Quest

- Q Questions
- U Understanding
- E Encouragement
- S Serendipity
- T Traveller not tourist

There’s an African saying: ‘Have patience, in time even an egg will walk’
To be in this hall today, means that for many graduates, parents, family and friends, the ‘egg’ did indeed walk.
The embryonic ideas, hopes and dreams which culminated in your presence here today, are the result of patience, persistence, talent and the development of skills. Yours and other peoples.

Dreams

Since you have graduated in the arts disciplines, you are potential idea-mongers: leaders and innovators in ideas worlds. There’s a strong possibility that initiating self-employment may be a workstyle option for you in the next decade. And it's likely that you will need to be flexible enough to tackle new roles, some of which do not yet exist, nor do they even possess job-descriptions.

Creators are our dream-makers, those who suggest new perspectives, which may apply to government, politics, management, health or the arts.

To influence reality, dreams must be structured and shared in a format others can understand. Creativity, technology and business are not in conflict, they are complementary.

A goal is a dream, with a deadline

Today you’ve achieved one goal.
But which route will you choose to your long term aim? And how will you judge if you achieve your dream?

Success?

So, what is success? And by whose standards?

Today is a public ritual which celebrates external achievement. On graduation day, a parent sighs with relief. And the graduate complains loudly about having to ‘get dressed up’ but secretly enjoys the fuss and acknowledgment.

But often an creator must judge ‘success’ by internal criteria, the gap between the aspiration and the creation. What was the goal? Was it Reached?
How can it be done differently? and more effectively the next time?
It has been said ‘an artist must know how far to go too far’

The journey you choose to take may follow a different route from others.
So it is unfair to judge 'success' or 'failure' by criteria to which the creator did not aspire.

**Orienteering**

I’m an occasional orienteer. Orienteering is the sport of running through the bush, using a compass and map to locate controls on a designated course. Route choice, navigation and speed are relevant skills. Elite orienteers are superb athletes, others aged 5 to 85, choose a course to suit their level of fitness, navigational skills and purpose.

Fast runners tend to choose the longer, but clearly defined flat paths. Good navigators ‘bush-bash’ or ‘red-line’ using a compass through the rough stuff and go directly to the control.
Naturalists meander, looking at the bird or plant life.
Show-offs run fast only at the Finish, where crowds watch.
And some are classified, D N F (did not finish).

By some criteria, I'm a failed orienteer, because I get lost a lot, walk rather than run, make 180 degree compass errors, more than once, and I'm bottom of the W50 B category, which means that I'm probably the worse woman orienteer in Australia, aged 50-55.

**My Aims**

My aims in orienteering differ from most others. I go at my own pace. Admire the scenery. Try again if I navigate wrongly the first time. Exercise with my family and friends. As it's an individual sport I 'm not letting down team members. Occasionally I collect story ideas. Sometimes I jog-walk. But I rarely run in at the finish. I do get all the controls, eventually. So orienteering works for me.

It also gives me a hobby to list under author bio notes.

- Decide on your route-choice.
- Fast-track, high profile? Acknowledged results?
- Or the 'rough' technical challenge of mentally finding your way around an idea?
- Risking an unorthodox route or way of travelling, as long as you have the eventual goal in sight, may be the way to go.

**Why am I an author?**

I like learning new things and having a legitimate excuse to be a participant-observer, I do not spend my life hunched over a computer. I do have the latest digital devices and website.
I've been hot air ballooning, gliding, flying in a Sikorsky helicopter to a Bass Strait offshore oil platform, had an 'excursion' through a funeral parlour, visited a forensic lab, trekked in Nepal and learnt belly dancing - all in the interests of research!
My initial choice of career was not made on financial grounds. I knew that writers didn't earn much. But I wanted a varied workstyle that would be mentally stimulating and people-centred.

I admit my major weakness is boredom with routine tasks - especially formatting!

Although I won a scholarship, my family couldn't afford to send me to University. I left school at year 11 to work in a bank. My University degrees were studied part-time, while working, getting married and having a family. In between, I wrote and collected enough rejection slips to wallpaper the study.

The word QUEST is very appropriate for a writer

- Q for Questions
- U for Understanding
- E for Encouragement
- S for Serendipity
- And T Traveller not tourist

**Q is for Questioning**

Basically, I'm a stickybeak. I like to know about others' lives. Being a writer gives you a legitimate reason for asking questions. It's then respectable, and called research. After all, literature is just high gossip.

In turn, as an author of children's books, I'm frequently asked unusual and challenging questions.

One of the most thought provoking questions I was ever asked came from an 11 year old.

>'What would you do if you woke up one morning and your imagination had gone and your hands didn't work?'

I had to think for a while Then I said,

>I would buy an audio recorder. Then I'd go on a quest in search of my imagination, because a writer can't create without an imagination.

As an aqua-readaholic (I read in the bath) I'm on a seven books a week diet.

