



Sutherland Shire **LITERARY** COMPETITION

2021

SUTHERLAND SHIRE





Launching the 2021 Literary Competition:
 Mayor Cr Steve Simpson (front left)
 with Subcommittee Chair, Cr Barry Collier OAM and
 (rear from left) Deputy Mayor Cr Michael Forshaw and
 Deputy Chair Cr Tom Croucher.

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

We know the Sutherland Shire is home to a wealth of literary talent and our local literary enthusiasts, as well as aspiring scribes from further afield, are always keen to find an outlet to express their creativity.

The widely acclaimed Sutherland Shire Literary Competition provides a space for avid writers to contribute original works and receive specialised feedback from an expert panel of independent judges.

Now in its third year, the competition recognises the diversity of literary talent within the Sutherland Shire and across the nation, while encouraging a love of literature for individuals from all walks of life.

In 2021, the Sutherland Shire Literary Competition attracted more than 400 submissions, presenting an almost even division between poetry and short story entries. Sutherland Shire entrants have again proven the level of literary passion engrained in our community, representing 27% of the overall nationwide entrants.

I would like to thank this year's judges for the considerable time and effort they have spent reviewing hundreds of entries and for their valued expert commentary.

I'd also like to thank our Sutherland Shire Libraries staff for their ongoing encouragement of and commitment to the competition and members of the Sutherland Shire Council Literary Competition Sub-committee, Councillors Barry Collier OAM, Michael Forshaw and Tom Croucher.

This competition continues to flourish because of the energy contributed each year from those working to fulfil the ambitious plans laid out by the original proponents of this competition, but more so because of those who put forward entries that subsequently bring this vision to life.

Councillor Steve Simpson
Sutherland Shire Mayor

MESSAGE FROM THE LITERARY COMPETITION SUB-COMMITTEE CHAIR

As with its predecessors, the 2021 Competition has been an outstanding success, attracting quality entries from across Australia, whilst showcasing the depth and diversity of literary talent within the Shire itself.

Now in its third year, our Competition has established a reputation for excellence on the literary calendar. Its organisation and magazine have been acclaimed by high-profile, independent judges, all of whom have expressed strong support for the continuation of the Competition well into the future.

As Committee Chair since its inception, I express my deep appreciation to my fellow Committee Members, Councillors Tom Croucher and Michael Forshaw, for their hard work and our shared commitment to promoting and celebrating literary creativity in the Shire and beyond.

My sincere thanks to Shire Library Manager Deborah Best and her staff, Kelly Wilson and Jay Fletcher, for their outstanding assistance on the administrative side of the ledger. Last, but not least, I thank our generous sponsors and the many entrants who have helped make my vision of a Shire Literary Competition the reality it is today. May it continue.

Councillor Barry Collier OAM
Chair, Literary Competition Sub-Committee

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Sutherland Shire Literary Competition
Publication

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LIST OF WINNERS

TRADITIONAL VERSE

Prize Winners

First Prize

The Difficult Poem - Jennifer Harrison, Melbourne VIC

Second Prize

Ghosts within a Tempest - Kay Goring, Morayfield QLD

1st Shire Resident's Prize

My Cathedral - Jan Motbey, Kurnell NSW

FREE VERSE

Prize Winners

First Prize

Sunday in Surfers - David Terelinck, Biggera Waters QLD

Second Prize

Home Christmas - Margaret Clark, Riverview NSW

1st Shire Resident's Prize

The Housing Commission Flat - Mark Best, Sutherland NSW

2nd Shire Resident's Prize

Fragments - Felicity Conneely, Caringbah NSW

SHORT STORIES

Prize Winners

First Prize

The Walkers - Freya Cox, Turner ACT

Second Prize

Hot in Two Ways - Jean Flynn, Ballarat North VIC

1st Shire Resident's Prize

Bob's on the Job - Margaret Harris, Gymea Bay NSW

2nd Shire Resident's Prize

The Bard of the Bonnet, Henry Lawson - Leone McManus, Como NSW

Highly Commended

All I Want - Jean Flynn, Ballarat North VIC

Highly Commended

In the Small House with the Big Walls - Matthew Querzoli, Cronulla NSW

POETRY

JUDGE'S REPORT

It's been a pleasure to judge the poetry sections of the Sutherland Shire Literary Competition, and I'd like to thank everyone who sent in a poem, or poems.

