

Naked Bunyip Dancing

Steven Herrick's acceptance speech

Firstly, I must apologise for not attending in person – I'm afraid July is one of the busiest periods in my performing life – all this month I'm doing shows in schools in Sydney. I'll be reading poems from all my books, including *Naked Bunyip Dancing*. I'm very grateful to receive this Award for *Naked Bunyip Dancing* (and also to win for the second year in a row!!).

I loved writing this book – I got a real kick out of trying to get each of the characters voices just right – I hope I've succeeded.

It's especially wonderful that this presentation is held at RiverBend Books – the last time I was at an event here was in 2002 to launch my book *Tom Jones saves the world*. That book was about community and how Tom's parents tried to “buy” it by taking Tom to a gated community where they think he'll be safe ... but communities can't be bought.

And *Naked Bunyip Dancing* is about a community as well – the world of the Primary School.

Naked Bunyip Dancing is very loosely based on my sons' school, which I guess could be regarded as “alternative”. But really, it's based on visiting hundreds of schools over the past 20 years to do performances and witnessing how important a good teacher is in the lives of his/her students. The Mr Carey of *Naked Bunyip Dancing* is dedicated to every great teacher I've met over those years, of which I'm pleased to say there are very many.

It's a joy to enter a school where a real sense of community is fostered; where children can be themselves and are valued for their input into the life of the school. The great school has nothing to do with how much money the parents have paid to send their child there – you can't buy a good school the same way you can't buy a good community.

So, thank you for this Award for *Naked Bunyip Dancing*, and may all the teachers and students who inspired the characters of Mr Carey; Billy the punk; Ahmet the soccer star; Anna the yoga master; Jason the good kisser; Peter the boy with the talking bottom; Alex the artist; Sophie the poet and everyone else live long and continue to contribute to our community.

Thank you.