

## ERICA WAGNER

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### About Erica

Erica Wagner has worked in the publishing industry for over three decades, editing and publishing many ground-breaking and award-winning books for children and young adults. Starting out as a trainee editor at Penguin Books Australia in 1988, Erica rose through the ranks to become Associate Publisher for the Children's Publishing Department, before leaving to establish Silverfish, a new children's imprint for Duffy & Snellgrove, in 1999. She was a highly regarded publisher at Allen & Unwin, Australia's leading independent publishing house, from 2000 until her retirement at the end of March 2020.

Erica is the recipient of the prestigious Dromkeen Medal, the ABIA Pixie O'Harris Award, the APA George Robertson Award and the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship. She is now a freelance publishing consultant and a co-director of Twelve Panels Press, the micro graphic novel publishing house whose most recent book, Safdar Ahmed's *Still Alive, Notes from Australia's Immigration Detention System* won Book of the Year at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Part of the judging panel for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in 2021 and 2022, Erica is a sought-after mentor and publishing consultant, specialising in illustrated books and books by First Nations' creators.

Recent books she has worked on include *Tangki Tjuta Donkeys* by Tjanpi Desert Weavers; *Iuwa tara iuwa waypa* by David mangenner Gough and illustrated by Samantha Campbell; the *Welcome to Our Country* series by Adam Goodes and Ellie Laing, illustrated by David Hardy; Leigh Hobbs' *Horrible Harriet's Terrible Tantrum* and the forthcoming *Mr Chicken Goes to Mars*; Miranda Burton's *Underground*; Archie Roach's *Tell Me Why for Young Adults* and *Took the Children Away*, illustrated by Ruby Hunter; DionTrace Balla's *Landing with Wings*; *Walking in Gagudju Country* by Diane Lucas, Ben Tyler, illustrated by Emma Long; and Dion Beasley and Johanna Bell's *Cheeky Dogs, to Lake Nash and Back*.

*From the 2017 Dromkeen Medal citation:*

'Erica Wagner's commitment to championing innovative creators has shaped and changed Australian children's publishing. For thirty years, she has nurtured the careers of many of Australia's most gifted writers and illustrators of young people's literature. Her ability to recognise talent and her courage in promoting new voices and innovative forms of storytelling sets a benchmark for dynamic publishing. Throughout her career, and in every publishing house that she has worked with, Erica has been a cutting-edge innovator, a risk taker and a passionate creative thinker.'

## Professional Profile

An experienced publisher and visual artist with a strong background in books for children and young adults and valuable experience with First Nations books and graphic novels. Enthusiastic and focused, enabling people to achieve their creative potential and follow a vision in concert with others. Prepared to take risks to build ideas from small beginnings and communicate the message. Something of a rebel who cares passionately about outcomes.

### *From the 2019 Octopus Story Camp:*

‘Erica was warm and excited for us and her enthusiasm was inspiring. She made us feel like our projects were possible.’ - Mandy Tootell, *Yellow Truck Road Train*

## Awards

**2022 – Australian Publishers Association George Robertson Award** for distinguished service to the Australian publishing industry

**2000 – Australian Book Industry Awards, Pixie O’Harris Award** for working consistently in the field of children’s literature, demonstrating commitment beyond the call of duty, and developing a reputation for her contribution.

**2017 – Dromkeen Medal** for outstanding achievement in the creation of Australian children’s and young adult literature

**1999 – Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship**, a unique opportunity for a senior Australian editor to develop knowledge and expertise through a research project, and share the findings with peers and the wider industry

## Key Competencies

- Able to inspire, motivate and lead people to achieve their potential in innovative, creative projects
- Well-developed negotiation skills, dealing with publishers, creators and agents to broker good outcomes for all parties
- Experienced in building and leading effective teams to enable writers and artists to achieve success, both critical and monetary
- Strong project management skills developed through an understanding of the creative process
- Good understanding of business and decision making that ensures workable, profitable outcomes

## Major Achievements

- Nurtured the careers of major Australian authors and illustrators including 2020/2021 Children’s Laureate Ursula Dubosarsky, 2016/17 Children’s Laureate Leigh Hobbs, and 2012/13 Children’s Laureate Boori Monty Pryor as well as Trace

Balla, Johanna Bell & Dion Beasley, Isobelle Carmody, Judith Clarke, Scot Gardner, Nicki Greenberg, Sonya Hartnett, Roland Harvey, Julie Hunt, Rebecca James, Paul Jennings, Barry Jonsberg, Catherine Jinks, Melina Marchetta, Christobel Mattingley, Maureen McCarthy, Tohby Riddle, Jane Tanner, Dianne Touchell, Nadia Wheatley, Margaret Wild and many more

- Instigated new areas of publishing, including First Nations community projects and graphic novels
- Major awards for her books and authors include multiple winners, honour books and short-listings for the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Awards, State and Territory Literary Awards, Prime Minister's Award and many more
- Strong international connections leading to successful worldwide outcomes for authors and illustrators
- Co-facilitated the inaugural 2019 Octopus Story Camp for 24 Top End writers and artists with Johanna Bell in Darwin

