



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

BEHIND THE IMAGINED

I S S U E

07

2024

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

Editor: Jane Carstens

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Welcome from the Editor



An agreement to house the Collection in the Library of the Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAEC), now the University of Canberra, was reached on 15 July 1980. Pictured are Lu Rees, Douglas Waterhouse (Chairman of the College Council) and Victor Crittenden, CCAEC Librarian.

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) began in 1974 with a grant of \$500 from the Federal Government to each branch of The Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA). Lu Rees, who was the president of the ACT branch, suggested that a national collection of Australian children's literature should be formed. She offered her own collection of 500 books as a starting point, and being very persuasive, all the branches agreed and started sending books to her. The rest, as they say, is history!

That history was celebrated in March this year with a series of events to mark such an impressive milestone. 50 years! This edition is dedicated to the events that took place to celebrate our Centre's half-century of achievement in the children's literature space. It hasn't been a smooth road by any means, but tenacity and the belief that preserving the history of children's literature in such a tangible way is important for future generations to see what came before was the fuel.



As of 30 June, 2024, we hold over 59,110 books, 5,711 of these in 100 different languages. We have accepted 80 Cultural Gifts of artworks, papers and manuscripts and other items from authors, illustrators and others. In July 2022 our collection was valued for insurance purposes at \$12,824,100.

As we celebrate the past, it's fitting to look to the future as well. The Centre was visited by staff and children from Blue Gum Preschool (Hackett, ACT) who are exploring the concept of 'advocacy'. They want to be advocates for the Centre and the children have drawn pictures of the building they believe we need. We are very happy with where we are (thank you University of Canberra) but also very excited to receive these drawings. You will unfortunately need to wait until our next edition to view them. This edition belongs firmly to our past 50 years. Happy Birthday to us!

Jane Carstens
Editor

50 Years of Achievements – A Timeline

- 1974 - National collection of Australian Children's books began. Children's Book Council of Australia ACT Branch agrees to establish the Lu Rees collection
- 1979 - Collecting translations began
- 1980 - Collection moved from private homes to the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now the University of Canberra)
- 1981 - Lu Rees Archives annual print journal began, continuing online from 2017 and renamed *Behind the Imagined*
- 1988 - Deductible Gift Recipient and tax-exempt charity status achieved
- 1991 - Formal Agreements began with the CCAE, now the University of Canberra
- 1995 - CBCA national body provided funding for part-time staff which ended in 2014
- 1997 - Website created by University of Canberra students
- 2007 - Words ... Pictures ... Book! First major exhibition
- 2012 - Lu Rees Archives registers as an independent incorporated body in the ACT
- 2013 - Annual reports began to Australian Government's Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC)
- 2014 - Rebranding with new logo, tag lines and collateral
- 2014 - Social media began: X (Twitter) + Facebook (11.4K followers) plus e-newsletter (720 subscribers)
- 2014 - Showcasing Treasures published as the history of the Centre's development
- 2015 - Name change from Lu Rees Archives to National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc
- 2016 - Ambassadors appointed—Jackie French followed by Christopher Cheng in 2017
- 2018 - Launched free-standing [website](#) after the original website was hosted by the University of Canberra 1997-2014
- 2018 - Sharing Stories exhibition, events and tour of IBBY International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) international collection
- 2019 - Launched the Centre's [Cultural Diversity Database](#)
- 2020 - Launched the Centre's [Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Resource](#) funded by the Australian Government
- 2021 - Launched the Centre's Verse Novels resource
- 2023 - Launched the Centre's [The Barrumbi Kids](#) website teaching resource
- 2023 - Launched the Centre's [Picture Books for Older Readers Database](#)
- 2023 – The Centre's [Blog](#) was launched
- 2024 - Celebrated the Centre's [50th birthday](#)

Our Party in Pictures

Lu Rees wrote to publishers in the early days asking them to donate their children's books. She wrote: *'The greatest help any publisher could give us would be to donate the new Australian children's books as they are published. This would allow us to keep abreast of the growing field as it happens and to devote what time and money we have to filling in gaps in the collection from years past. This suggestion might seem too much to ask, but anything you could do towards this would be helpful.'*

What started as a grand idea is now 50 years old and gaining momentum every year. The official 50th party was held at the NCACL office at the University of Canberra on March 12 where a large group gathered to hear speeches, recognise volunteers and celebrate what Lu Rees started 50 years ago.