It was interesting to note the themes that prevailed. There was surprisingly little about the pandemic – only a few poems mentioned it. There were quite a few poems about war (the First and Second World Wars), and even more about the psychological aftermath of war. There were poems that paid tribute to friends and family members, a number about ageing and dementia, and quite a few about the natural world.

The poems that won prizes tended to be technically assured, with good rhythm (and rhyme, in the rhyming verse section), evocative language, vivid imagery and interesting ideas. They also tended to be consistent within themselves: setting and making good on their own challenges, being true to the structure chosen, and containing a complete thought, idea, image or story.

In terms of the potential development of other of the poems, I offer some observations.

Some poems began strongly, but did not maintain this energy through to the end – there were good poems let down by weak endings. Some contained an arresting image, or a good line or two, but did not maintain the high standard throughout.

In the rhyming verse section, some poems contained lines where the rhythm faltered, because there weren't enough beats in the line, or because there were too many, or because one word had its emphasis on the wrong syllable, so that the rhythm of the line could not be maintained. Where rhythm and rhyme are concerned, the reader needs to feel they're in good hands, so that they can relax into the poem and enjoy it.

In both sections, but more often in the rhyming verse section, sometimes a word was clearly there purely to maintain the rhythm. Every word in a poem, every syllable, must be necessary; there's no place for filler. Sometimes word order was distorted so a line could fit within a rhyme scheme. If, in order to achieve a rhyme, a poem requires an awkward construction such as, for example, 'to Sydney she did go', it's a sign that something isn't working and that the line (or stanza) needs to be examined and revised.

The enemy of originality is cliché, and some poems were eliminated because of clichéd words or phrases. Sometimes it was because of inconsistency of tone: for example, a single inappropriately colloquial word can jar the reader out of the world of the poem.

In both the free verse and rhyming verse sections, anything that cast the entire readership, or the entire population of Australia, as being of purely Anglo-Celtic heritage was seen as problematic – not because Anglo-Celtic heritage is a bad thing in itself (it's my own heritage), and not out of 'wokeness' or 'political correctness', but because it's evidence of a disjunct with reality. Australia is not a mono-cultural or mono-racial country. There's absolutely nothing wrong with writing from the perspective of someone with an Anglo-Celtic heritage, or writing about that heritage – the trouble starts when it's implied that this perspective applies to all Australians. When a poet says 'we' in a poem about Australians, they need to make sure that the implied assumption (that the experience or sentiment will be relevant to all Australian readers) is justified.

A final bit of advice: it's a good idea to proofread your poems when you're sending them to a competition, as typos can distract the reader. Definitely run the spellcheck through it, but if you know someone who's a good speller, run it past them too, because spellcheck won't pick up homonyms (like 'they're' and 'there' and 'their').

I hope you enjoy the poems that I've selected as the prize-winners, and my congratulations go to this year's winning poets.

Tricia Dearborn

SHORT STORY JUDGE'S REPORT

Australian writer Christina Stead once wrote that what is unique about the short story is that 'we can all live one, tell one, write one down'. The short story doesn't demand the time and discipline of creating a novel, or the necessary compression and figurative language that is required of a poem. In judging the 2021 Sutherland Shire Short Story Competition I read one-hundred-and-ninety-nine stories with an impressive range of subject matter and forms, confirming that Australians in general and Sutherland Shire residents in particular have lived, told, and written stories that encompass what it means to be human as we enter the third decade of the twentieth century.

The genres of the stories varied widely: realist, first-person monologues; historical fiction set in the convict era, in the 19th century, and in the 1950s; romance fiction; science fiction; contemporary fairy-tales; and narratives for children. Overwhelmingly, the most popular genre of the submissions was crime fiction, most of which included murder, often in the pursuit of revenge.

In terms of subject matter, again the submissions covered a broad spectrum of concerns. I was particularly moved by the many stories about the ravages of old age, with several narrators casting a wearied eye in the rear-view mirror of their long lives; others addressed the debilitating confusion of dementia, or the humiliation of immobility. Another common theme was the dynamic that exists and changes between a parent and child, with plots that revealed the demanding expectations of a family Christmas; sibling rivalry; lack of parental protection; intergenerational secrets; and the fierce pride that a parent experiences when her child grows up to be intelligent and kind. Domestic violence was also at the heart of several stories, with two set in a women's refuge.

