


# Academy Awards event celebrated Sonoma author Jeanne Walker Harvey

Jeanne Walker Harvey's children's book "Dressing Up the Stars," about famed Hollywood costume designer Edith Head, helped launch the 95th annual Academy Awards celebrations. | 



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Jeanne Walker Harvey, author of 'Dressing Up the Stars' at her Sonoma studio on Friday, March 17, 2023. (Robbi Pengelly/Index-Tribune)

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As Hollywood's starlets did the final dress fittings for their red carpet Oscar looks, Sonoma resident Jeanne Walker Harvey stepped into the warm Los Angeles spotlight. The award-winning children's book author was invited to share her work on famed costume designer Edith Head as part of the festivities leading up to the 95th annual Academy Awards.

The Academy of Motion Pictures Museum hosted the author on March 4 to share her 2022 picture book, "[Dressing Up the Stars](#)," which explores the colorful life of Head, one of the film industry's most decorated personalities who contributed to dozens of movies during her five-decade career.



"She won more Oscars than anyone, including actresses, had ever won," Harvey said.

That included eight Academy Awards for dressing Audrey Hepburn and the cast in "Sabrina" and "Roman Holiday," along with classics like "All About Eve," "A Place in the Sun" and "The Sting." Not to mention 35 more nominations for films like "The Ten Commandments," "Funny Face" and "The Greatest Show on Earth." Harvey's book, published by Simon & Schuster in September, explores Head's rise to fame from humble origins as a small-town girl.

"I was so excited to be invited during Oscars week to the Academy Museum," Harvey said. "The audience was varied because it wasn't just children and families, it was also people who had been huge fans of Edith Head and some who even had connections to her."

Harvey said in addition to showcasing her book, the day included a costume workshop that allowed visitors to create their own designs.

"They had piles of wonderful fabric and all sorts of art supplies and adults and children were just leaping into the possibility of designing costumes," she said.

During the workshop, a crew filmed an ad about the museum that aired during the March 12 Academy Awards and featured a snippet of Harvey's book.

"My book was on the Oscars!" she beamed.

While in LA, Harvey also took a tour of Paramount Studios, where Head was under contract from 1924 to 1967.

"It was wonderful to see the building where Edith Head and her costume staff did their designs and fitted the costumes for the stars," she said. "Then they opened up a case and pulled out a real Oscar that I had the thrill of holding. They are really heavy! It was surprising. Now I see why winners often say that this is much heavier than they anticipated."

Head grew up in the desert, where there were very few children, forcing her to turn inward for amusement. She began designing costumes for herself and her pets, and even though she was not the best artist, she was able to launch one of the most noteworthy careers in Hollywood. That's a message that resonates with kids today, Harvey said.

"She wasn't that good when she was first hired as a sketch artist and she had to learn, and children comment on that too," Harvey said of her book reading. "They got that they have to keep trying."

That is a message close to Harvey's heart. As a little girl checking out stacks of books from the children's library, she dreamed of one day penning her own. But it would take years of submitting her ideas before one got picked up for publication.

"I wanted my name on the front cover of a children's book... My passion has always been to write children's books," she said. "I'm now doing my dream job."

Harvey's first book, "Astro the Stellar Sea Lion," was published in 2010 and based on a true story about an endangered sea lion who was rescued by the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito.

"I read about the story in the newspaper, which is why newspaper stories are very important," she said. "It inspired me because he had joined a walkathon in Corte Madera. He scooted out of the water and followed children around. It's a very powerful story."

Harvey has worn many hats in her day. She studied literature and psychology at Stanford, got her law degree at UC Davis and earned a teaching credential. She taught middle school language arts and writing workshops before making it as an author.

"I tell children, just keep pursuing those dreams," she said.

She's worked with major publishers like Harper Collins, along with "wonderful, amazing local Sonoma County publisher Carmon and Company," she said. She's published seven titles, with another two under contract. "Else B. in the Sea: The Woman Who Painted the Wonders of the Deep," which will hit shelves in 2024, tells the story of Else Bostelmann, who inspired oceanographers with her detailed paintings of bioluminescent creatures in the 1930s.

"I predominantly like to write picture book biographies about creative people," Harvey said.

While she authors the books, editors and art directors pair her up with an illustrator to bring her stories to life. Diana Toledano added the pictures for "Dressing Up the Stars."

"I've always just been so thrilled by the creativity, the attention to detail, the whimsy of the illustrators," she said. "Writing and illustrations are of equal importance. They both are telling the story. So I try to write what can't be shown in the illustrations and they always expand the story more, it's really quite magical."

Harvey bought a house in Sonoma's Diamond A neighborhood in 2017, making occasional visits before the pandemic until 2020 when she and her partner, Ron Bowman, made the move permanent.

"I just knew it would be a special place to live," she said. "I was a longtime Marin resident and I would frequently drive up to Sonoma to soak up the beauty of the different seasons and settings of the vineyards and the hills."

Ultimately, she hopes her stories inspire the next generation of artistic minds.

"I want children to seek joy on their own creative paths and realize that they may encounter challenges during their lives, but hopefully by reading about creative people who have pursued their dreams and overcome challenges that they can try also," Harvey said.

For more information about Jeanne Walker Harvey and her books, go to [jeanneharvey.com](http://jeanneharvey.com).

