



# Ivan Southall

2003 Dromkeen Medal Winner

It is most appropriate that it is the literary contribution of Ivan Southall that Dromkeen has chosen to celebrate in 2003. Earlier this year, Ivan was the recipient of an international literary prize for a book that had been published twenty years previously, *The Long Night Watch*.

The prize, the Phoenix Award, is given by the Children's Literature Association in the United States to the author of a book that did not win a major award at the time of its publication, but that is of high literary merit. The award citation reads: 'Like the fabled bird that rose from its ashes with renewed life and beauty, Phoenix Award books once again touch the imaginations and enrich the lives of those who read them.'

The books of Ivan Francis Southall have touched generations of children both in Australia and overseas. The nine volumes of the Simon Black series, produced between 1950 and 1962, were RAAF adventure stories. These, as well as *The Long Night Watch* and other books such as *They Shall Not Pass Unseen* (1956), were based on Ivan's own wartime experiences. (Whilst with the RAAF he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.) *Hills End* (published in 1962) marked the beginning of a new sort of life-and-death adventure story, where the emphasis shifts from the actual adventure (in this case, storm and flood) to the depiction of the way children respond, interact and grow through challenge and experience. This interest in realism and real-life problems continued with such books as *Ash Road* (1965), *The Foxhole* (1967), *To the Wild Sky* (1967), *Sly Old Wardrobe* (1968), *Let the Balloon Go* (1968), *Finn's Folly* (1969), and *Chinaman's Reef Is Ours* (1970). *Let the Balloon Go* and *Bread and Honey* (1970, published in the US as *Walk a Mile and Get Nowhere*) marked another, more reflective, change of writing direction that was to find its most powerful reflective voice in *Josh* (1971) and, later, *Rachel* (1986).

Ivan Southall has won many awards in an extremely distinguished literary career: the most notable of these include the Children's Book of the Year Award 1966, 1968, 1971 and 1976; Picture Book of the Year Award 1969; British Library Association Carnegie Medal 1971 for *Josh* (to date, the only Australian recipient of this prestigious award); the Zilver Griffel of Holland in 1972; the Australian Writers' Award in 1974; and in 1988 the USA Child Study Committee Book of the Year for *Rachel*.

Ivan Southall's writing spans more than half a century. His contribution to Australian children's literature is immense; his books not only reflect Australian story but also have, with great integrity, made their own contribution to creating it. His passion for writing is only equalled by his passion for young people, and it is this passion, as well as his wonderful storytelling skills and profound moral and literary rigour, that makes Ivan Southall a worthy recipient of the Dromkeen Medal for 2003.

Ken Jolly  
CHAIRMAN BOARD OF GOVERNORS, DROMKEEN

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