Interim Vice Chancellor Professor Lucy Johnston



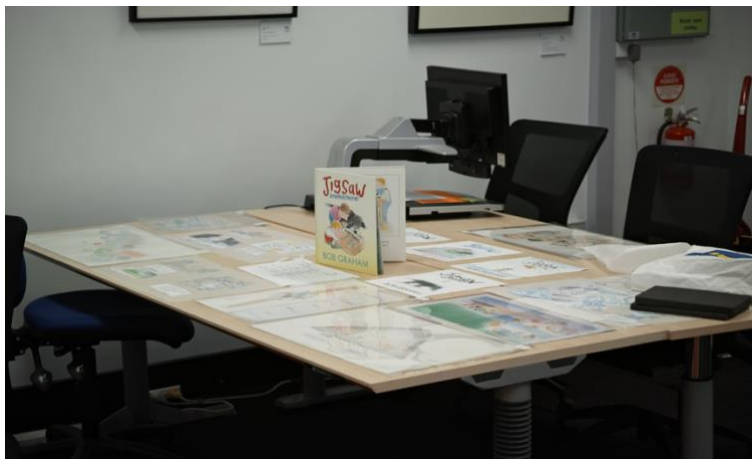
Gathering to hear the opening speech by Interim Vice Chancellor Professor Lucy Johnston



Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators books



Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman AM



Bob Graham's artwork for *Jigsaw*



Drinks at Mizzuna Cafe



Book Cow Bookshop selling Canberra children's writers and illustrators books



Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman receiving a commemorative plaque from Dr Malcolm Beazley, Director of the National Museum of Education



Emeritus Professor Belle Alderman, Interim Vice Chancellor Professor Lucy Johnston, John Faulks, Bob Graham

Life Memberships awarded to Bob Graham and Rose Howes



Bob Graham, John Faulks, Rose Howes

On Tuesday 12 March 2024, Life Memberships were presented to Bob Graham and Rose Howes by John Faulks, Acting Chair of the NCACL Board. This was John Faulks' speech.

The thing that probably most distinguishes humans from machines is imagination. As William Arthur Ward said:

If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it. The man who has no imagination has no wings.

Or, perhaps as Willy Wonka said:

There is no life I know

To compare with pure imagination

Living there, you'll be free

If you truly wish to be.

Or as Winston Churchill remarked in relation to King Arthur and the legends about him:

It is all true or ought to be: and more and better besides.

We are storytellers. We are the tellers of the stories of the things that we imagine and the things that we observe. That is part of being a human being and perhaps an essential part of being a human being.



Children need to have the benefit of stories both oral and importantly, from NCACL's point of view, in writing, in books.

Our first duties are to preserve children's literature, to encourage children's literature and to examine and explain children's literature. That has been the function of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature for 50 years. It is a journey that is part about preserving what it is to be human but it is more than that. It is about fun. It is about imagination and it is about the wonderful business of being a child and hearing stories.

The NCACL began 50 years ago as the Lu Rees Archive. And some of the people associated with the beginning of NCACL are still in the business of preserving children's literature.

We were very fortunate that from a long time ago the University of Canberra became our partner and our friend and have provided us with accommodation, insurance and support.

In return we have enabled students (particularly from UC) to research, use the facilities and the wonderful archive which is the Collection.

Two things that have enabled this to occur are our wonderful volunteers who have always provided not only skilled and enthusiastic but consistent and reliable labour, love and care.

Foremost among those I acknowledge our director Belle Alderman who has been the living soul of the organisation for most of its life.

I also wish to formally express my thanks to the University of Canberra. Without them we would not be here.

The third thing that is important is that while we might want to preserve children's literature we also need to ensure that it is accessible. Knowledge locked away is knowledge lost and NCACL has worked over many years to ensure that as many people as want to, and need to, can have access to the Collection.

In more recent times this has meant more online accessibility which again has only been made possible by the massive efforts of our incredible volunteers. Lynn Fletcher has been a particular marvel.

Our dream is to have a building in which all the children of Australia can come – not all at the same time! – to become immersed in children's literature. That is still a few years and about \$100 million away.

The Board decided recently that it should provide special recognition to particular individuals who have contributed significantly to enabling the NCACL to have a 50th birthday and still to be a viable and important tool for children – and their parents. We called for nominations and from those, two people were selected to receive Life Membership of the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature.

Choosing two people from the many worthy nominees was no easy task. The Citations will appear in a special book that sets out the background of what these two people provided. They are both with us tonight.

The first of these is Bob Graham. Bob has not been a volunteer in the sense of someone that has preserved books or done those sorts of things although he has been a frequent attender

at NCACL functions and has always been prepared to give his time as well as his books and materials to the collection. Moreover, he is an advocate and a friend.

The second is Rose Howes. It is hard to put into words the fact that someone can contribute 30 years of service with such dedication with such unassuming generosity and with such love. Rose will be acutely embarrassed about the fact that anyone is talking about her at all tonight and I will let her citation in its written form speak for the many things that she has done.

May I however offer my personal congratulations, the congratulations of the Board and, vicariously, your congratulations to these two amazing friends of the National Centre.

Bob Graham's birthday celebration speech

National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc's 50th Birthday Speech by Bob Graham on 12 March 2024



Bob Graham delivering his speech

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, (formally the Lu Rees Archives collection) is 50. I read in Belinda Gamlen and Shelley Blakeley's notes that my own contribution goes back some 44 of those years with my first picture book Pete and Roland in 1980. I try to grab onto that, the swift passing of time. I find I am like one of those big brown bears standing in a swift stream and swiping at salmon as they swim past; me snatching at memories.

