A biography of John Marsden

John Marsden was born in Melbourne on 27 September, 1950. His first memories are of living in the small Victorian country town of Kyneton. Here, the iceman called daily, the family cooked on a fuel stove and no-one had television. John started school there.

In 1956, the family moved to Devonport on the north coast of Tasmania, where John attended Devonport Primary School. Here, his interest in reading became so great he exhausted the supply of books from both the school and town library!

In the same school an inspiring teacher in Year 4 persuaded John and his friend to start a class newspaper.

In 1960, the family moved again — this time to Sydney — and John was enrolled at The King’s School in Parramatta. This school was run on military lines. John didn’t win any military awards but he won many academic prizes, including one in Year 11 for writing a 40,000 word competition essay.

After completing high school, John tried a series of unusual jobs — collecting blood, looking after a mortuary at night, working on a sideshow and guarding Australia’s oldest house from vandals. But it wasn’t until he was twenty-eight that he found what he wanted to do — teaching.

One year, while on school holidays, John wrote his first novel — So Much to Tell You. It was rejected six times before a Sydney publisher snapped it up. It won the 1988 Children’s Book of the Year Award. His second book, The Great Gatsby, and his third book, The Journey are still bestsellers. His first book for primary school readers — Staying Alive in Year 5 — came next.

By 1990, John was finding it increasingly difficult to write and teach, so he reluctantly left the teaching profession. He now writes full-time but enjoys teaching at writing camps, where adults and young people can learn the skills of the craft.

His books now fill many shelves in libraries and book shops. Teenagers all over Australia are enjoying his Tomorrow series, which is now being produced for television, and The Ellie Chronicles featuring the immensely popular Ellie Linton.

But John Marsden is not only famous in Australia.