



Eric Rolls

April 1923 – October 2007

Eric Rolls was born into a western New South Wales farming family in 1923. After primary schooling at home through Blackfriars Correspondence School, he won his way into the selective Fort Street Boys' High School in Sydney.

World War II started before he finished school and, instead of going to university, he joined the soon-to-be-disbanded 24th Light Horse Regiment. He then went to Papua New Guinea with the New Guinea Air Warning Wireless Company to report movements of Japanese troops and aeroplanes.

He began telling stories in public at five years and by fifteen years had written his first major poem, *Death Song of a Mad Bush Shepherd* which was published by Douglas Stewart on the Red Page of the *Bulletin*. It was picked up and broadcast by the ABC and the BBC.

After World War II Eric returned to Australia where he farmed his own land and continued to write:

SHEAF TOSSER: 1967, won the David Myer Trust Award for poetry

THEY ALL RAN WILD: 1969, 1977, 1984, won the Captain Cook Bicentenary Award for non-fiction.

RUNNING WILD: 1973, won the John Franklin Award for a children's book.

THE RIVER: 1974, won Braille Book of the Year.

THE GREEN MOSAIC: 1977, poems of New Guinea.

MISS STRAWBERRY VERSES: 1978, 1988, for children.

A MILLION WILD ACRES: 1981, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2003, 2005, won Age Book of the Year, C.J. Dennis Prize and Talking Book of the Year.

(Eric was particularly proud of the two Blind Society awards. He said 'I write to make people see').

CELEBRATION OF THE SENSES: 1984; paperback editions in 1985 and 1987 and republication in 1998 carried an additional chapter in memory of his first wife, Joan, who died in January 1985.

He and Elaine van Kempen became lovers and partners in late 1985 and married in 1988. He then published:

DOORWAYS, a year of the Cumberdeeen diaries: 1989.

SELECTED POEMS: 1990.

Flowers and the Wide Sea - SOJOURNERS: hardback 1992, paperback 1993 ;

Flowers and the Wide Sea - CITIZENS: hardback 1996, paperback 1998.

Flowers and the Wide Sea - two one-hour documentaries: Film Australia in conjunction with SBS Television, 1994.

WATERMARK LITERARY SOCIETY INC

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FROM FOREST TO SEA: Australia's Changing Environment: 1993.

The Billion Trees of Man' published in the *Independent Monthly*, 1990, won the Greening Australia Journalism Award and the inaugural Landcare Media Award.

In 1991 a one hour film on his life and work was made by SBS as part of the *Masterpiece* series.

He was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for services to literature and environmental awareness in 1992.

The film *WILD*, directed by Ross Gibson, based on *A Million Wild Acres*, won the Environmental Category at the San Francisco International Film Festival, 1994.

In 1995, the University of Canberra made the award of Doctor of the University *honoris casua*. An excerpt from the citation reads: 'Eric Rolls... has managed in a series of books and articles that span forty years, to set the human experience of living in Australia in the context of the history of the land itself as well as its people... he writes in order to learn, and he learns in order to write, and he does both with distinction... he is without peer in our country'.

CELEBRATION OF FOOD AND WINE volume 1 – *of flesh, of fish, of fowl*; vol.2 – *of grape, of grain, of gethsemane*; vol.3 – *of fruit and vegetables, of vulgar herbs, of sugar and spice*; 1997; single volume edition March 1998.

An Australian Creative Fellowship, awarded in 1991, assisted the production of:

AUSTRALIA: a biography The Creation: published in 2000;
VISIONS OF AUSTRALIA 1642 – 1910: published October 2002;

Citizens has been translated into Mandarin and *Celebration of Food and Wine* into Hungarian. Poems for children have been published in both French and Italian translation. The poem *Bamboo* is translated into Mandarin for a Chinese publication of the best poems published in the English language in the twentieth century.

In addition to the twenty-one books above Eric Rolls wrote many hundreds of journal articles and newspaper features. He wrote also for literary magazines, for the Australian food and wine magazine *Divine* and for *Slow*, the international journal of Slow Food, the Italy-based organisation concerned with the preservation of biodiversity of food species and the preservation of taste and flavour. He was one of the first International Jurors appointed for Slow Food's annual Ark of Taste award. For the last four years he donated articles on food and local produce to assist the Kendall Community Centre which published them in the newsletter, the *Kendall Chronicle*.

Eric Rolls was recognised by his peers as the doyen of Australian nature writing. He was Patron of the Watermark Literary Society Inc. and mentor for the Society's biennial Fellowship for an emerging writer.

He became a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 1985.

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