And there they are, much of my working life laid out and meticulously annotated for all to see in the collection; the whole caboodle along with the coffee cup rings, the crossings out, the sticky tape and no doubt some disappearing text on yellowing paper from old fax transmissions. For me, this striving, feeling around, getting it wrong, finding a way through, when I see this again it is such a fundamental part of the process, somehow more real than seeing the finished version of the story bound between glossy covers, with its hair neatly parted and its shirt tucked in. And so I suspect it might be for many authors and this is what the Archives hold and is available to see. I think that is an extraordinary resource!

When I first sent off work to the Lu Rees Archives I never quite made the connection, never thought that it might make for general or academic interest somewhere down the track—more that all that used paper was fast building up under our low slung Futon from the 70s and threatening to make our feet higher than our sleeping heads. Something needed to be done! And my editor and friend Anne Ingram from William Collins introduced me to Dr Belle Alderman at a CBC event (I think it was) and things went on from there.

No longer does my work sleep under our bed or in the laundry, (and I know that's something destined to cause a sharp intake of breath from all Conservators). I take my hat off to you all at the Centre and beyond, to Belle and to all the volunteers who so carefully

annotate, document, put into order, find context and who work with such dedication and expertise.

I owe you!

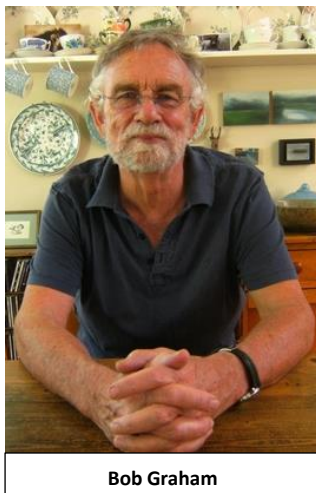
WE owe you!

And with the further passing of time when people stand here for the Centenary celebration of the Centre for Australian Children's Literature that all your work will have been a major foundation to an extensive and beautiful collection of children's books housed in an Institution of cultural importance to the arts in Australia.

Thank you.

Telling Tales: Inside Australian Children's Literature

Two very popular speaker's sessions were held on Monday March 11. The first session was [Bob Graham](#) talking about his work as an author and illustrator, and the second a panel discussion with Eva Mills, Christopher Cheng, Ann James and Sally Allen. This group discussed current publishing trends in children's literature, challenges for aspiring, unpublished authors and illustrators, the need for Australian children's books to remain in print and available, and the need for promotion of children's literature by teacher librarians, teachers and parents of Australian children's books. This session's recordings are in two parts: [Part one](#) and [part two](#). A short biography of each speaker is below.



Bob Graham is a Kate Greenaway-winning author-illustrator who has written and illustrated many acclaimed children's picture books. These include *Crusher is Coming*, *How to Heal a Broken Wing*, *Jethro Byrde: Fairy Child*, *April Underhill: Tooth Fairy* and *Jigsaw: A Puzzle in the Post* amongst others. His 2011 title, *A Bus Called Heaven*, is endorsed by Amnesty International UK and was the winner of the 2012 Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year Award. Bob has won this award an unprecedented seven times. In 2014, *Silver Buttons* was awarded a prestigious Prime Minister's Literary Award in Australia.

Bob studied drawing and painting, went to the UK after graduation, returned to Sydney and there began his career as an illustrator and designer. Between 1983 and 1995 he worked as an illustrator for The Five Mile Press publishing house. He created the long-running monthly French comic-strip for children for the French magazine, *Les Belles Histoires*.

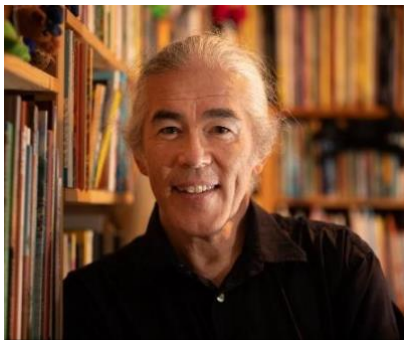
Eva Mills is the Publishing Director of Books for Children and Young Adults at Allen & Unwin Book Publishers. Originally a British publisher, Allen & Unwin became an independent Australian publisher in 1990. Rosalind Price was appointed their first children's and young adult publisher in 1988. Today Allen & Unwin publishes around 250 new titles annually.



Eva reveals that as a child she was a 'little obsessed' with box sets of books. Her parents bought her entire series of such long-time favourites as *Winnie-the Pooh*, *the Moomins*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Narnia*, *The Dark is Rising* and *Lord of the Rings*. Many of these classics are known and loved the world over.

While working in the public service, Eva knew she wanted to write fiction for young adults. She enrolled in a course at RMIT and loved a course in editing. This became her real passion. She landed a work placement at Allen & Unwin under the tutelage of Rosalind Price. She joined Allen & Unwin in 2009 and, in 2015; Eva was appointed Publishing Director of Books for Children and Young Adults.

