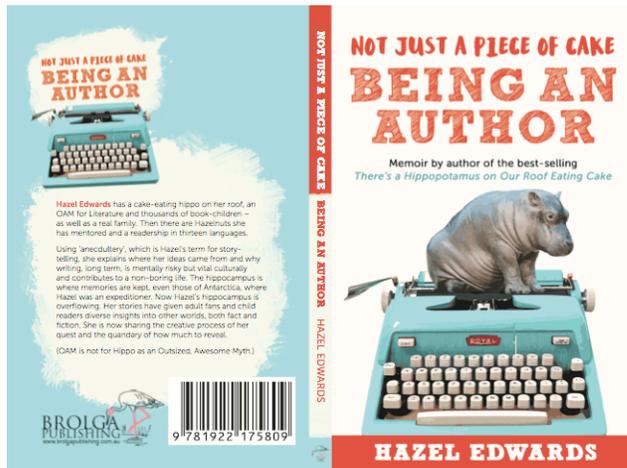


Not Just a Piece of Cake: Being an Author

Not Just a Piece of Cake: Being an Author by
Hazel Edwards (Brolga Publishing) PB RRP
\$19.99

ISBN 9781922 175809

Reviewed by Susanne Gervay
Buzz Words. Feb 1st 2016



The hippopotamus may be eating cake, but you'll have a feast reading Hazel Edwards' memoir on 'Being An Author.' From country girl who read before she went to school, courtesy of her very Baptist grandma who also terrified young Hazel with bloodthirsty missionary serials, to fifty-five year old Hazel the Antarctic explorer stranded in ice on the supply ship 'Polar Bird', this Memoir is

strangely addictive.

Hazel Edwards was born a story teller. An only child, she grew up in rural Victoria where her parents ran the seven-day-a-week general store. Life became difficult when her father fell ill and they had to keep moving, finding themselves in new general stores and towns. Hazel went to four secondary high schools alone and when her parents could not afford for her to continue at school, she started work at the State Bank. Hazel opposed the bank policy which only sponsored the study fees of male employees because ‘Females will just get married.’ She left the State Bank to study primary school teaching.

However, Hazel knew she was a writer and refused to follow the conventions for girls and ‘marry the farmer ... and (do) teaching or nursing.’ She did eventually marry and have two wonderful children who became part of her writing life as she juggled family with her profession. She was a primary school teacher for a while. Her love of teaching found a permanent place in her career through teaching writing students, mentoring her women writers (the Hazelnuts) and acting as a mentor to many authors.

For this inveterate explorer, endlessly inquisitive, deeply interested in people, life was not just a piece of cake. ‘Luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity.’ It is also the willingness to go into brave new areas. Who could imagine that the endearing imaginative picture book *There’s a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake* conceived in 1978 inspired by her children, would become an international best seller?

This memoir reveals Hazel to be a trail-blazer going into areas ‘where angels fear to tread’. Her F2M young adult novel with Ryan Kennedy who underwent gender change from female to male is a leading book in this new wave of young adult literature. Her adult books include *Difficult Personalities* in collaboration with psychologist Helen McGrath that gives insights into psychopathic behaviours; *Non-Boring Family History* which continues to be a staple guide in writing family histories; *Cycling Solo*; *Ireland to Istanbul* in collaboration with Hazel’s son Trevelyan who actually rode from Ireland to Istanbul.

Hazel’s current project, an illustrated children’s

book *Hijabi Girl* written in collaboration with librarian Ozge, gives Islamic children a place to be acknowledged.

This memoir is also an author's life on the road. She's 'been everywhere, man (or more appropriately woman)' from a Nepali Montessori School in Kathmandu reading hippo; Nanjing School for the Blind; the mining settlement of Mt Newman in the heart of the East Pilbara. There have been times of exhaustion and exhilaration adventuring on the road as an author speaking at schools, literary festivals, libraries and community events for all ages. Everything that can go wrong did go wrong from Hippo the huge stuffed hippopotamus splitting at the seams; to losing her voice; to a helicopter crash in the Antarctic. But then everything that can go right did go right from a standing ovation at St Kilda Film Festival premiere of the Pocket Bonfire film version of Hazel's Hippo eating that cake; being in Paris and seeing Hippo displayed in the Australian Bookshop; to Alice the Country Women's Association 'best cook' making Hazel 24 profiteroles in Condobolin in exchange for writing ideas.

It is heart-warming to read the fan mail Hazel receives from children and adults. Writing is more than a book. It is a full life that includes working with Auslan, Australian Sign Language and Braille, being a National Reading Ambassador and supporting literacy in a myriad of ways.

Hazel also translates her experiences into practical writing advice. How to embellish and retell stories, maintaining integrity in what you write, writer's block, developing characters, getting ideas, how to develop them and a host of invaluable insights into the writing process.

Not just a piece of cake: Being An Author is a delightful insight into the life of a much-loved author. It inspires those who wish to begin the author's journey and those on the journey. It's also a book with a special quirkiness that once you have finished reading it, you want to drop in again and again. Highly recommended.

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