I'd never contemplated living without the stimulus of other minds via the page or screen, until I was questioned by the mother of a 5 year old Prep student in a remote country school. As an author, I'd been talking with the parents about 'encouraging your child to read'

About 30, neatly dressed, she waited until the others had finished, and then she asked nervously.
'Do you have any other books like 'There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake'? It's the only one I've ever read. Those words have patterns I can work out. My daughter is in Prep and learning to read. I'm learning with her'

What courage! Admitting illiteracy, especially near other parents who were readers. Luckily, there was a tactful librarian nearby and we found appropriate books.

That incident was a significant reminder to me. One idea can have the power to travel and influence. . . . But the skills to shape those words are also important.

And a courageous question must be answered.

The books I have written are not mine now. Once a book is published it has a life of its own. It may go places I have never been. I tend to think of it as a book-child, out on its own. An embryonic idea that has walked. It now belongs to the reader's imagination who re-creates from the thought clues designed in word-form by the author.

One of my greatest thrills has been to see my books in translation, or in another dimension such as in Braille, in a ‘feelie’ picture book. And then to have the same stories performed by others with puppets, music and song.

Questioning is part of interview skills. Facts matter. Answers matter, especially when you are the subject. But mistakes occur.

In a country town which must remain nameless, I ran a workshop for historians on 'Writing a Non Boring Family History' and explained that I was not a genealogist. The session was written up in the local paper as being conducted by gynaecologist Hazel Edwards. When I pointed out that I was not a doctor, the response came, 'Oh, it's only one end of life or the other!'

Misconceptions can occur, if you don't check your facts.

Provocative questions matter, Especially if you address them to unusual minds. In the Gateways 'Gifted' program, the theme was 'Journeys'. Reversing the common sequence of asking a question, I provided the answer,

'If the answer is a purple journey, what is the question?'
A 10 year old said,' My question is what happens when you start a red journey but take away the blues.'

I enjoy working with unusual minds

As a children's author I receive a lot of readers' requests

'Dear Hazel Edwards we are doing a project on an Australian author. You were the last one left on the list. When were you born, did you get married and when did you die? I need this by last Wednesday'....no return address.

It would have been difficult to answer that, post-humously
U- is for Understanding.

Challenging stereotypes is an occupational hazard for a children's writer.

Psychologist Dr Helen Mc Grath with whom I wrote Friends, Love, Sex; A Practical Guide to Understanding Relationships, was asked recently 'Is it true that your co-writer is Hazel Edwards, the children's author?'

Helen said 'Yes.'

The response was 'But the book's got 'sex' in the title. How can a children's author write about sex? Sex and children are incompatible'

Stereotyping limits. Think outside narrowly defined occupations or roles. Remember, 'web-master', 'digital artist' and 'spin-doctor' didn't exist ten years ago

I write for adults, adolescents and children. It is hard to write well for children. Each word counts. So does the design in conveying the complex idea, simply. You really have to know what you're talking about, before choosing simple words to describe pyrotechnics, forensic science or even the way a hot air balloon works.

The skill to present complex ideas simply, requires a thorough understanding of the process. Whether writing fact, faction or fiction, it has to be logical. Even fantasy has an internal logic.

Ironically, children's writers are more likely to be economically viable, for they have a new readership every five years, earn more export dollars for Australia, and have loyal followings. Children's authors receive more letters from readers, partly because adult fans tend to write to point out errors of fact. Child fans are honest, or touching.

Dear Hippo,
I haven't got a friend. Would you like to live on my roof? You could play sokker.
Love Sam

Children who have rich fantasy lives will become the adults who do not need stress-management courses. They will also be the imaginative problem-solvers in worlds other than books. They will design the bridges, aeronautical equipment and space food because they ask questions like 'What if' and then attempt to provide a solution.

The logic of fantasy must be sustained within a book and between the reader and character. Often my characters receive mail. And it has to be answered.

'Corridor of Characters' was a Australia-wide touring exhibition of children's letters to my characters and the responses, in character. Letter-writers gave permission, because letters belong to the writers not the recipient.
Spelling was often idiosyncratic.

Dear Stickybeak
What were you before you were an egg?
Love, Joseph

That was a hard one to answer, for even a literate duck.

Dear Joseph
Before I was an egg, I was an idea
Quack
From Stickybeak

Artists and creators are not morally superior. Nor should they be seduced into believing they are instant philosophers. Their role is to provide a different perspective and allow individuals to reflect, and then act.

The issue of 'literary terrorism' faces all creators. This is the potential blackmailing threat that the artist will use her version of family affairs or romantic relationships, and call it 'fiction'.
As if artists have a superior right to their version of intimate history. They don't.

An effective writer is androgynous, and can create credible characters of any age, occupation or gender, through the skills of research and observation plus imagination.

The fiction writer who draws directly from real life, is limited, and will soon run out of material, friends, family and lovers.
(But maybe more lawyers will be employed).
The novelist who is writing a novel about a novelist who is having trouble writing a novel indicates a limited lifestyle
A professional writer crafts 'composite' characters who have more intensity than any one person in real life, unless of course the writer is a biographer or journalist.

E- Encouragement

Because creators often work solo, family support is important.