Eva describes children's publishing in Australia as generous and collaborative. She goes on to say that publishing is a business and so difficult and sometimes painful decisions for commercial reasons must be made. Still, she goes on, publishing is also an art—'many creators I've worked with pour their talent and passion into their work, so that must be remembered and respected at all times'.



Christopher Cheng is the award-winning author of many children's books published worldwide in print and digital formats. He writes children's fiction and nonfiction as a full-time pursuit. His picture books include *Bear and Rat* illustrated by Stephen Michael King and *One Tree* illustrated by Bruce Whatley.

Christopher has worked as a primary school teacher, children's bookseller and he established Australia's first travelling zoo, the Zoomobile at Taronga Park Zoo.

Christopher is co-chair of the International Advisory Board for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

(SCBWI). He is a recipient of the Lady Cutler Award for Children's Literature. Christopher established the international peer voted SCBWI Crystal Kite Awards, chosen by children's book writers and illustrators, the only peer-given awards in publishing for young readers. Christopher has been a Literacy Ambassador for the Federal Government's Literacy and Numeracy Week initiative and is an Ambassador for the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc.

Ann James' earlier life as an art teacher is the foundation for her approach to illustrating books for children. In a career spanning 45 years, she has illustrated over 70 books, collaborating with many authors and publishers. In 1988, she and Ann Haddon established Books Illustrated, a gallery and bookshop, promoting Australian picture books and their creators through exhibitions in Australia and overseas for 35 years.

Ann was a director on the Board of The Australian Society of Authors representing children's book creators for 20 years, and a founding director on the Board of the Australian Children's Laureate Foundation. As an Ambassador of the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, Ann has the wonderful opportunity to work with children in some of the most remote and inspiring communities in Australia. Her interest in supporting and promoting creators of Australian children's books has been acknowledged over her career. In 2000 she was awarded the Pixie O'Harris award and, in 2002, the Dromkeen Medal for services to children's literature. Ann was the Australian illustrator nominated for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2020. In 2016 Ann was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia.



Ann James AM



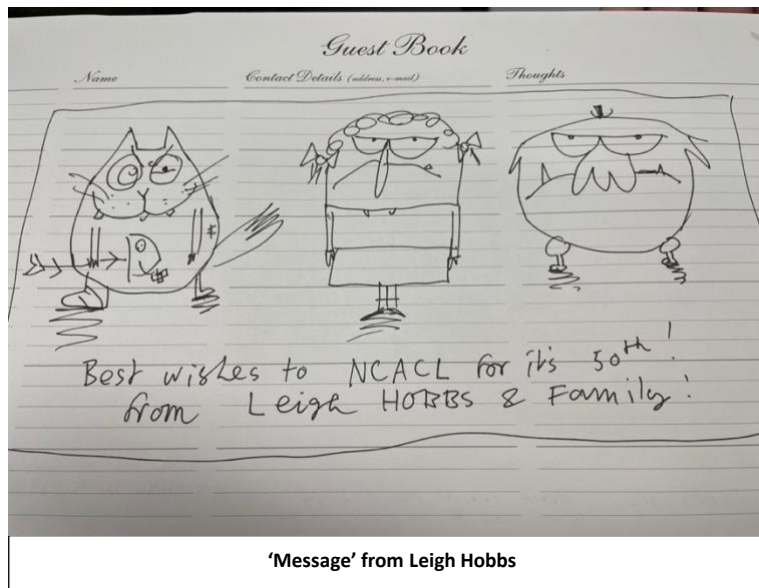
Sally Allen

Sally Allen has worked for over 20 years as a teacher in ACT public schools, including as a classroom teacher, EAL/D teacher, Reading Recovery teacher and as a release teacher within the school library. She completed her Master of Teacher Librarianship at Charles Sturt University in 2023, as part of the ACT Education Directorate teacher scholarship program that supported her to upskill and gain a formal qualification in teacher librarianship.

Sally was drawn to being a teacher librarian after seeing the impact it made in schools. The teacher librarian advocates for children's literature and encourages storytelling and reading across the whole school community.

Sally is now a practicing teacher librarian, a role shared across the Narrabundah and Lyons Early Childhood Schools in Canberra, Australia.

