to meet Dr Rachael Jacobs, a lecturer in Creative Arts Education at Western Sydney University.

Dr Jacobs presented the LOST IN BOOKS creative multilingualism professional development program for teachers and using books from the collection demonstrated ways that they could be used effectively in a multilingual classroom.



Jane Stratton, CEO Think+DO Tank Foundation, Dr Rachael Jacobs, Lecturer, Creative Arts Education, Western Sydney University, outside Lost In Books

Family Day

For Family Day of the exhibition we invited children and their families to come to a fun day at LOST IN BOOKS on a Saturday.

We devised a scavenger hunt through the book collection to encourage a deeper connection to

the books as objects, two of our Forked Tongues multilingual storytellers read books from the collection in Arabic and Spanish and we had a craft session inspired by the French book *Le Ruban* (The Ribbon) by Adrien Parlange. Children were given found objects to incorporate into new illustrations of their own.



Maria del Mar Barahona, Forked Tongues Multilingual Storyteller, Lost In Books



Asmaa Yousif, Forked Tongues Multilingual Storyteller, Lost In Books



Thank you very much to IBBY International, IBBY Australia and Belle Alderman and Justine Powers from the National Centre of Australian Children's Literature for the opportunity to host this exhibition of the Honour Books.

It was a wonderful opportunity to explore publishing across many new countries and to engage deeply with teachers, families and the children's literature community.

2/40 Harris Street, Fairfield, NSW 2040

Tel: 02 9727 3928

Web: www.lostinbooks.com.au

Facebook: [lostinbookssydney](https://www.facebook.com/lostinbookssydney)

Instagram: [lostinbookssydney](https://www.instagram.com/lostinbookssydney)

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Opening address for the Story Time Exhibition

by Emily Rodda

This address was given at the National Library of Australia, 16 August 2019.



Emily Rodda

When I was a child, books and reading weren't just a pleasure. They were as much part of my life as my family, my best friend, and the woolly dog called Pooch I went to sleep cuddling every night. They were part of my emotional life, I mean, rather than my physical life, and the stories they told are still part of me now.

Most of my friends were avid readers, too. We used to talk about the books we'd read as if we'd all gone travelling, and visited the same amazing places. And of course, in a way, we had, because books are doors that open into other worlds.

Einstein is credited with saying: *'If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales.'* Einstein loved an aphorism, but the point is well made. Imagination, the willingness to step outside the square we can construct around ourselves as we grow up, is the key to every human endeavour. It can help us understand the past, consider the future, wrestle with the present, find ways and means, believe that anything is possible.

Little children do it naturally. When my youngest children, twins, were about three, we were in the bus going to town when a lady wearing a full-length fur coat got in. The lady was wearing a lot of makeup, and looked rather bad tempered.

'Mum!' Clem said in a piercing stage whisper. 'A bear!'

The people near us heard, and laughed. The lady in the fur coat didn't.

I mumbled apologies and tried discreetly to tell Alex and Clem that this was no bear, but a woman in a furry coat. They clearly thought I was wrong, or else just preferred their interpretation of what they were seeing. They went on staring at the lady, their eyes on stalks.

Finally Alex, who was always the outgoing twin, leaned forward. 'Could you please take off your gloves?' he asked the lady, very politely.

'Why does he want me to take off my gloves?' the lady snapped at me.

I knew only too well. At the time, I was so embarrassed that I lost my head and the truth slipped out. ‘He wants to see your claws,’ I said, and the whole bus broke up.

I’ve thought of the bear on the bus often since. It’s such a perfect example of the way young children see the world—as a place of infinite possibilities. Naturally, as we get older and more experienced, we learn that some things are more unlikely than others. But if we can avoid building those walls of fact and received wisdom around our imaginations, or at least keep the walls full of windows and escape hatches, or low enough to be jumped, the world will be richer for it.

We’ll wonder if the earth moves round the sun, instead of the other way around. We’ll wonder if disease could be caused by organisms too small for the naked eye to see. We’ll wonder if relaxing polio-stricken limbs with warm cloths might be better than restraining them in iron braces. We’ll think it might be possible for people to fly, for sound waves to travel from person to person by means of wires—and without them. We’ll paint pictures full of light, that break all Academy rules. We’ll write *The Hobbit*, though we’ll have to bribe a publisher with another text book to get it into print.

That’s why children’s books are so important—far more important than adults who have forgotten will admit. They’re often dismissed as trivial. They’re often regarded as ‘easy’. And yet they nurture the very thing on which human development depends. And not only that. The simplest tale teaches logical thinking, in a way no film can teach it, because film works in quite a different way. And a book teaches empathy, as characters are followed and their thought processes are spelled out on the printed page.

Fairy tales of different kinds are all around us now. Words and pictures, produced by Australians for Australian children. Some of the books represented here I knew as I child. I still think of *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* and little *Ragged Blossom* when I walk in the bush. I still have a little inward shiver when I see the seed pods on a banksia tree and think of May Gibbs’ pictures of the big, bad, Banksia men.

But I have to say that when I was a child most of the books I read and talked about with friends were set in England or America—or Prince Edward Island, where *Anne of Green Gables* lived. That was how it was, then. There were Australian books, but they were comparatively very few. I took *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* and *Blinky Bill* for granted, along with *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, but it was so amazing and refreshing to read Mary Grant Bruce, Ethel Turner, Frank Dalby Davison and others later, and suddenly to recognise the seasons, climate, places and language of home. I think, before that, I’d thought stories were somehow restricted to far-away places, where magic happened.

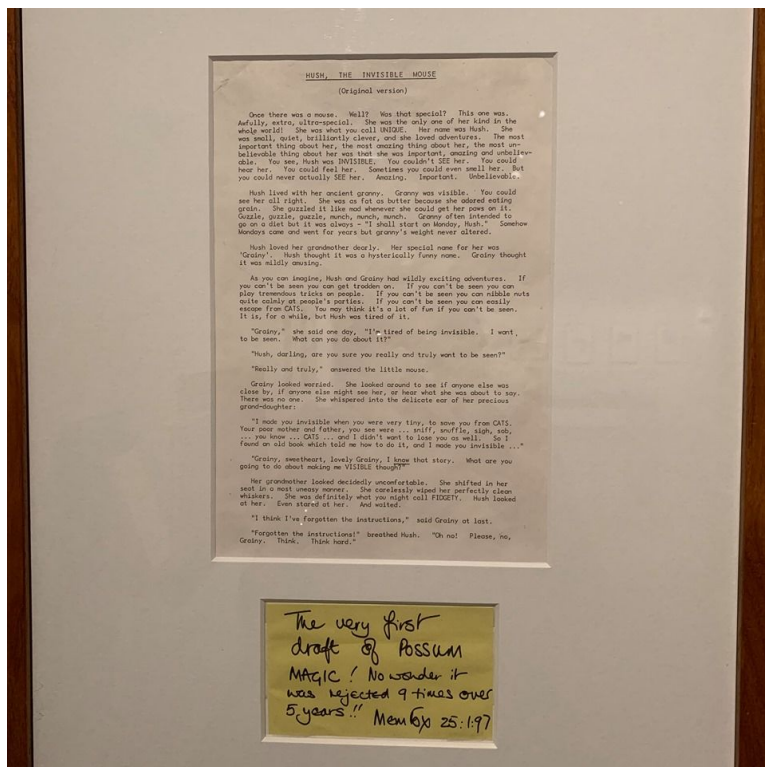
Still, Australian books were few. But gradually, things changed. By the time I went to work for Angus & Robertson Publishers in the late seventies, the Australian children's book world had begun to expand. More books by Australians were being published. More Australian children were reading them. The Children's Book Council of Australia, which of course had begun many years before, was by now well into its stride, promoting children's reading, and the Australian Children's Book of the Year Awards had become a big talking point in schools and in the book industry, if not on TV or in the national papers. (Well, that hasn't changed, but you can't have everything!)

