

## **Acceptance Speech for Dame Annabelle Rankin Award**

I feel honoured and humbled to accept this award. I am grateful to the Queensland branch of the Children's Book Council, especially to the Dame Annabelle Rankin Award committee, Jenny Stubbs, Kerry Neary and Mia Macrossan. This award was instituted in 2004 on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Queensland Branch. It bears the name of Dame Annabelle Rankin who was president and patron of this branch for more than 10 years, but was also Queensland's first woman to serve as a federal senator, minister and head of an Australian diplomatic mission. I am very proud to be included on a list with the other recipients - Lyn Linning, Kerry Mallan, Robyn Sheahan-Bright, Jenny Stubbs, Jill Morris and David Cox.

I have worked in what I consider to be the wonderful world of children's and YA literature for 35 years. In 1977 I was transferred to Mount Gravatt State High School where the deputy principal timetabled me on to a couple of English classes. It was reading for the wide reading scheme that turned me into a passionate advocate of good books for teenagers. Encouraged by Margot Chantrill and Beth Shaw to apply for secondment to teacher-librarianship course at Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education, it was here that I was fortunate indeed to have as lecturers Lyn Linning and Joan Zahnleiter. They certainly inspired in me (as well as countless others) a deep love of the broad spectrum of both children's literature and art.

I travelled overseas to the Loughborough Conference in Stirling in 1979 and around Scotland with Robyn Sheahan-Bright. It was on this trip that I discovered how the first hand interaction with the creators of literature and visiting places where they lived, such as Beatrix Potter's farm in the Lake District, greatly enriches your appreciation of their work. If this is so for adults, then it must be so for our students.

I was then working in Townsville and we had a close-knit network of school and public librarians who were prepared, under the auspices of the School Library Association of Queensland, to apply every two years to the National Book Council for a grant to bring authors such as Margaret Mahy and John Marsden for tours of Townsville, Ingham, Charters Towers and the Burdekin. In the late 1980s literary experiences for young people living in country areas were few and far between. Working with Judy Hunter, Bernadette Walker and others we arranged professional development events for adults as well as presentations for students by authors in schools and at writers' camps on Magnetic Island. Not only did this add value to the curriculum in our schools, but we also became skilled at the area of arts administration. This prepared me for the next phase of my career in Brisbane which included the organisation of the literary component of conferences for state, national and international associations.

It was natural for me to join the Children's Book Council in Brisbane in 1993 and to contribute all that my knowledge and experience allowed. The Branch's projects were aligned with my beliefs and interests. I was able to participate in organising arts experiences for in Brisbane and regional areas. Professional development of members across the state who were interested in running sub-groups of the organisation was conducted in Brisbane and these groups are still in existence.

When Queensland hosted the national executive in 1995 and 1996 I was national treasurer, merchandise manager and served on the third national conference committee for the Children's Book Council of Australia. The hunt for sponsorship to fund the prizes for the authors and illustrators of the Book of the Year Awards preoccupied our national executive during this time, but we eventually received funding from sponsors including Australia Post who produced a set of stamps of Australian illustrators in 1996 to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Book of the Year Awards. We decided to use Australia Post to send the orders of Book Week merchandise to each of our branches throughout Australia. The post office agreed to send a truck around to my house to pick up of the mountains of publications in boxes, posters, badges, balloons, stickers and t-shirts that had all been printed locally. Branch members came over at the weekend to pack up and make an inventory of everything. Many of the items were too big to fit on the bathroom scales so the packers decided to weigh themselves first, pick up a package and then weigh themselves again subtracting the difference so we could track how much we owed the post office! My interest and involvement at the national level continues with my role as national archivist for the organisation liaising with the National Library of Australia and the Lu Rees Archives in Canberra.

My involvement as state coordinator and member of the national program committee of the May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust has extended my opportunities to promote children's literature. Since 2005 we have been operating a creative time residential fellowship program in Queensland. We have a strategic partnership with the State Library of Queensland which offers paid employment to our fellowship holders. I recognise some of our fellowship holders both past and present in the audience tonight. Our current fellow in Brisbane is Victorian author/illustrator Judith Rossell, while Pamela Rushby, Stephen Axelsen and Tania Cox have all had fellowships interstate. Tania was Australia's first fellowship holder and travelled from Ayr to Adelaide in 2000 to undertake a joint fellowship with illustrator Ann James.

During all this time it has been a privilege to work as a volunteer in these professional and community organisations in various capacities. However it would not have been possible to go on for so long without the support of others and the mutual feeling that the programs we developed and delivered were worthwhile. A great deal of personal pleasure and satisfaction was gained and the friendships that developed along the way are priceless. It has also often been lots of fun.

For their camaraderie in the Children's Book Council and the May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust, I would particularly like to thank Lyn Linning, Leonie Tyle, John and Kathryn Moffatt, Chris Kahl, Donna Dyson, Coralie Ross and Michael Bauer,

and to acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the late Leanne McDougall and Brian Brandenburg.

I am delighted that the Branch has recognised the importance of the work that I have done and assure them that I will continue to support authors and illustrators and to promote projects that encourage young people to love literature to the best of my ability.

Judith Russell

16/8/13