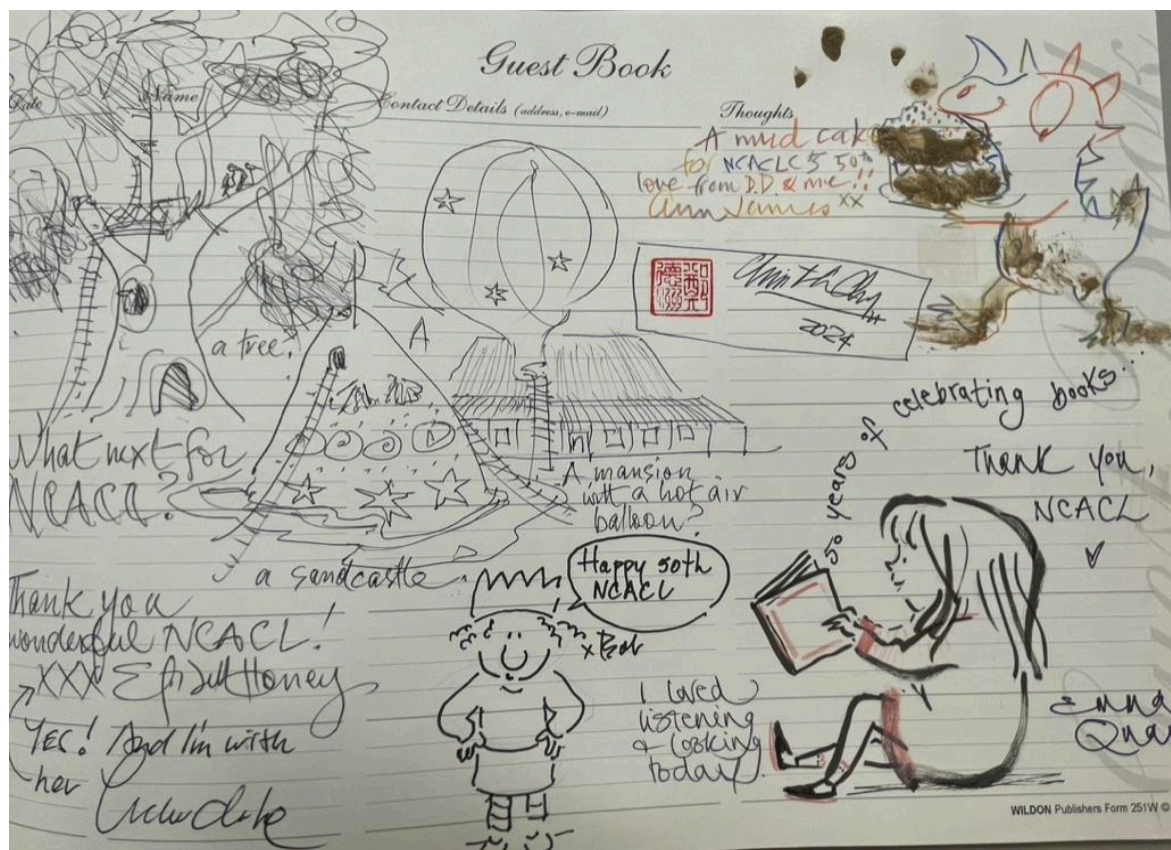
We felt the love



'Message' from Leigh Hobbs

There were many ways we felt the love for our work. Our Centre has certainly gained a following and we are grateful for all the messages sent to us.

A guest book for the Centre has been kept since 1983. We have had some lovely entries over the years, but when you invite author/illustrators to sign it at a 50th birthday party, anything can happen!



'Messages' from top left: Elizabeth Honey, top right Ann James, top middle right Christopher Cheng, bottom right Emma Quay, bottom centre Bob Graham, bottom left Andrew Clark

We also received [birthday messages](#) from a variety of people whose sentiments showcased how successful we are. This is an edited version of just a few.

Professor Gregory Bryan, University of Manitoba, Canada

It is wonderful to know this is merely the first fifty years and that there are many still to come with the Centre collecting and preserving materials that tell the stories of Australian children's literature. Thanks for all you do.

Julie Long OAM

Congratulations to past and present supporters and may there be many more people who benefit from this National Treasure house of Australian Children's books, School Magazines, artworks, author and illustrator files and sometimes quirky ephemera.

Elizabeth Honey

*NCACL you are precious
You stand up for us in the turbulence of this digital revolution
May your dedication remain heartfelt
and may your spine not fade.*

National Library of Australia

We send our warmest birthday wishes to the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature for their 50th anniversary. As a collecting institution ourselves, we recognise and appreciate the remarkable importance of holding a record of these stories, these artists and writers, this significant legacy. Thank you for your work preserving this part of Australia's history.

Alex Wharton, Educator, Literary Critic and Judge

As an educator, a parent and a reader, I am thankful for the caretakers of NCACL whom I can stand alongside in this celebration and say, "what a marvellous collection and contribution to the social and cultural fabric of Australia. We are all the richer for having you in our lives, classrooms and communities."

Andrew Leigh, Federal Member for Fenner

"From Mem Fox's "where is the green sheep" to Pamela Allen's "waddle giggle gargle paddle poodle", the best of children's books stick in your mind for many years afterwards. Although our three boys are now in double-digit ages, my wife Gweneth and I still enjoy reading them the occasional bedtime story. Books have marked their growing up, as they moved from May Gibbs to Norman Lindsay to Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton to Morris Gleitzman to Jack Heath. We're lucky to live in a nation with such remarkable Australian storytellers, where you can almost smell the eucalyptus leaves on the page. Congratulations to the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature on your 50th anniversary, and I look forward to the remarkable achievements to come in the next half century."

