

VC's Note *By Jeanette Hackett*

20 February 2007

Vale Elizabeth Jolley



It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Elizabeth Jolley who died last week.

Elizabeth Jolley joined the Western Australian Institute of Technology in 1978 as a lecturer in Creative Writing in what subsequently became Curtin's School of Communication and Cultural Studies. She continued teaching in Communication and Cultural Studies until 2000.

Born in England in 1923, she immigrated to Western Australia in 1959 with her husband Leonard Jolley and their three children, Leonard Jolley becoming Head Librarian at the University of Western Australia. Her literary career started in Perth with the publication of her first book, *Five Acre Virgin and Other Stories* (1976), and continued with some two dozen books of essays, fiction, plays and poems - many of them dedicated to Curtin's Vice-Chancellor of the day and to her colleagues in the Division of Humanities.

During her distinguished career, she won many overseas literary awards and every major Australian prize, including the 1983 *Age* Book of the Year Award and the 1983 Western Australian Premier's Literary Award for *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, the 1984 New South Wales Premier's Award for Fiction for *Milk and Honey*, the 1986 Miles Franklin Award for *The Well*, the 1993 Western Australian Premier's Literary Award for *Central Mischief*, the 1994 National Book Council Banjo Fiction Award as well as the *Age* Book Prize for *The Georges' Wife*, and the 1999 *Age* Book of the Year Award for *My Father's Moon*. A recent collection of her essays was edited by Caroline Lurie, *Learning to Dance: Elizabeth Jolley - Her Life and Work* (Viking/Penguin, 2006).

She received honorary doctorates from WAIT (1987), Macquarie University (1995) and the University of Queensland (1997). She also received many civic awards, including the Western Australian Citizen of the Year Award in 1987, the Order of Australia for Services to the Arts in 1988, and was named a Living National Treasure by the National Trust of Australia (NSW) in 1997.

In 1987 Curtin Vice-Chancellor Don Watts named her Honorary Writer in Residence, and in 1998, on her seventy-fifth birthday, Vice-Chancellor Lance Twomey named her Professor of Creative Writing. The large lecture theatre in Building 210 is named after her, and since 1991 the Faculty of Humanities has held an annual lecture series named after her, with speakers that have included Ruth Cracknell, Barry Humphries, Carmen Lawrence and Pat Dodson.

In addition to being a prolific author who received both popular and critical acclaim, Elizabeth Jolley was a devoted and beloved teacher of Creative Writing. Her students have also gone on to win many literary prizes, including several *Australian/Vogel* Awards (for a first novel), several different Premier's Awards, the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Miles Franklin Award.

She greatly valued being a Curtin staff member, for "a room of her own" in which to write, for her contact with literary colleagues, and for the opportunity to work with young writers.

In return, she was equally valued by Curtin staff and students. Her passionate commitment to the community touched us all and will continue to do so through her works.

As a tribute to the contribution Professor Jolley has made to Curtin, the University flags will be flown at half mast from Wednesday 21 February to Friday 23 February.

Jeanette Hackett
Vice-Chancellor