And over the next decade, something happened. Our children's books began, slowly, to sell overseas—in the UK and the US, at first, and then in translation. Apparently, the freshness and vitality of Australian writing and illustration appealed. At the same time, more parents here began demanding and buying Australian books for their children. Deluxe editions of classics like *Blinky Bill* by Dorothy Wall, sold in

huge numbers. Fairy books by Pixie O'Harris and Peg Maltby did likewise. *Possum Magic* became a phenomenon.

Australian picture books were in demand. Young novels by new writers at least had a chance, though always published with a little prayer and crossed fingers that the book club would take a few.

It would be cruel and unfair to say that Australian book publishers suddenly looked at their children's list with dollar signs in their eyes. But the fact remains that, for whatever



The first draft of *Possum Magic* displayed at the Story Time exhibition (Image courtesy of Tania McCartney)

reason, the children's book departments in our major publishing houses slowly crept out of their cubby holes, and expanded, and publishing houses that had had no children's department made haste to gain one.

People like Lu Rees began the collection that is now at the heart of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature. Writing and illustrating for children became (marginally) more

respectable. Australian publishers went to sell at the Children's Book Fair in Bologna, and did well—soon, very well. And so it went on.

At the beginning of all this, writers and illustrators were still mostly middle class people of British descent. I'm not knocking that particular breed—I'm one of them! But it's fascinating to see how quickly this changed, as Indigenous writers and illustrators claimed their rightful storytelling places, as the children of migrants from Europe and Asia grew up and began to tell stories of their own, as people from many backgrounds came out of the shadows, to show what they could do. Together, the old and the new form what's now a throng of authors and artists dedicated to giving our children the reading stamina and the food for unfettered imagination they now need more than ever.

Our authors and artists no longer always talk about gum trees, koalas or the bush—only when such Australian icons are important to the story they have to tell. Sometimes their books aren't set in Australia at all. But whether they're producing high fantasy, or gritty realism, or gentle tales, or slapstick comedy or breathtaking images without words, their Australian-ness is intrinsic to their prose and their paintings. It's in their values, too, because it's in the air they breathe.

When my own fantasy series, *Deltora Quest*, was being made into a Japanese anime TV series, the director and art director came to Australia just to look at landscapes, because they said they could feel that the landscapes of *Deltora* reflected my home country—as, of course, they do.

And all over the world now, from Japan to Sweden, from China to Brazil, children are reading Australian stories. They're opening the covers of those books and entering the worlds inside. They're sharing those worlds with our own children, and with each other. It's been a true metamorphosis, and here, collected together in this wonderful exhibition, are the proofs of it.

I'm honoured, and delighted, to declare this Exhibition open.



Design adapted from: Koala Shape Book, (Sydney: John Sands Ltd., 1931), [nla.cat-vn4272738](#)



In the making... Artists and publishers and my writing life

by Libby Hathorn

When I began making a list, I realised there are quite a few artists and publishers whose lives become inextricably bound up with my life as a writer, and sometimes intensely. Invited to write an article, I thought it would be good to revisit some of the experiences of my stories being envisioned by others. It turned out though, to be a challenge, because each book has an all-important 'story behind the story,' and probably too many others to recount.

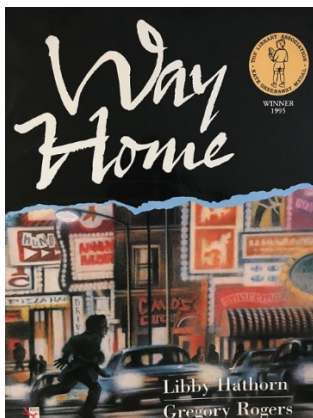
As a writer you are caught with the evolution of each text, at a particular time of life e.g. in and out of your own personal relationships, your own family life with all its unpredictable history-making, your relationships with the publisher and publishing house, the unsubtle variations in your income, and so many people whose lives you affect and whose affect you, in the making. And not to forget the novel sometime interspersed with picture book texts, as for me, novels are written over years.



Libby Hathorn

And importantly your own aesthetic- your idea of beauty, of pleasure, of artfulness. In early career do you dare to disagree with the publisher's choice for illustrator? The decision for the book must be three-way, so there are sometimes serious discussions to be had. And then you may discover an artist for yourself and bring their work to the publisher's notice.

This timing is significant for the illustrator in the same way of course, be they an established or emerging artist or indeed a first-time artist. So many factors come to play in the making of a picture book and time and again I'm filled with a certain amazement when it comes to pass, and a welcome, sweet-smelling advance copy is at last in my hands.



In many instances I've worked with the publishers cited for other publications, such as novels, poetry and story collections but for the purpose of this piece, I will be discussing my picture books. These are not arranged in time order but as they occurred to me.

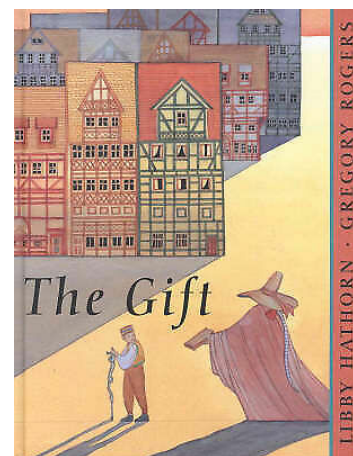
The most memorable partnership in the field with an illustrator surely has to be with Gregory Rogers as we went to great lengths to achieve the inner-city atmosphere, the gritty feeling of my text, for *Way*

Home (Random House) which is about a homeless child in a city at night. It was the then forward-looking children's publisher Mark Macleod who brought us so fortuitously together.

It was an important text for me as I'd just begun on a novel *Feral Kid* after a Salvation Army report on the homeless in Sydney which pointed out how the age of street kids was falling.

Greg visited Sydney (he was from Brisbane) and we found our way to the back streets of Kings Cross and Darlinghurst, Sydney, where the homeless of all ages hung out. I'd interviewed a few teen kids in shelters but by this, we were more concerned with the streetscapes in which city kids get lost (and found) and I took Greg to the mostly doubtful places I thought were likely for my story to take place.