Elise Moore, Literacy Advisor: The School Magazine

Over the past five decades, you have made an indelible impact on the landscape of children's literature in Australia. Your commitment to collecting, preserving, and documenting developments in Australian children's literature has not only enriched the lives of countless young readers but also contributed to the cultural heritage of our nation.

Behind Secret, Sealed Doors



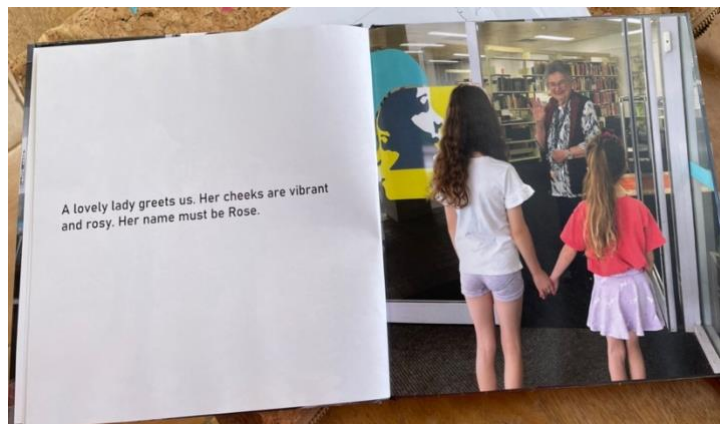
The front cover

Birthdays are renowned for surprises, and we were certainly surprised when every guest at our celebration on March 12 was presented with a copy of *Behind Secret, Sealed Doors*.

Written by Emma Janssen, assisted by her daughters Sophie and Niome Janssen, this book records their visit to the Centre from the perspective of the youngest daughter Niome. Written as a children's book, it is dedicated to our hard working and dedicated volunteers, and for all the children who dream of being authors and illustrators.

This book was not only a lovely surprise, but a copy is now in our archives where it will be preserved for future generations.

Thank you, Emma, Sophie and Niome.



A page in the book



Christopher Cheng, NCAAC Ambassador launches the book at the birthday celebration on March 12

A salute to our volunteers

Visitors to the NCACL office at the University of Canberra, or those who attend activities and functions hosted by NCACL, often don't see the engine room that keeps the Centre going. So, we've given you a peek behind the curtain to see what our volunteers do, often in the shadows. We salute and thank them for all their hard work.

Accession and process books and other items Acknowledge donations Advise and supervise UC students and external work experience students and interns Annual submission to Australian Charities and Not for profit Commission Arrange, describe and create finding aids to creators' papers Assign Australian Curriculum codes to database entries Assist UC students Attend & participate in meetings Attend cataloguing training Attend meetings Attend visitors Catalogue items Arrange catering for events Choose books from Lifeline Book Fairs Choose items from grant funding Complete Affiliate annual reports Conduct school incursions Contribute to NCACL databases & bibliographies Correspond with children's literature community Create and deliver professional development sessions Create and dismantle exhibitions Create and revise policies Create and update author & illustrator research files Create displays Write grant submissions Create inventories Create items for Annual Reports Create learning activities for children Create newsletters Create plans for future needs Create presentations for local and national organisations and conferences Create new project proposals Create promotional material Create resources for website Create spreadsheets Demonstrate databases Develop marketing and communication plans Develop and present talks to professional organisations/conferences Document & house special collections Document artwork Document book sales and bank funds Document papers for the Cultural Gifts Program Document research file material Document space needs Edit and publish the journal Edit NCACL blogs File research material Frame artworks for exhibitions Host politicians Host visitors Identify and label framed artworks Identify and sort Lifeline books Liaise with external organisations for exhibits and events Liaise with NCACL Ambassadors Locate second hand books Maintain supplies Manage and develop website Manage NCACL blog 2023 – now Manage Facebook 2014 – now Manage finances Manage online events Manage database projects (ATSI, CDD, PBOR etc) Manage travelling exhibitions Manage NCACL website Manage X 2014- (formerly Twitter) Manage work-integrated learning for UC students Manage workshops for volunteer projects Meet with external experts Meet with those in the children's book world Mentor UC Work Integrated Learning (WIL) students Mentor, plan programs and write reports on external work experience students Moderate database content Monitor book sale trolley Negotiate acquisition of creators' collections Network with children's literature community Oversee and update databases Oversee travelling book exhibitions Participate on Boards Photocopy items for research files Plan & execute fund raising campaigns Plan and execute exhibitions Plan and implement interstate exhibitions Plan and run funding campaigns Plan collaborative exhibitions (for example, NLA) Plan events Prepare material for and write annual reports Prepare book lists for thank you letters Prepare clippings for research files Prepare financial reports Prepare items and documentation for external loans Prepare labels for exhibitions Prepare policy, promotion and business papers Prepare teacher professional development Prepare wish lists Prepare, research and mount exhibitions Present reviews, talks, and visual presentations Process & supervise translation projects Process and file research material Process donations Process Lifeline books Process and check rare books Produce journal, Behind the Imagined Produce and print the online journal Project manage databases Project manage events Promote events Promote the collection through talks,

