

Vannessa Hearman Interview Transcript

June 26 2026. Port Phillip Heritage Centre Oral History Studio.

Vannessa Hearman: I always really liked reading, and I read voraciously as a child.

I had a case of books which I carried around everywhere, and I was writing poetry, short stories, and I submitted it to the local newspaper, and I was winning prizes in Indonesian.

But in English, it was something else.

My dad took me to the St Kilda Library and we took the tram.

Dad was epileptic, so he'd given up his driver's license a very long time ago.

We were always a public transport family.

You know, we would go on the tram.

He taught me how to get around myself.

And he took me to the library because he said you've got to read. You've got to read everything. And then you will graduate. "to higher and higher levels of reading, but you've got to get started to improve your vocabulary, your writing, your spelling, your expression, all those kinds of things.

For me it was hard because I didn't have any kids my own age around the place at that time.

We spent that summer of 84, 85 getting me up to speed with English, with reading, in order to prepare me for school.

So t hat was the function of the St Kilda Library.

I didn't, you know, attend any classes or anything like that.

It was just chucking me in there to explore the library, to pick books that were of interest to me, to have some kind of a semi-structured kind of program to develop my English language skills.

And I just want to ask you about the building itself.

Interviewer: Do you remember some thoughts when you first kind of saw it? Because it's quite unique. It's in the brutalist tradition. It's had the big, the pyramid sky dome at the entrance or the concrete mixed in with some timber and it's very open planned and the

architect Taglietti used light in different ways. Did you have thoughts about the building at the time?

Vannessa Hearman: Well, I thought it was stood in stark contrast to the St Kilda Town Hall, which is like a beautiful white kind of

It was like a birthday cake or a bridal cake. It's so pretty, it's so lacy, it's beautiful.

And then you've got this really foreboding grey-looking building across the road.

And at the time I thought it was like a flying saucer. And I thought, oh, oh wow, what's in this building?

There's some of it that's really foreboding, that's kind of almost hostile in a way, that kind of holds the person at arm's length to say, do not approach.

But at the same time, because it resembles this weird kind of outer space kind of contraption, you kind of want to explore it and think, what's this about?

Why all the hard edges on the outside? What does it have inside?

I think the light wells and things like that actually really make up for those more brutalist elements where it's much more inviting inside and all the sort of, you know, it's open but it's also got all these nooks and crannies that as a young person you can kind of feel you could be completely alone in a place, you know, and I think as I was growing into adolescents that space is really important, away from your parents where you can just be somewhere.

And also the St Kilda Library had a lot of holiday programs where I met other kids.