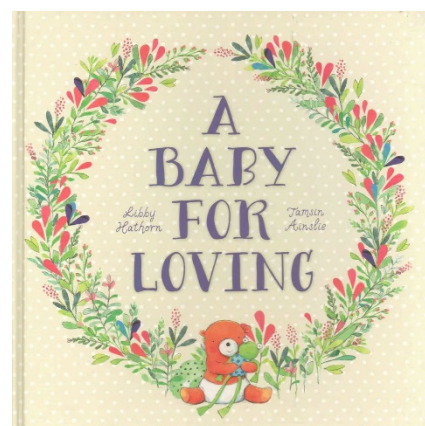
Greg also illustrated *The Gift* (Random House) which was of an entirely different character. I've long been absorbed in poetry and one of the classics of kids' lit, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* suggested to me a sequel about the disabled boy who was left behind in Robert Browning's wonderful poem. One of my books *Grandma's Shoes* had just been performed as an opera and Greg told me he had opera sets in mind when he did these wonderful illustrations for *The Gift*. The opera is yet to come.



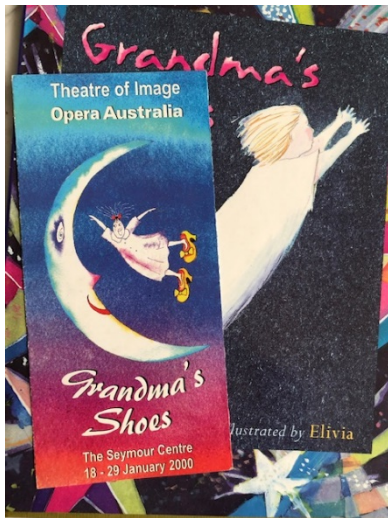
The most surprising partnership was an artist I have never met, Ritva Voutila and yet who responded to the lushness intended of my song of praise for a garden and a child's joy in the five sense, *Outside*. There's surely something luminous in this artwork that makes my singing words sing out sweeter, louder and more fully. What's exciting for me is that composer Elena Katz Chernin loves the text and the libretto I wrote for it, and has composed an opera for children which is in development

Stage 2 and has morphed into a musical-cum-installation.

It was the inestimable Margaret Lamond of *Little Hare* who brought us together as she did with Tamsin Ainslie for my text. *A Baby for Loving* later to become a board book *Our Baby*. Very sweet pictures mindful of greeting cards and wholly suitable for the age range with its illustrations deftly playing out another dog and cat story as an artful sub text.



The most emotional text for me was *Grandma's Shoes* first illustrated by American artist Elivia published with Little, Brown and Company, USA; and then later, in another version by Hodder Headline, Australia, with a new artist Caroline Magerl, found by the inimitable publisher, Belinda Bolliger.



And later still, was performed as an opera with Opera Australia and Theatre of Image. Though I'd visited Curtis Brown, New York, and read the text aloud to my

agent, Laura Blake there, I never met the artist Elivia though we corresponded briefly afterwards. It was on this stay in New York that I was invited to some of the formidable high rises of the Manhattan publishers; and yet, whose offices seemed strangely familiar with their Australian counterparts - kids' books, bright posters and artwork strewn everywhere - smiling faces and much enthusiasm.



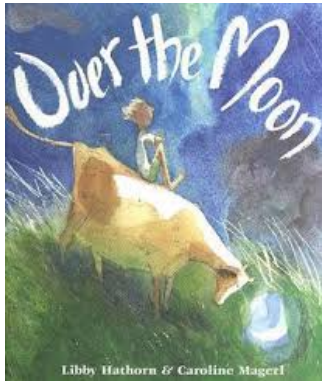
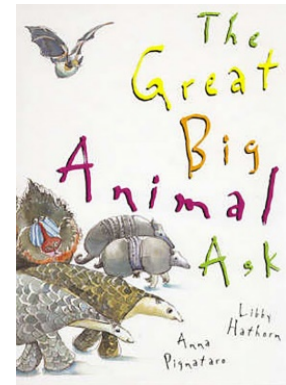
On a visit to Simon and Schuster, I was privileged to meet the 'grande dame' of US kids' lit, Margaret K McElderry herself and we had a great talk about my first YA novel *Thunderwith*, already taken by Little, Brown. I felt a little trembly just being in her presence in an office with sweeping NY views that said she was pretty darned important. But she was friendly and seemed well informed about Australian literature.

Quite often American publishers don't like the idea of writer meeting artist; and this was the case for *Grandma's Shoes*, but not so for Stephanie Owens Lurie, the Simon and Schuster, USA publisher for *Sky Sash so Blue*, who'd approached fine artist Benny Andrews to illustrate it. He complimented my text at a convivial luncheon uptown NY, saying it would be his first time as children's book illustrator - Benny is represented in most major galleries in the USA. I explained I'd been inspired by Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison's book *Beloved* - a paragraph about a slave girl collecting rags for her wedding dress. I wrote a poem that became the text for *Sky Sash so Blue*. Both these books *Shoes* and *Sky Sash* were adapted as children's operas; one in Alabama, United States (amazing for me to be able to briefly talk to the whole theatre of young people prior to performance about idea to book to opera) and one here with Opera Australia and Theatre of Image. I was finding the role as a



librettist to be a satisfying one.

Anna Pignataro was a wonderful choice by Helen Chamberlin my innovative publisher at the historic Lothian publishing house for my Noah's Ark story, *The Great Big Animal Ask*. It was funny that some kids decided not to sound the 'k' in the title, which I sounded very carefully thereafter. Anna's detailed artwork as animals of all kinds from the tallest to the smallest romp aboard is quirky, but not to say quite beautiful!



And again, the calm and discerning Helen Chamberlin found me the multi-talented Caroline Magerl, for *Over the Moon* (Lothian). Here, an old nursery rhyme comes in handy! How come every time Caroline spoke on the phone there were sounds of hens clucking in the background? Her artwork has a freshness that bespeaks her imagination!

The most musical book has to be *Butterfly We're Expecting You!* (Hachette) with the artwork by musician Lisa Stewart. Inspired by Emily Dickinson's spring poem *Bee, I'm Expecting You*, while sitting in a garden with a keen-eyed three year old the idea evolved with exclamations of 'Froggie, birdie, lizard, we're expecting you', as animals came into view, a dinosaur being the final twist in the tale. Artist Lisa's violin playing was memorable at the Shepherd Centre launch where hearing-impaired children are taught. The butterfly has special meaning here, as it cannot hear, but the children surely did as they listened with rapt attention



