

Desert and dust inspires award-winning book

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Tassie mum Karen Harrland with her daughter Asha, 8. Harrland has taken out the Finch Memoir Prize at the Sydney Writers Festival.

Source: News Corp Australia

TASMANIAN mother-of-three Karen Harrland is now a published author after winning a prestigious writing prize.

Her book, *Spinifex Baby*, which chronicles the challenges of being a new mum while living and working in Australia's Simpson Desert, was yesterday announced as the winner of the 2014 Finch Memoir Prize at the Sydney Writers Festival.

The outback memoir has already hit bookstores, with an e-book also being sold online.

It's an exciting time for Harrland – and her husband Al Dermer and their children Asha, 8, Clay, 6, and Zavier, 3 – because until she went to live in the desert, she had no ambition to write.

However, when the now 38-year-old found herself amid the dust and 48C heat of a former 215,000ha cattle property-turned-nature reserve near the Queensland-Northern Territory border in 2004, with a baby in tow, she started writing down her experiences.

Getting bogged in the middle of nowhere, fighting bushfires and eating camel and emu for dinner were all part of the adventure.

Undeterred by the experience, Harrland and her family have since enjoyed further stints in the desert during breaks from staying at their home at Neika, southwest of Hobart. The Margate Primary School garden teacher said the isolation of raising a baby in the desert was not unlike the isolation felt by most new parents, regardless of where they lived.