My criteria for selecting the winners was both intellectual and instinctual. I was looking for stories that were not too ambitious plot-wise, that did not try to cram, for example, a murder, a police investigation, and the solving of the crime in the small space of four pages. I was looking for a distinctive narrative voice, revealing details, and compelling characters—or, I should say, compelling characters in conflict. For essentially, that is what a good story contains: a character in conflict, however minor, and who, through the action of the story, undergoes some sort of subtle transformation. In short, I was interested in stories in which the character at the end of the story is not exactly the same as the one in the beginning.

Mandy Sayer

TRADITIONAL VERSE



THE DIFFICULT POEM

Jennifer Harrison,
Melbourne VIC

Difficulty of articulation/assimilation/animation
Where the poem is flat, without music, plods along.

Difficulty of beatification
Where everything you've said is precious, you are
in love with your own song.

Difficulty of coloration/concentration/coronation/
culmination
Where the poem doesn't go anywhere, dead end
dead end.

Difficulty of derivation/declaration/defamation
Where the poem seems like a poem that has been
written forever before, amen.

Difficulty of exclamation/explication
Where what is said would have been much better
implied.

Difficulty of fenestration/fertilisation
Where the images are like dirty windows, glassy
and blind.

Difficulty of gentrification/generalisation
Where everything is ephemeral, awash with
abstraction, sighing.

Difficulty of habitation
Where your voice is never home because you are
too busy lying.

Difficulty of intimation/innovation/improvisation
Where you obfuscate for the sake of standing out
from the herd.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

This somewhat 'meta' poem is a pure pleasure. Using an alphabetical progression and a quirky rhyming structure (two-line stanzas where the first line begins with 'Difficulty of' or 'Difficulty with', and the second line with 'Where ...'), it examines many of the difficulties that can be encountered when writing poetry, including struggles that many poets (and other writers) will be familiar with:

*Difficulty of laceration/lineation
Where you edit the poem into fragments
of dust.*

It's allusive, suggestive; it springs from idea to idea, from stanza to stanza, with the grace of a trapeze artist. It's playful, absurd, often funny and never predictable. Overall, it's cleverly done and extremely good fun.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

What wonderful news. Thanks so much to the judges and to Sutherland Shire. Although I live in Melbourne, Sydney was my birthplace - I was raised and educated there - and it is absolutely fabulous to receive this prize from my home town. The poem was occasioned by a request to take part in a public discussion on the topic of The Difficult Poem hosted by Melbourne Poet's Union at the Wheeler's Centre here in Melbourne. Following the talk, I decided to write my thoughts into a poem and deliberately chose difficult multisyllabic words to weave into the rhyme scheme. I had tremendous fun writing the poem and I am delighted that others have also enjoyed its sly humour.

Difficulty of justification/jubilation
Where you might ask: do I have the right to
assume this persona, Pessoa?

Difficulty with karyomitoses
Where you'd like to write about science or
philosophy but end up with piecrust.

Difficulty of laceration/lineation
Where you edit the poem into fragments of
dust.

Difficulty of moderation/mystification/
magnification
Where nobody knows what you are talking
about. You are full of puff.

Difficulty of nullification
Where you are your own worst critic and
nothing is good enough.

Difficulty of orchestration, ostentation
Where you have too many adjectives, too few
bones.

Difficulty of perpetuation/perseveration
Where you write about the same thing: moons
and stones.

Difficulty of qualification/quantification
Where your voice is neither brave nor bigger
than your boots.

Difficulty of revelation/reparation/restitution
Where privacy is a burden and disclosure
disloyal: fame without a parachute.

Difficulty of serialisation/sanctification
Where verses one to three are fine, but four
does not belong.

Difficulty of termination/tantalisation
Where the end of the poem just won't end; the
last line is always wrong.

Difficulty of ululation
Where the poem sings for its own unctuous
singing (you were writing whilst drinking wine).

Difficulty of veneration, valorisation, violation
Where you can't throw out a line because
you've written it, divine.

Difficulty of waratahisisation
Where you are too local even for the local locals.

Difficulty with yodisation, yotization
Where semivowels and French prefixes slip
around like too-big bifocals.

Difficulty with xanthophyllisation
Where you'd like more pigment, colour, oomph,
but ambition leaves only grey.