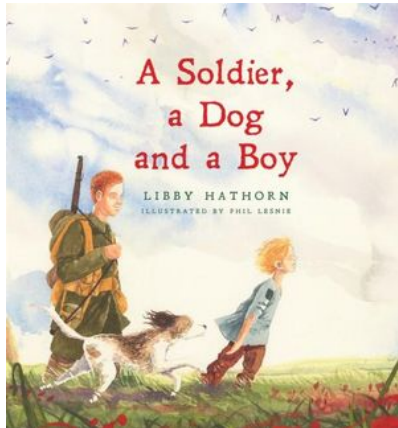
The most delicately beautiful artwork for one of my texts was for *Incredibilia* (Little Hare) by Gaye Chapman, a fine artist who brought a magical quality to my simple story of three children. It's a story about imagination set against sibling rivalry with the younger child often feeling left out and resolving not to be. She receives little notes with messages about a new game in every conceivable place and finally decides to act on one. It was the impeccable Margrete Lamond from Little Hare who so cleverly paired us, Gaye's artwork the stuff of dreaming. I was exhilarated to be able to make an allusion to favourite poet John Keats' self-written epitaph,



Here lies One

Whose name is Writ in Water

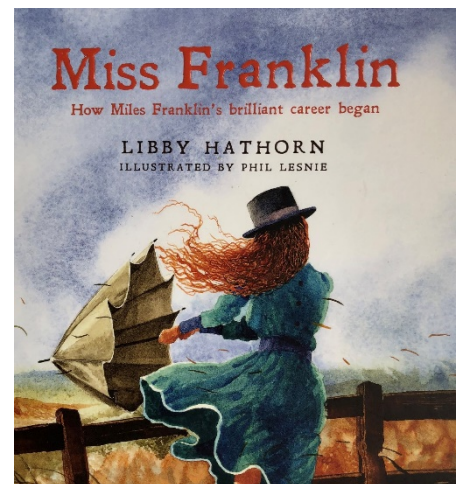
'More messages came, One out of the toybox, Another from the garden, Yet another written on water...'



The most fulfilling research has to be working with Phil Lesnie on both texts *A Soldier, A Dog and a Boy* for the Anzac Centenary of World War 1 in 2014, and the text about the iconic Miles Franklin, Miss Franklin. Suzanne O'Sullivan, my inspired and thoughtful publisher at Hachette, chose the stunning and sensitive Phil Lesnie for the artwork for the first; and then again for Miss Franklin – a kind of artistic pigeon pair! Whilst *A Soldier* took me to the Western Front in France, Miss Franklin took me rather more locally from her statue near Hurstville Library,

Sydney, to the Brindabellas near Canberra, and to the archives of the State Library and her multiple diaries there. The text about a slice of her life as governess outside Yass became *Miss Franklin*: how Miles Franklin's brilliant career began (Hachette).

I'd spent three years writing my Anzac novel *Eventual Poppy Day* (Harper Collins) and in fact wanted no more of war stories, but by a strange co-incidence, a talk and an image shown at the State Library of NSW haunted me. One of the slides shown was of a returning Australian World War 1 soldier opening a huge sack out of which was crawling a boy (a French boy) and that inspired me to turn my attention once again to the Western Front and write *A Soldier, a Dog and a Boy*.

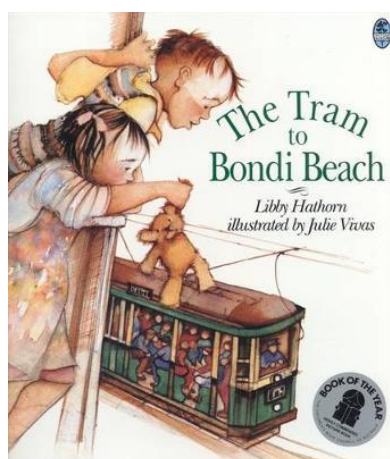
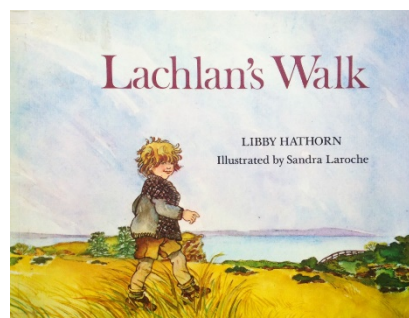


The very first partnership for my very first picture book was with an illustrator Sandra Laroche, a case of happenstance. Sandra lived next door to my brother's garden market in Randwick and we collaborated on *Stephen's Tree* while she adjusted valiantly to a balance of work and home then as a single mother of a small child. It was taken up by Liz Fulton the then children's publisher at Methuen. Later it was translated as a dual text, Methuen the first house to do this with a picture book, into Greek and Italian in the hope of reaching migrant markets. My love of nature and in particular in the

wonder of trees is something that has increased over my life, and it's interesting to me that my very first picture book was about a gum tree.

Having written a poem *Tree Australia Tree*, I'm planning and dreaming a tree-book right now! *Stephens' Tree* is another book launch I'll always remember as it was presided over by the inimitable Maurice Saxby, critic, reviewer and authority on Australian children's literature, and to become a life-long friend. I was to receive my first Sydney Morning Herald review by Maurie, always a truly exciting event for children's literature to be found in the reviewing space in a major newspaper.

Encouraged by its success, the enthusiastic Liz at Methuen asked for another story and *Lachlan's Walk* followed. Set at Rose Bay a story of a runaway child by the precipitous cliffs was based on my first-born nephew, Lachlan, who indeed had wandered away from home (not that he got near to the cliff edge itself), but what a dramatic setting with Sandra Laroche again. There followed a story about the famous Bondi tram, of the old Australian saying to 'shoot through like a Bondi tram' and which had me decide to set in the old days.



The most Sydney-centric story was based on a random radio broadcast one night about the early day of trams to the time they were discontinued in Sydney. I was astonished at the strong memories evoked through the sense of sound- listening to tram wheels 'gnashing on tramlines' and people talking about running boards and paperboys. So, *The Tram to Bondi Beach* was born and again by happenstance, I found a highly suitable illustrator. I was at an exhibition by artist Julie Vivas at Waverley Library and attracted to her finely-wrought, highly individualistic artwork. Julie told me her art wasn't really

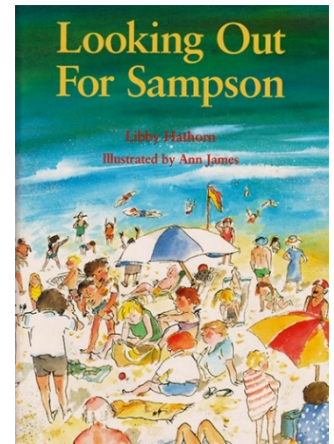
suitable for children and I'm glad she changed her mind. *The Tram to Bondi Beach* was to be Julie's first picture book.

There followed get-togethers (we both had young children) including a trip to the Loftus Tram Museum with our kids in tow and photos of them jumping on and off running boards. Then a long year for Julie, she said she found it difficult working alone on her wonderful and iconic images. Even though the publisher Methuen wanted me to change the name to *The Tram to the Beach* so it would sell in England, I resisted and am happy to say it even sold modestly into the USA, and remains in print in Australia some 40 years later.