interviews, programs, radio, television and articles [Proof read documents](#) Provide catering for events [Provide clippings for research files](#) [Provide research assistance](#) [Provide tours for visitors](#) Publish articles [Radio and television interviews](#) Record donations for Annual Reports [Relocate collections](#) [Repair books](#) Research and annotate books for databases and bibliographies Research donors Research, write & submit grants solo and with others [Review and revise various Agreements](#) [Review books for radio & publications](#) Review research files Revise policies [Sell used books](#) Shelf books [Solve cataloguing entries](#) Supervise & work with interns [Supervise exhibitions' development and display](#) Support external researchers [Support NCACL Board](#) [Support researchers](#) Take photographs [Train new volunteers](#) [Undertake financial accounting](#) Undertake strategic planning [Update research files](#) [Update website](#) [Visit related children's literature organisations](#) Work with students [Write donation acknowledgment letters](#) [Write grants](#) [Write references](#) [Write NCACL Annual Reports](#) [Write reviews, blogs, articles, reports and books](#) [Write submissions](#)

Never be Late for a Parade!



Shaun Tan

As part of our birth celebrations, [22 framed digital prints](#) from Shaun Tan's major works, plus displays of [preliminary art and ephemera](#) relating to his work were displayed from February 19 to March 14 at the Mura Gadi Gallery at the University of Canberra.

Curated by NCACL, the exhibition was a huge success and sparked many wonderful [comments](#) in our guest book.



Shaun Tan's digital artworks in Mura Gadi Gallery during the birthday celebrations

The last word goes to Lu Rees



Lu Rees

The last word in this celebratory year must go to Lu Rees. A determined visionary, Lu kept jumping hurdles and didn't give up, even when the odds seemed stacked against her.

This is the article she wrote in the forerunner to this online journal initiated by Victor Crittenden in 1981 titled *The Lu Rees Archives: notes, books and authors*.

She wrote that it all really started in the 1950s which makes the origins of NCACL much older than 50 years!

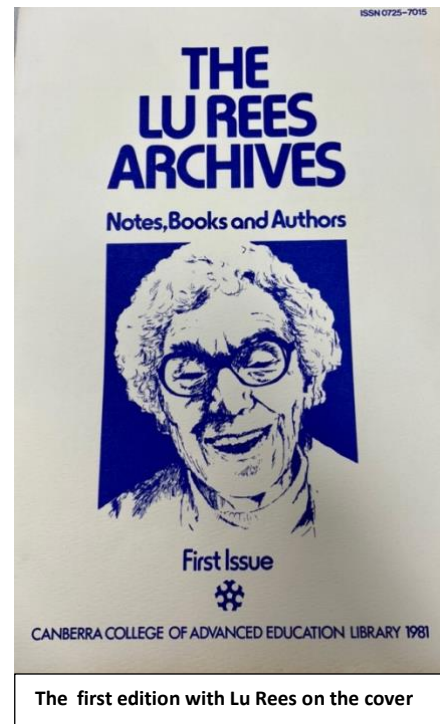
Thank you, Lu. We and subsequent generations owe you a huge debt of gratitude for your foresight and tenacity to see your dream turn into a reality.

The Children's Book Council Collection of Children's Books by Australian Authors

The Librarian at the College asks. "How did it start?" - and then added, "Will you write an account or perhaps, do a tape about it all?" So - where does anything start? With the idea - with something that arouses your interest. Maybe this really started back in 1950 when a branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers was formed in Canberra and I found myself elected Secretary and general dogsbody, and I began to meet many authors.

I was used to working amongst authors, but they were all writing Military History - then in 1955 I left the War Memorial staff and joined Cheshires as manager of the branch opening in Canberra. That opened up a contact with a wide range of authors and publishers and for the first time I was brought in close touch with children's books, their authors, illustrators and publishers.

The ACT branch of the Children's Book Council was formed in 1957 and I was elected its first President which meant a closer interest in children's books, and I formed a deep respect for these authors and the honesty of their attitude towards their readers. No doubt they have fads and prejudices like all of us, but they don't try and ram them down the throats of their young readers. And of course - while grown-ups put up with that sort of thing children won't have a bar of it. It became quite fascinating to watch the development of an Australian children's literature. And yet, in the early '60's, I asked a member of the Literature Board what Fellowships were available to authors of children's literature, and he bluntly replied, 'My dear, you wouldn't call children's books literature, would you?'



The first edition with Lu Rees on the cover

So, there was still a long way to go. In the early '70's a meeting of the Federal body of the CBCA agreed to the formation of an Archives Section, to be built by the Canberra Branch. This branch offered to house any records the State branches wished to hand over for safekeeping and, at the same time, to set about making a collection of the works of Australian children's authors. As a first step in this I offered to hand over my personal collection of a few hundred books as soon as there was a place to put them – this would be something to build on. Jill Gamble (Mrs Don Gamble) offered temporary space in her house and the Council had shelving put in, floor to ceiling, in our room. Jill also housed a lot of Federal records in fact still has them - and for several years did all the work connected with arranging and keeping them. From that time all members of the Book Council were involved to some extent - new books were bought by the Council - so far as this could be financed and any member who saw an old book on sale at a fete would buy it and pass it to Jill. So it grew.

