

Hazel Edwards ▶▶ Author

Ashburton Primary School 1951–1957

IT'S BEEN 30 years since author Hazel Edwards introduced us to a very special cake-eating hippo. Since then, she has written more than 200 books and has been nominated for the 2011 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the world's richest children's literary prize worth almost \$800,000, with the winner to be announced on March 29.

An avid reader from childhood, Ms Edwards had her first short story published in the children's pages of a local newspaper when she was in Grade 3 and penned her first 'novel' in Grade 6 at Ashburton Primary School. "It was a mystery about adventurous children stuck in a mine. It didn't have a title and I never did anything with it, but it was my first attempt at writing a book," she recalls.

High School proved fertile ground for the young writer, with books and passionate teachers becoming a way into other worlds when real life got tough. "Because my father was ill we moved a lot, so I actually went to four secondary schools – Gardiner Central, Frankston High, Traralgon High and Camberwell High," she says. "At the time, always being the new kid and having to make another group of friends seemed like a problem, but it turned out to be really good training for a writer. I learnt to observe, to work out people's motivations and to find out for myself how to survive even if I felt different.

"At school, I would have been considered the quiet outsider, who was okay at netball, who liked maths and who read a lot," Ms Edwards continues. "I remember the love of learning, which was caught from enthusiastic teachers who loved their subjects. At Traralgon High, a history and English teacher called Mr Mitchell, and Mr Terrill who loved his maths, were inspirational.

"So too were the long school-bus rides with all-age country kids dropped off at different schools," she laughs. "There were farm kids, town kids and the ones in-between like me, whose parents ran the country general store, so I knew all the gossip. It was a great apprenticeship for an author."

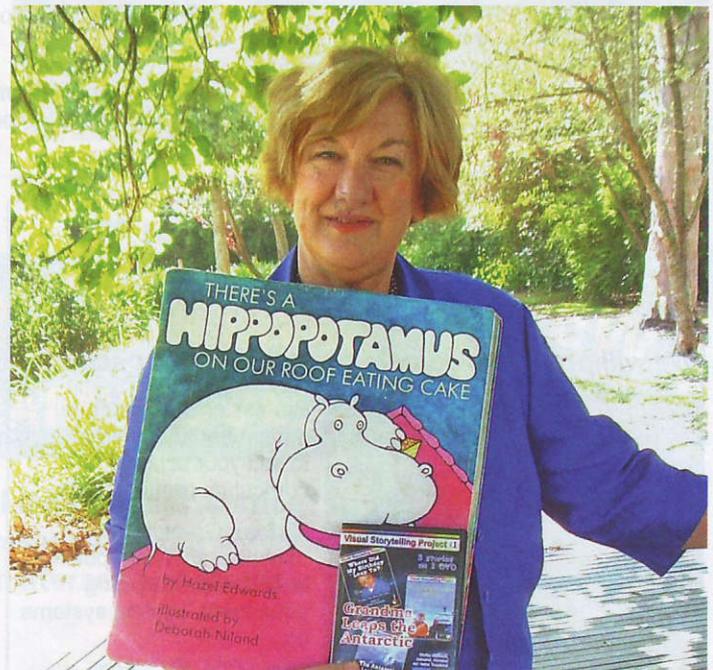
After graduating from Toorak Teachers' College, Ms Edwards taught maths and English at Westall High School. Later, she lectured in children's literature and psychology at Toorak Teachers' College, and the Institute of Early Childhood Development (now Melbourne University). Her first novel, *General Store*, was published in 1977 and is based on her childhood memories of growing up in a country town. The award-winning picture book classic *There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof Eating Cake* was published in 1980 and has been reprinted annually ever since. The film will premiere this year, and the sixth book in the series, *Hooray, There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Having a Birthday Party*, was released last year.

Then ▶▶

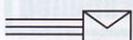


Hazel Edwards in Grade 6 in 1957 at Ashburton Primary School.

Now ▶▶



The picture book that made Ms Edwards famous has been reprinted annually since it was first published in 1980.



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