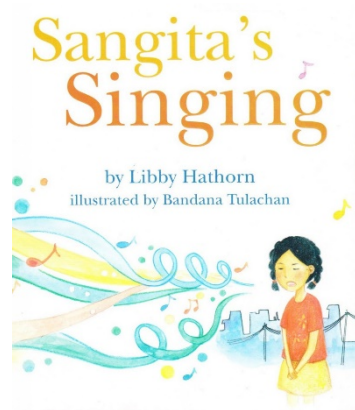
Later, a play followed, (Currency Press) co-written with Andrew Johnson which saw a huge old tram being carried through the streets of Sydney to Bondi Beach Public School so kids could

jump on and off those running boards! What a sight in a school playground! I wrote a kind of sequel about a Manly Ferry which is probably in the 'orphan's drawer somewhere to this day. I'm glad in that time to see that trams are on the rails again in Sydney town, though not of the noisy variety.

And of course, Ann James's lively and vivid illustrations of Bondi Beach once again in *Looking out for Sampson*, (with the sensitive publisher Rita Scharf of Oxford University Press) was again singing up the place I know so well. This story was based on a real-life drama of my son being lost on Bondi Beach, and Ann's illustrations were wildly appropriate. Her breezy artwork captures the families, the beach and the drama so well.



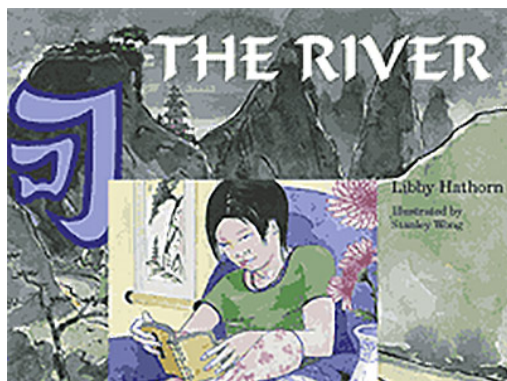
The most experimental book was one I published myself in Nepal entitled *Sangita's Singing*, (Pax Press) nurturing a Nepali artist Bandana Tulachan as it was her first time illustrating. After several visits to Nepal working with the Mitrataa Foundation, I wrote the story of a village child coming to school in Kathmandu, the apprehension and then the magic of learning to read.



This had to be largely done through skyping (a new process then) and teaching Bandana some of the fundamentals of book illustration e. g. every child's head does not have to be turned fully 'to camera' so to speak- they can look at each other! The Director of Mitrataa Foundation, Rebecca Ordish for whose organisation I was writing the book as a fund raiser, would place the artwork along the floor for me to see and with a very scratchy and oft - interrupted connections we managed to get though each stage of

the publishing. I quickly learned how time consuming the publishing process can be for writer, editor and publisher – a tough job! I'll never forget the joyous and noisy on-stage launch of *Sangita's Singing* in Kathmandu complete with Nepali dancing, and Bandana and her family's

immense pride.



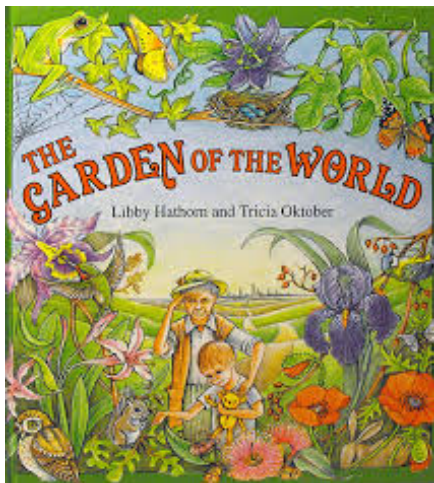
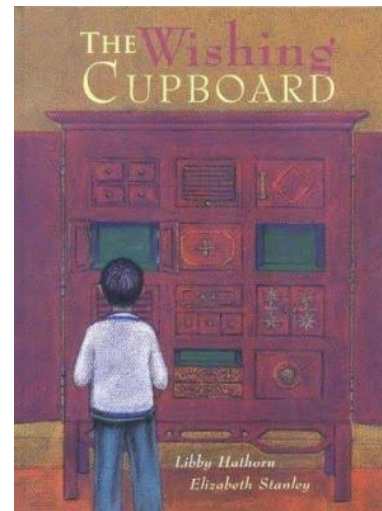
Rebeca was determined to make a musical for which I wrote the words and composer Elise Moreton visited Mitrataa to help produce it so that children performed it on stage and out in the open, the signature song to be seen on YouTube under *Sangita's Singing Song of Kathmandu*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmt6s9mhwd0>

[The joy in the faces of the young performers bespeaks their involvement.](#)

An earlier text set in another country is *The River* set in China. I was brought together with Melbourne artist Stanley Wong as illustrator through the Curriculum Corporation/Access Asia. The artist said it reminded him of his own 1950's childhood in China and we corresponded Melbourne to Sydney over the Yangtze River story. I was pleased to be able to attend the launch in Shanghai in China, at a teacher conference there and find the time to explore some of the wonders of this amazing city. It is a story that moves from the past to the present, is about the precious thread of the generations in a family, and is a theme dear to my heart. However, it is the only text whose copyright I do not own, still a cause for concern, as it is not possible to reprint!

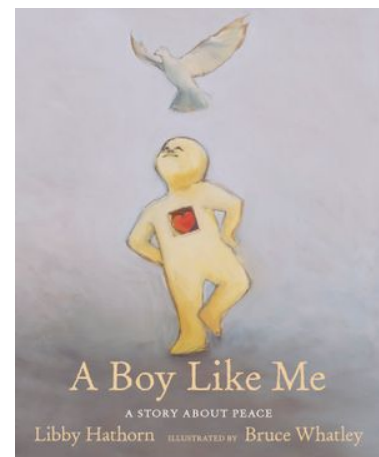
The most glowing work is Elizabeth Stanley's illustrations for *The Wishing Cupboard* bringing Vietnam to light when the ever-sensitive Helen Chamberlin of Lothian publishing house accepted this work. This was after a devastating false start for me, with a publisher actually cancelling the project. Helen grasped the opportunity for Elizabeth to ably show something of the world of Vietnam that my character, young Tran, had left behind, set at a time when Australia accepted refugees coming by boat here, in the 1970's. It was luck that Elizabeth had actually lived in Vietnam and had an instinctive and special feel for colour and style of illustrations.



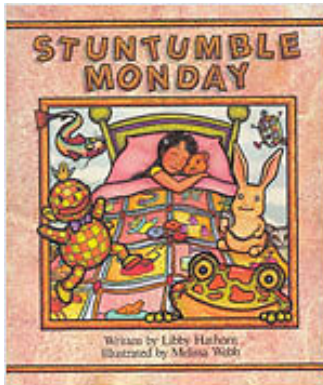
The most floral book, *The Garden of the World* was with the plucky Margaret Hamilton as publisher, Margaret continuing to be truly a dynamo in the world of Australian children's literature. This was with her then newly established Margaret Hamilton Books and she chose flower devotee artist Tricia Oktober to illustrate the story of a journey taken by Jack and his grandma Paddy, in a search of a perfect place, to be finally found in the child's own back garden. It was written to honour a garden-lover who

always looked after me and my children, sweet Paddy!