As a matter of interest, I had started files for all the authors I knew - that extended to others and help came from many quarters. Margaret Aitken provided much valuable material, and this was followed up by her colleagues in later years. All that is now "Background Music". At the end of 1978 after the Council had held its last meeting for the year and broken up till February, one of the librarians from the Canberra Public Library Service (CPLS) rang me and asked, "What are you doing about the International Year of the Child?" I could only say, 'Nothing – haven't thought about it'. Apparently the matter had come up for discussion and there someone suggested finding out what plans the CBCA had so that they didn't cross wires. I found that our entire Executive, President, Secretary and all - had disappeared for the Christmas holidays - there were a couple more phone calls and by the time Pat Eccles of the CPLS came on the line I'd had time to think a bit and explained that all the top brass of the CBCA were out of touch but, if I could throw in a personal idea, it would be to emphasise the International angle but didn't think it would come off - but if I was to try they would back me and support the idea.

I did manage to contact a few of our members and there was no opposition - "wonderful idea" they said with some scepticism. And no wonder, for I only had a vague idea of how to go about it. Most of my first moves were pretty discouraging - only one publisher initially gave unqualified support - that was Ann Ingram on behalf of Collins. Then I changed into another lane and started the long road of writing to each author personally asking for a list of former editions and the publishers – explaining the purpose, of course. This was most rewarding and the general tone of the response from authors lifted me up onto a cloud of enthusiasm.

Reginald Ottley sent me the names of his overseas publishers and sometimes the name of the person who had handled his work and I immediately wrote to them all. Patricia Wrightson sent eight books in different languages as a gift and the addresses of the publishers of others - and has since sent the Yugoslav Nargun and the Stars which was published last year and the Swedish Bunyip Hole. Elyne Mitchell sent thirteen books as a gift and a Spanish one on loan and addresses of other publishers and has since sent another. Joan Phipson presented all the copies she had and the names of her other publishers. So did Mavis Thorpe Clark, Hesba Brinsmead, Margaret Paice and Nance Donkin.

Ivan Southall presented a somewhat different problem for as his foreign editions had reached about 80 volumes and many of them would be irreplaceable. I would not ever think

of asking for a gift of that size and value - we discussed the matter over the telephone, and we made a token exchange and my son called at Ivan's home and picked up several cartons containing 83 volumes in time for the 1979 Children's Book Week.

This was the most wonderful thing that could have happened to us at the beginning of such a campaign. Spread out on a large table in the 1979 Children's Book Week Exhibition, it showed at a glance what we were aiming at - a complete edition picture of one author's work in their original editions and in the many other languages in which his books were being read by children around the world.

This slow process of collection is still going on. The simplest way for me to work is to go through the work of one author at a time - to get their books in English and then write for all the translations - slow but overseas publishers have been very co-operative. Although at first the Australian publishers didn't take me seriously, things have changed. As the size of the collection grew, more support came from this important source.

At the end of the International Year of the Child 1979 we had already built up a unique and valuable collection and then faced the problem that everyone who collects material of some historical value must come up against in time. What is to become of it all? What use will be made of it? And who else cares about it anyway? My hope was that presented with a shelf displaying the full range of an author's writing and a file giving biographical and critical notes on his or her life's work - some young teachers and librarians might be interested enough to follow this up - to make a study of individual authors and illustrators, to study them in enough depth to form an opinion of their place in local and world literature and to be able to talk about their work to children. This might be optimistic, but I don't think so. I have seen a crowd of young students at a seminar - asking questions - flocking around a speaker at the end of a talk, all breaking into eager discussions - and have tried to visualise this scene happening naturally in a School or Library where a young teacher could arouse enough interest to have a whole class or group discussing what they like or don't like about the works of one of our authors - the kind of discussion that goes on around the judges' table with many different people arguing the merits of their own choice.

Well - we were discussing possibilities and tossing ideas around when Belle Alderman came into the fray with a request that she might be permitted to put the whole question before the authorities at the Canberra College of Advanced Education Library for, speaking personally, she would like to have this whole collection - books and files - available for reference and study by her students in Children's Literature here at the College. I felt that this might open the doors to achieving the very purpose we all had in mind - and so it came about.

The College Library offered to house the books and files in full security and, what's more, to give them the same care and service as given to their own rare books and we - the CBCA - will continue to add to the Collection. We haven't much money available - but then we never have had much money but that has not prevented the Council trying to get a few things under way. Perhaps it all depends on how much you want to do whatever it is you are attempting to do.

Lu Rees
September 1981

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Under this program, the Archives has received the papers, manuscripts and artwork of many leading Australian authors, illustrators and publishers.

Enquiries about this program should be directed to:

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