

# Vale Edel Wignell

by Hazel Edwards OAM

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An author's legacy is ideas, interpretations and books, in varied formats.

Edel Wignell left a literary legacy others will continue to read. Her history- themed books will not date.

Raised in a Fundamentalist family, the second eldest of six girls, on a farm, Edel had strong views and a work ethic which later sustained her through the rejections of the freelancer workstyle.

An intelligent girl, accepting a studentship to teachers' college and higher education in the city, meant her family ex-communicated her.

Edel wrote mainly for children and yet claimed that being 'child-free' was her choice.

She also mentored young authors and illustrators, often at her own cost.

Her interpretation of marriage to Geoff Wignell was a 'lifelong romance'. He suffered arthritis which limited their social life.

A highly skilled and persistent researcher, Edel's best work included historical tales or scripts which explored myths and legends as well as the natural world. Until her marriage, she was a very competent teacher and later a teachers' college lecturer and the educational skills were apparent in her articles, notes and books. 'Escape by Deluge' was the historical YA novel of which she was most proud, and also of being mentored by Patricia Wrightson on this project set during the 1970's flooding of Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.

Rarely do writers keep good records. Edel's files were immaculate and she could find contract clauses when necessary. An 'old-school' editor she could be pedantic about commas and grammar and this upset some. She also read well for programs such as Radio RPH Children's Hour and recorded some of her work.

Her real name was Edna, which she didn't change legally to Edel until after her mother's death, aware that this name change might be seen as insulting to the parents who named her. Edel could be thoughtful about issues others might not notice. When the Fundamental group to which her family belonged, hit the news, Edel allowed me to borrow a rare book which explained the extreme upbringing.

I'm forgetful of exact dates, although Edel could probably tell the day we met as well as the year. My 2 year old daughter ( now 50) was in childcare within Burwood Teachers' College and Edel lived nearby and had volunteered at a Children's Book Week display. It was the early 1970s, I had a couple of books already published, but

Edel was much better informed about the general children's literature field and was writing an educational column. Later she added educational journalism to her skills.

With teaching and freelance writing in common, we'd have quick coffees as we lived geographically close. Occasionally Edel would 'borrow' my children for 'embarrassing moments' inspiration or as readers, and she dedicated a couple of books to them, especially after one child fell in the pond and another went through the car wash. When our family traveled overseas for six months, Edel looked after my business mail and my records had never been so well organized. Scrupulously honest and intellectually curious, she was more of a compiler than a fiction writer although she utilized family anecdotes with crafted humour. Occasionally she wrote short adult crime, well plotted. Her brief funny poems found constant markets.

She and Geoff led very organised domestic lives including healthy soup and salad for lunch each day. Edel's marmalade was the best and she made fabulous lettuce soup. She also created silver jewellery.

Classical music, ballet and galleries with 'nice meals' on weekends away (but mid week) were treats.

Edel could surprise. When I was researching 'massage' for my sleuth character in 'Formula for Murder' and needed to practise massage techniques, Edel volunteered.

She was proud of her slim body and power walked at 5 am daily. After she was widowed in her seventies, Edel did a tandem parachute jump, hired a limo and went hot air ballooning. In her twenties she had toured Europe in a van.

In later years we didn't meet as much, as the realities of teenage families left no time but I did admire her persistence in recycling and archiving manuscripts. Edel retained her writing friends by being part of various organisations.

She was always politically interested in the 'Dying With Dignity' organization and made no secret of her intentions. But she had a stroke and passed away in mid January 2023.

In (2019), **Edel Wignell was awarded the ASA Medal**. The mentorship for children's writers/illustrators that she bequeathed to the ASA will continue to help other creators.

Edel's website has author photo:

<https://youngwritersaward.com.au/edel-wignell/>