The most unusual has to be *A Boy Like Me* (ABC Books/Harper Collins) which was inspired by a WB Yeats poem which included the line 'and peace comes dropping slow'. The *Lake Isle of Innisfree* is one my mother used to often quote but re-reading it I thought I'd like to do something where peace was rather more pacey. And so, *A Boy*

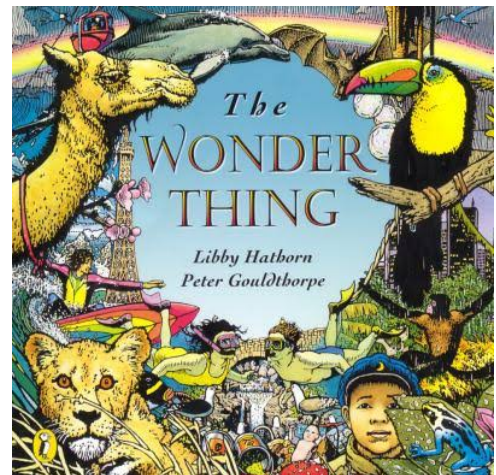


Like Me was born with my ever-enthusiastic publisher at ABC Books, Belinda Bolliger choosing Bruce Whatley as illustrator. With changes at ABC the experienced and enthusiastic Lisa Berryman at Harper Collins took over and Bruce began his plain and intriguing illustrations explaining that by using his left hand he felt closer to the message about peace. I still love the poem near the conclusion in the book. *'Peace is in the talking And the end of the fight/Peace is for the days/and peace is for the night'*.

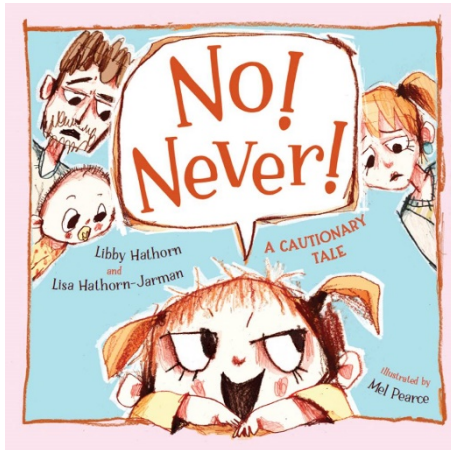


The zaniest work has to be *Stuntumble Monday* with zany and energetic artist Melissa Webb for Collins Dove. Metra, a small girl, falls through a week where every day is a colour (synaesthesia-like) and a place as she looks for her birthday close up ahead. Melissa's artwork is spirited and startling. As she travels into fairy tale, over and under and beyond, there's so much detail to drink in, but Metra finally lands on her birthday safe and sound! I note the dedication to my own children is a quote from John Larkin's short and satisfying poem, *What are Days For?* that concludes *'they are to be happy in'*.

The most highly anticipated book would have to be *The Wonder Thing*. Stirred by a visit to Tasmania to stay in the cosy little Writers' Cottage in Hobart, I began a whole-hearted poem about the miracle of water in our lives. I was thrilled when vital and gregarious publisher Julie Watts of Penguin offered it to the celebrated Peter Gouldthorpe. (Who could ever forget the famous Bologna Children's Book Fair, being dazzled by books and more books, and dining with Julie and my husband John, in that exquisite Italian city?)

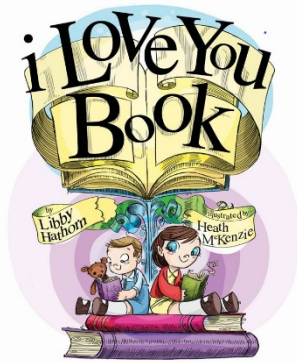


Peter dedicated himself to miraculous lino cuts for this work over sustained time and it was a small miracle to see each of them. Every writer and illustrator hopes for good things for each book, but perhaps more so with this one as it slowly and beautifully took form. I must admit we both felt let down as it did not win favour with the awards. So much artistic energy and love was poured into this work, and for the writer there's this sense of guilt for drawing the artist's work life so compellingly into one's own. But this picture book stands as an exquisite testament to the magnitude (and variousness) of the importance of water to every living thing. In its outright beauty and its message, it is a favourite with me. Last line for the final revelation, *Lovely as life is For the life it will bring/Splendid as rainbows A miracle thing...Water.*



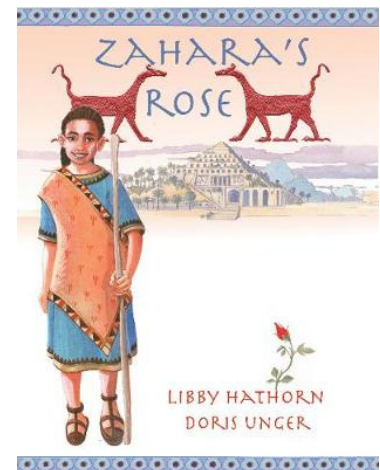
The funniest book I've written with my daughter Lisa Hathorn-Jarman has to be *No Never!*, a cautionary tale (Hachette, 2020) with illustrations by first time hilarious illustrator Mal Pearce. Based on a time of young children living in my home once again, we couldn't resist a retort from one of them when asked to pick up Lego pieces, and this became the basis for the book. It was an interesting experiment co-writing a text and led to both laughter and animated discussions, as we found our way through the text. Innovative publisher Suzanne O'Sullivan had

discovered a perfectly suited illustrator, through SCBWI, whose work had excited her (and us). And now Lisa and I are working through a longer text *The Tatibah Quest* which is immersed in the glorious Australian bush, for a time ahead.

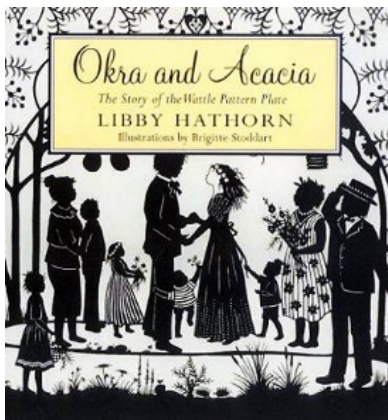


Another funny and heartfelt publication is *I Love you Book* (Interactive Children's Books) and the energetically humorous artwork of Heath McKenzie which resourceful publisher David Reiter immediately managed to get into three translations. The text was inspired by a group of mums at a high school in Goroka, PNG, when I was on a book tour there, who were for the first time learning to read. They performed a drama for the assembly of high school boys I

Love you Book about the wonder and power of their learning to read. Listening to their heartfelt poem I knew I'd write a book with that title one day. In a different mood, I found the pleasing and talented artist Doris Unger for my next book with Interactive, who researched and brought to life so elegantly, the ancient lands for the story set in the Hanging Garden of Babylon, *Zahara's Rose*.