I came from a family where books were valued, but I didn't meet an author until I was 23. I always knew I wanted to be a writer but I wasn't sure how. University wasn't economically possible for me, I had to leave school and work

My father's legacy was the attitude that it was okay to be different, or to be the outsider, as long as you worked hard. Write only when you've lived a bit and have something to say. Ask questions. Don't be intimidated by the labels on the doors.

As a teenager, I worked in our general store in Gippsland and learnt to talk to anyone and cope with whatever went wrong. What better apprenticeship for a writer.
I pumped petrol, bagged pollard, weighed sugar, handled difficult customers and gave the correct change. Survival skills for the business world.
Creators need partners who tolerate the idiosyncratic workstyles. I've been lucky. They also need someone to understand the frustrations of rejection and rejoice in the successes.

My husband and two children were very understanding about living with imaginary characters.

*My publishers organised the making of a large hippo toy for promotional talks. Occasionally, between author tours, the large two metre high stuffed hippo travelled, seat-belted in my car. Unfortunately, one night, we were waved down by the police breathalyser squad on Dandenong Rd. When they saw my front seat passenger, they said, 'Drive on Madame' I'd only had a cappuccino anyway.*

Currently I collaborate on different book, theatre and multi-media projects with three co-writers. We have equal but different skills. The ability to work as part of a creative team, contributing different disciplines is the future workstyle. Computer-linked, we alternate between meeting in person and via e-mail attachments.

Collaboration overcomes procrastination and increases productivity. We also have fun.

For ten years, I've been mentor to a gifted young writer. We've recently had a role reversal. He is now my electronic mentor, looks after my author page, and fixes up my electronic mistakes.

A serendipitous relationship, unplanned but enjoyable.

**S- Serendipity**

These are the happy events, that you didn't plan, but should stop and enjoy.

'S' is also for 'soul' projects - the ones you do for pure enjoyment.

Always program one into your schedule. Ironically they are often successful artistically and commercially because you invest so much energy.

**T- Traveller not tourist**

Tourists just visit and expect to be entertained, travellers are participant-observers. Writers need to participate in life so they can write more realistically later.

When things go wrong ... this is research, I tell myself.

*As I trekked, upwards in the mountains of Nepal, I reminded myself, as the not-so-fit trekker, that 'this is research!'*

Things do go wrong Projects don't work out, despite business plans. The cheque isn't always 'in the mail'. Most writers learn to live with rejection. One proposal in ten is a good return. Some recycle the stories or projects and eventually they are completed. Others give up, and become cynics or critics.
Success lies in achieving the goals to which you aspire. But your goals may not be the same as those of your neighbour in the seat alongside today.
- A creator needs to initiate work and be business-like, not just ‘Be’.
- Choose an unorthodox path as long as you know your eventual goal.
- In the long term, satisfaction and pride in what you do is more important than external status.
- Allow room in your life for ‘Serendipity’, fortuitous happenings.
- Recycle rejection and make something else happen. Try again.
- Make sure your equipment is in good order.

On a quest, you'll need a backpack with essential supplies.

- Imagination: a creator should never leave home without it.
- Torch: to illuminate good ideas.
- Water bottle: to refresh with inspiration.
- Strength bars: for rejection times.
- Compass: to check on direction.
- and a Thumb-Drive: for recording significant experiences.
- First Aid Kit: band-aid skills.
- Luggage label: so you know who you are and where you've come from or are heading

Of course, the backpack needs to be versatile to act as armour, sleeping pillow, life-raft, mobile advertisement and could even be edible.
But preferably not see-through.

Professional writing is not a career choice, it is a lifestyle decision to live more intensively, to be versatile, flexible and to work productively. To use your imagination in a way which might benefit others as well as yourself.

Today the egg walked . . . tomorrow it may be part of some other creation.

Poached, hard-boiled or rise in a soufflé . . . hopefully with not too much hot air.

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**Hazel Edwards**

has been a self-employed author since she was 27, and in that time has written more than 220 books and scripts for adults and for children.

Her books have been translated and won various awards, including the ‘*Leipzig bronze medallion for the Best Picture Book in the World in 1982*’ for ‘There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake’.

She has served as a judge of various literary awards, including the Victorian Premier's Literary Award.

As a problem-writer and judge of Tournament of Minds for ten years, she continues to be interested in gifted children and has been a mentor since 1984.
She presents workshops for gifted students, including some as part of the Aim Hi program of the Krongold Centre in the Faculty of Education at Monash.
Internationally she has been involved in literature workshops for youth in Canada, USA, France and China.

She has undertaken a variety of commissions as a writing consultant, and as a freelance journalist, she has been published in national newspapers and magazines. Linking books with other mediums of communication, such as stage or CDROM interest her and she enjoys the challenge of presenting complex concepts in ways that are accessible to children. She uses the participant-observer approach to researching fiction and documentary writing and has worked with JIM Customs, airport authorities, police, forensic scientists and emergency services.

She has several links with Monash University. Her husband Garnet holds a Master of Administration from Monash and her daughter recently graduated with an Honours degree in Economics.

The 1991 tour of her 'Hip Hip Hippo' puppet production included performances at Monash's Alexander Theatre.

Mrs Edwards holds the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Master of Education from Monash. In 2013 she was awarded an OAM.