## **Publishing History**

**2015 – ongoing** Co-director of Twelve Panels Press

**2020 – ongoing** Publishing consultant (freelance)

**2000 – 2020** Publisher, Books for Children & Young Adults, Allen & Unwin

**1999** Publisher, Silverfish, an imprint of Duffy & Snellgrove

**1988 – 1998** Associate Publisher, Senior Commissioning Editor, Senior Editor, Editor, Penguin Books Australia

## **Endorsements**

*From **Rosalind Price**, Publisher at Allen & Unwin 1982-2007*

Having worked alongside Erica for many years, I have great respect for her talents and her whole-hearted commitment to children's literature. Erica brings energy and enthusiasm to all aspects of the work. Her emotional intensity – quick to laugh, rage, cry – enables her to connect with people and understand the inner workings of stories. Her psychological insight into the young guides her publishing choices; her artistic talent deepens her collaborations; her quick intelligence and practicality enable her to get things done. Within the industry, her generosity is well known. She nurtures young editors, inspires colleagues, and fosters a hard-working but playful culture.

*From **Leigh Hobbs**, creator of Old Tom, Horrible Harriet, Mr Chicken and Mr Badger*

My working relationship with Erica is one of complete creative trust and collaboration. She is a courageous, honourable, strong but sensitive editor and publisher, who is a credit to the publishing industry generally. Erica's ability to nurture the creative impulse in writers and illustrators, to coax out, formulate and extend an idea, is an instinctive gift and a marvellous one indeed.

From **Nicki Greenberg**, creator of graphic novels *The Great Gatsby* and *Hamlet*  
Erica is well known for her creative daring and her willingness to break new ground, including taking on my adaptation of *Gatsby*. She has also put enormous energy into expanding readers', teachers', librarians' and booksellers' understanding and appreciation of graphic novels. Without exaggeration, Erica is one of the most influential people in Australia's flourishing kids'/YA graphic novels scene.

From **Ann James, A.M.**, illustrator and co-director of *Books Illustrated*  
Erica has enthusiastically involved herself across the industry, beyond her immediate employment, to extend and deepen the work she does for the benefit of her colleagues and herself. Some projects I've been involved with that Erica has championed are: the Style File; the Indigenous publishing collaboration between A&U and the Little Big Book Club; and ACLA. Erica has always supported the Laureate project. Her knowledge of the Laureateship's importance to the whole industry ensured the full support of A&U, resulting in a really strong ongoing relationship with ACLA.

From **Julie Watts**, Publisher at Penguin Books Australia 1986-2005  
Erica has made an outstanding contribution to Australian children's literature. Visionary and innovative, Erica has always embraced the new and the different. A courageous and gifted publisher, Erica's passion and commitment show no sign of abating after nearly 30 years.

From **Armin Greder**, creator of *The Island* and *The Mediterranean*  
Libby Gleeson once commented that I have 'pushed the Australian Picture Book into a whole new league'. If this is so, then it is in good part thanks to Erica, who was unconventional enough to see merit where a lesser publisher would have seen only the unconventional. Regardless of this kind of insight, she stays in the shadow. Erica's qualities, easily overlooked by outsiders, merit recognition.

From **Boori Monty Pryor**, author of *Maybe Tomorrow* and *Shake a Leg*  
Erica extracts the essence from life's juiciest stories, and without any spin. Though there is movement and motion. But it's done with emotion, the essentials are never deleted or edited out to create the hype. Erica's not that type. She is calm, inquiring, a listening learner, compassionate, a painter of phrases, and she sees the present as a gift to the future. *Maybe Tomorrow*, our first book together, was published in 1998. It became just that, a gift to the future.

From **Sonya Hartnett**, author of *Wilful Blue*, *Sleeping Dogs* and *Thursday's Child*  
An early manuscript of *Black Foxes*, somewhere around 1991 ... went into Erica's hands. She did not like it much, but she wrote a long and thoughtful rejection letter, and asked if I had anything else I could show her. In making that request, she opened a door into my future as a writer. It was amazing at the time, and it remains so to me now: that one line in a letter might shape a life the way Erica's line shaped me.

For years now, Erica has continued her good fight for the writers of children's literature in this country – I am but one of the names who owe an immeasurable debt to her wisdom and foresight. As a friend she is funny, goofy, and sweet; as an editor she is patient and

Careful, and full of cleverness. One of the best things anyone has ever said to me about my work was when Erica, having been sent the manuscript of *Sleeping Dogs*, rang and said, 'Sonya, I've just read your story, and I feel sick. We're going to publish it.' Decades later, still delicious words to me. Decades later, I would still say Erica is the one who found me, who pushed me, who gave me someone to please, who made a writer of me.

*From Johanna Bell, author of Too Many Cheeky Dogs, Go Home Cheeky Animals and Cheeky Dogs – To Lake Nash and Back, all with Dion Beasley*

I'll never forget the first time we spoke and Erica asked, 'What would you really like for yourself?' No one had ever asked me that before.

In 2019, Erica and I ran a six-month story camp with 24 artists and writers from across the Top End. It was such a joy to see the participants and their stories grow under Erica's honest and expansive mentorship. Her work here has changed the storytelling landscape and helped combat geographic privilege allowing new voices and stories to rise.

It's such a privilege to work with a publisher who understands my creative process and is willing to journey into all the glory and grit that comes with writing.