And a meticulous first-time illustrator I worked with is Brigitta Stoddart with her lace-like papercutting artwork, a case for much wonderment, for *Okra and Acacia: The Story of the Wattle Pattern Plate* (Hodder Headline) with then publisher Lisa Highton. It was during one of my times of sojourning in Tasmania visiting Peter Gouldthorpe that I found the work of Brigitta in one of the many art galleries at Salamanca Place. It



was perfect I thought, so I took it to Lisa and she agreed it was absolutely fitting for my *Wattle Pattern Plate* folk tale (based on the Chinese Willow Pattern Plate story), but the star-crossed lovers are set amid Australian gums and wattle, in mine.

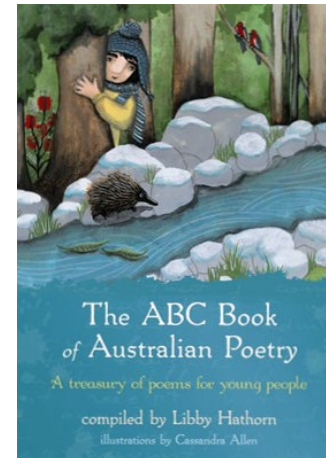
The most recent away-from-home experience in Japan with talented water colour artist Sadami Konchi for my text *We Children and the Narrow Road to the Deep North* was extraordinary. Matsuo Basho wrote a book describing his travels in the 1600's in prose and haiku, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, which inspired my text.



At one moment, not long ago, per favour of an Australia Council grant, artist and writer were both sitting in a temple garden at Matsushima Bay north of Tokyo, looking onto a moss and sedge garden with elderly pine trees giving us filtered almost celestial light, just as Basho and his friend Sora had done centuries before.

Sadami was painting and I was writing haiku, evoking the master poet Basho we had come to honour, with our book. It was a very special and memorable time. The text where three village children meet Basho and Sora is now complete, and the art slowly and beautifully evolving.

And finally to poetry, and an illustrated poetry book I'd like to mention is *The ABC Book of Australian Poetry*, *A treasury of poems for young people* which I compiled following the trajectory of a river, from it sputtering beginnings, down the sheer mountainside, through the meandering countryside to the splendid sea and beyond, with both modern poets and poets of old. I was lucky to have the appealing illustrations of Cassandra Allen, (once again resourceful and imaginative publisher Belinda Bolliger's finding) whom I never met as she was living on the other side of the world, but whose art still works magic for the poems I've selected where Judith Wright can sit beside Steven Herrick, Henry Lawson or Dorothy Hewett. The three short documentaries I did with the State Library of NSW, (poets Dennis, Lawson and Mackellar) seemed to evolve from working on this book, as well as drawing the Society of Women Writers of NSW attention to the much neglected grave of poet Dorothea Mackellar in nearby Waverley Cemetery, and placing a more fitting headstone.



At this moment, reflecting on all these works, I realise how rich and fulfilling writers' and artists' lives can be, as well as all those dedicated publishers, not so far behind the scenes, who bring it all together. That is, in between the sometimes bitter struggles, the over-long waits and crushing disappointments, the reaching towards the almost impossible dreams that are part of an artist's

life, there is such a lot to savour and to struggle for, time and again. And as a writer for young children I hope that my texts might stir imagination and perhaps enhance positive emotions like empathy, as well as all those other good things that learning to read should do! I feel so privileged in being able to devote my life to the arts, and to Australian children's literature in particular.

LH 2019

Afterword

Of course there are other illustrators I've worked with happily, such as Donna Rawlins, Peter Viska, Wayne Harris, Steve Axelsen, Simon Kneebone, Gary Fleming, Kerry Millard, and Melissa Webb, who created some colour illustrations e.g. covers of novels, but mostly black and white illustrations for shorter books and for poetry anthologies to be recounted perhaps another day.

- 'Ms. McElderry came to be called the grande dame of children's publishing, having transcended the typical anonymity of book editors by riding the crest of the post-war baby boom, helping to provide it with a new breed of engaging, nonpatronizing literature.'

By [Douglas Martin](#) New York Times / February 19, 2011

Picture Storybooks

- No! Never! (2020) illus Mal Pearce
- Miss Franklin; how Miles Franklin's brilliant career began.(2019) Illus Phil Lesnie
- Butterfly we're expecting you (2017) illus Lisa Stewart
- A Soldier, a Dog and a Boy (2016) illus Phil Lesnie
- Incredibilia (2016) illus Gaye Chapman
- Outside (2014) illus Ritva Voutila
- A Baby for Loving (2014) illus Tamsin Ainslie
- Sangita's Singing (2012) illus. Bandana Tulachan
- A Boy Like Me (2012) illus. Bruce Whatley
- I Love You Book (2011) illus. Heath McKenzie
- Zahara's Rose (2009) illus. Doris Unger
- The Great Big Animal Ask (2004) illus. Anna Pignataro
- Over the Moon (2003) illus. Caroline Magerl
- The Wishing Cupboard (2002) illus. Libby Stanley
- The River (2001) illus. Stanley Wong
- The Gift (2000) illus. Greg Rogers
- Grandma's Shoes (1994) illus. Elivia & (2000) illus. Caroline Magerl
- Magical Ride (1999) illus. Gary Fleming

- Sky Sash So Blue (1999) illus. Benny Andrews
- The Wonder Thing (1995) illus. Peter Gouldthorpe
- Way Home (1994) illus. Greg Rogers
- Stuntumble Monday (1989) illus. Melissa Webb
- The Garden of the World (1989) illus. Tricia Oktober
- Freya's Fantastic Surprise (1988) illus. Sharon Thompson
- The Tram to Bondi Beach (1981) illus. Julie Vivas
- Lachlan's Walks (1980) illus. Sandra Laroche
- Stephen's Tree (1979) illus. Sandra Laroche



The Hazel Edwards OAM Interview

by Robert Kelly



Hazel Edwards

Hazel Edwards OAM is one of Australia's most well-known authors. Her work ranges in genre and style, but no matter the subject matter Hazel's writing has inspired generations of writers and readers. I sat down with Hazel to talk about her life and career.

Robert Kelly (RK): 'When you decided to become a writer, what challenges did you face?'

Hazel contemplates the question before replying.

Hazel Edwards (HE): 'When I was twenty, I hadn't met any authors and I didn't know how to research, pitch, write or organise a book. My father told me to get a 'real job' and to have adventures, so I would have something of value to write about.'

Hazel laughs.

HE: 'That's probably why I ended up in Antarctica as an expeditioner. I think participant-observation [which is when a writer does things in order to write realistically about them afterwards] was what he was referring to. I did a bit of that and as I wanted to be a teacher being an aspiring author fitted well with writing, as both are about sharing ideas in accessible ways.'

RK: 'What inspired you to follow your passion?'

HE: While working in the teachers' college I met the late George Pappas. He was a charismatic educator who wrote TV scripts, produced plays and educational books. He was the first practising professional writer whose work style was not 9.00am to 5.00pm. I realised it was possible to have a dual career, but George was single and I was married with a family. That's when I realised that effective writing is about time and energy management, as well as quirky ideas and adventurous travelling.

RK: 'When you were awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to literature in 2013, how did you respond?'

