

Elizabeth Gleeson AM

Elizabeth (Libby) Gleeson is an esteemed writer and educator and a tireless campaigner for increasing and improving opportunities for young readers, writers and teachers. Through her advocacy of literacy and storytelling as indispensable to the flourishing of creativity in children and the adults they become, Libby has made an outstanding contribution to the Australian community.

One of six children, Libby grew up in country New South Wales where her father was a teacher. Books and reading always had a central role in her life. She remembers visiting the library on Saturday mornings, borrowing five or six books and reading them all by Sunday night.

She studied history at Sydney University where she became involved in student politics. She joined the Vietnam moratorium campaign and participated in the women's liberation movement.

Inspired by her father and encounters with other great teachers, she entered that noble profession and became a teacher herself before travelling to Europe in the mid '70s. In London she wrote her first novel Eleanor, Elizabeth. London was also where she met her husband.

Since their return to Australia and the publication of her first novel in 1984, Libby has gone on to write 40 more books for children. Much loved by children all over the world, her novels, stories and picture books have been translated into many languages including Danish, Italian, German and Dutch. They are also available in Braille. Her books have won Libby innumerable honours and commendations from many institutions including three Children's Book Council of Australia awards.

Throughout her writing life Libby has also been a driving force for the increase of children's literacy and learning in Australia. Many of her awards, including the Lady Cutler award, the Dromkeen Medal, the Nan Chauncy Award, the Special Premier's Literary Award, and membership of the Order of Australia, were received not only for the quality of her writing, which is universally admired, but also for alerting young people to the joy and power of reading. She has mentored many young writers and continues to seek out opportunities to improve the lives of young people by improving their ability to read and write.

Libby knows the importance of helping and supporting teachers and all who work on behalf of literacy, education and the flourishing of children's literature in Australia. As well as working in schools and universities, she has taken executive roles in writer's organisations including the Australian Society of Authors, the Copyright Agency and dozens of advisory boards and committees.

Underlying this lifelong contribution to teaching and literature has been a heartfelt dedication to social equality. It's most recent expression has been the founding of WestWords, an organisation established to bring opportunities for reading and writing to the children of marginalised communities in Western Sydney.

Libby is also a proud mother of three daughters and recently became a grandmother for the first time.