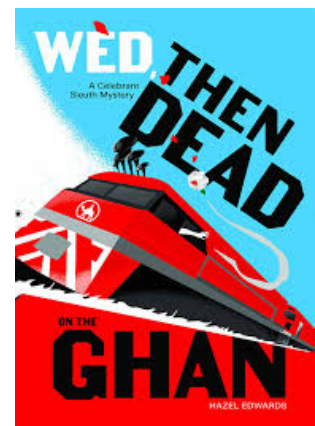
HE: I was shocked, but thrilled that an author was acknowledged for literary work. We don't have staff nor a hierarchy of professional colleagues who can fill in nomination forms for awards. It was very much appreciated that my colleagues took time from their own self-employment to put my name forward. I think they saw the O.A.M. as a cultural acknowledgement of the economic importance of creativity. I was delighted to accept on behalf of all my writing community.



RK: In recent years, you branched out to more adult literature with your books about Quinn, a celebrant with style and a few obsessions, but a good heart being one very significant addition. Why did you go down this direction with your writing?

HE: It was about wanting to improve my plotting. I write mysteries, as a discipline, but also to utilise interesting settings like the iconic outback train, The Ghan. I choose the versatile occupation of a 'celebrant' as a way of moving my sleuth into various cultures and settings. I

had been to lots of funerals, naming ceremonies and a few weddings. The character of Quinn was deliberately created with a book series in mind. In the long term, I intended a television series to be made, so the existing self-contained chapters would transfer easily to episode settings. I'd been asked by a person of diverse gender why nobody ever wrote realistically about people such as her. So my celebrant sleuth Quinn is asexual and in a longterm relationship, 'but prefers ice-cream to sex.'



RK: 'In 2019, you released a sequel to your first book *'Wed, Then Dead on The Ghan'*. Tell us about that.'

HE: The sequel was an experiment, both as a digital eBook and print. The printed version is tiny and more like a pamphlet which can be read on one trip. I find that e-stories story are more flexible in length, but book covers and titles still matter.

RK: How does writing adult literature differ from writing literature for children?

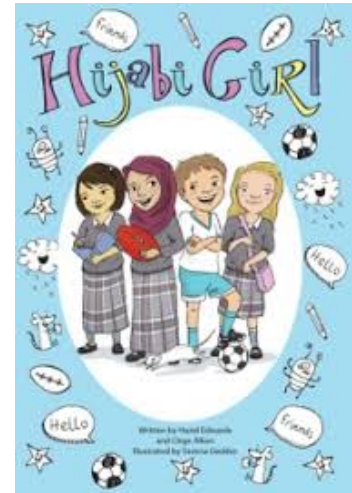
HE: Writing for children is harder, but more satisfying. I think it's something to do with the genuine involvement the author has with the characters. My cake-eating hippo character is real for readers. He even gets fan mail like, 'I haven't got a friend, will you come and sit on my roof?' I suppose the motive of 'why?' a character does something is more complex in an adult book. And more sub-plots are woven. But a well-choreographed picture book with humorous sub-text is the greatest challenge for a writer. Children's books are re-read many times, and often at significant stages in a lifetime. I would surmise that most adult books are read once. So the emotional and commercial life of a children's book is longer and there are also new readers every six years which is about a generation now. Often child readers relate to the character rather than the author and faithfully read every book in which that character appears. And then they watch the animation, the movie or the theatrical production. My favourite creative experience is to be anonymously in a theatre audience of children interacting with the characters from my books. When Garry Ginivan produced 'Hippo Hippo The Musical' I loved watching the child audience being taken into the world of imagination.

RK: 'How has storytelling evolved since you became an author?'

HE: Digital devices enable individual children to watch and experience a producer's version of that story by themselves. There's more emphasis upon the visual and action. Sharing a book between a child and an adult enables closeness, fun and explanation, but only if BOTH like that story. There is no point in an adult sharing a story they dislike. A story has to grip the imagination of the reader and enable them to become involved in that world and care what happens to the characters within it. Sometimes the story can be about reassuring others that it's possible to cope successfully with being different, such as in our *'Hijabi Girl'* book which is soon to be a 'Larrikin Puppetry' musical. Every night, my grandson and I read stories on FaceTime - once he taught me how to use it. As an author, I have read my stories on Skype to children in remote outback towns. Regardless of the device, the story has to work as a story, and maybe even without visuals.

RK: What about your audiobooks?

HE: Recording ‘*Celebrant Sleuth: I Do or Die*’ for AUDIBLE was a big challenge for me, since I’m not an actor. The adult book was much longer (9 hours edited of recording) than the mainly junior fiction like ‘*Hijabi Girl*’ or the picture books I have read in studios before. It also made me conscious of the rhythm of sentences and I often test how my children’s books sound when workshopping them with audiences.



RK: ‘What advice can you give to aspiring authors in a world already full of great stories and books?’

HE: Write an inspiring story about something which matters to you. Read it aloud to tell whether it has an appropriate rhythm and give it the ‘yawn test’ on an audience. If they go to sleep, it needs re-writing. And maybe more humour.’

RK: That’s great advice. Now, going back to your latest book in the Celebrant Sleuth series ‘Wed, Then Dead on The Ghan’ takes your protagonists on an outback train journey through Australia. Why did you choose this setting?

HE: Literary Tourism! I have travelled many times on the Ghan, which is a very special, three day outback train journey from Adelaide to Darwin [and then there’s the reverse trip]. I have family who live in Darwin, so I wanted Quinn to perform a wedding in a different setting from her hometown, and to solve a mystery related to the iconic train journey. I researched that a wedding could be performed, but mine was made- up in the story. As we know, many international and especially Scandinavian visitors wanted to see kangaroos and joked about Agatha Christie’s ‘*Murder on the Orient Express*’ that it seemed appropriate to weave into the plot. Literary tourism is when tourists visit an area because it was the setting for a book, a series character or a film. Occasionally it may be that the author lived there. So I imagined an Agatha Christie role-playing murder mystery on the Ghan, with passengers in character but fiction becomes fact. I didn’t want the crime to be related to food poisoning because the catering on the Ghan is exceptionally good. So I found out about opals and indigenous art sales. The twist may be that eventually tourists will book onto the Ghan to enact this story. That will be real Literary Tourism.

RK: Why should international readers buy your new book?

HE: ‘*Wed Then Dead on the Ghan*’ is a mini memento of a significant train journey and a souvenir. And maybe part of future Literary Tourism?

RK: Where can readers find your new book *'Wed, Then Dead on The Ghan'*?

HE: All details are on my website at [/hazeledwards.com](http://hazeledwards.com). It's currently available for free on Kindle Unlimited. The original full length book *'Celebrant Sleuth; I Do or Die'* is on Kindle, but also on Booktopia and Amazon in print format. It can be ordered directly from the publisher BookPOD.

RK: Hazel, thank you for the interview. In closing, how do you want to be remembered?

HE: For writing stories which readers enjoyed or which enable them to see the world differently.



**Hazel Edwards in her study
(credit Copyright agency)**



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