Difficulty with zombification
Where there is really nothing much to say but
you say it ravenously anyway.

TRADITIONAL VERSE

**2ND
PRIZE**

GHOSTS WITHIN A TEMPEST

Kay Gorrington
Morayfield QLD

JUDGE'S COMMENT

'Ghosts within a Tempest' is a ghost story, skilfully crafted. The reader is dropped into the centre of the action, and the story unfolds in three parts, at a well-judged pace. The traditional rhyming structure is used to great advantage. The poem is highly visual, with some beautiful images (for example, the coins that shone on the shadowed bar), and the story itself was conveyed vividly enough to give me literal goosebumps.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

I have always loved ghost stories particularly from the earlier days of Australian settlement where legends grew large and their re-telling became a national pastime. The poem 'Ghosts within a Tempest' is based on one such story and is my favourite among the poems I have written on the subject so far. I am delighted to see it do well and would like to thank the organisers, judges and supporters of the Sutherland Shire Literary competition for what has quickly become a most prestigious event. I would also like to extend my congratulations to all award recipients across all sections of the competition.

Bad weather blew in early and it never seemed to ease.
The lightning cursed the darkness and the thunder shook the trees.

The air was filled with heaviness, a weight that would not lift.
Its coldness wrapped around your heart and simply wouldn't shift.

A young man took his shelter in a rough and dingy pub
that perched between a river and a wild expanse of scrub.
A dog sat close beside him with a handsome brindle hide.
"I've sailed from London." said the man, "I'm looking for a guide."

He shouted all a friendly beer with money from his purse
but boastful generosity is apt to be a curse.
He drank until he staggered as the howling storm raged on,
he left more coins than needed, on the shadowed bar they shone.

Two figures watched intently leaning hard against the wall.
They grabbed him by the shoulders so the youngster would not fall.
With eyes reflecting lightning and with thunder in their hearts
they whispered harshly in his ear, "We'll see you through these parts."

"An Englishman alone out here. It's really not that smart.
We'll travel on together, mate - should any trouble start."
The young man nodded drunkenly and stepped into the rain.
The dog got up and followed them and none were seen again.

.....

So, life went on as normal and the years maintained their pace.
The strangers long forgotten in the humdrum of the place
until, in eighteen twenty, when a servant girl got lost
and wandered through the blackwood scrub near where the river crossed.

She came upon a clearing as the rain began to fall.
A long-abandoned campsite gave her shelter from the squall.
She bedded down as best she could and tried to close her eyes.
The storm increased in fury as the lightning lit the skies.

The tempest raged around her and refused to break its hold.
The lightning held a spectral light, the night grew icy cold.
Her skin began to tingle and a chill ran down her spine.
The air was charged with energy and time slipped out of line.

A scream tore through the eerie night, she turned towards the sound
and saw a young man falling dead upon the rain-soaked ground.
His head was turned towards her with his mouth an ugly gape.
A dog was howling mournfully, a rough and ghostly shape.

Two men appeared behind her, seemed to fix her with their stare.
An evil look, the servant thought, from souls that did not care.
The poor girl begged "Don't hurt me..." but the men seemed not to hear,
they took a step straight through her as she froze in utter fear.

"We'll cut him up in pieces and we'll leave no tale to tell.
We'll take his gold and burn him and we'll kill the dog as well."
The young girl tightly shut her eyes and begged the nightmare gone.
The tempest shrieked an answer as the scene played on and on.

The sudden yelp, the laughter, and the growing flames she saw,
the sight and sounds of sawing and the girl could take no more.
She fled into the open bush and ran until she fell.
She'd rather take her chances than bear witness to that hell.

.....

That's where the searchers found her, lying face-down in the mud
and raving on incessantly of murder in cold blood.
She quickly gained her senses but her story never changed.
The troopers heard her story and another search arranged.

They quickly found the campsite but her visions – unexplained -
for only ashes, scattered bones and restless souls remained.
The murder was apparent, but it happened long ago
and each one wondered inwardly, how could the young girl know?

The story quickly spread about the crime that once occurred
and how the lines of life and death are sometimes strangely blurred.
When ghosts within a tempest can walk forward from the past
and in the midst of fury get to tell their tale at last.

TRADITIONAL VERSE



MY CATHEDRAL

Jan Motbey

Kurnell NSW

JUDGE'S COMMENT

This poem conveys the immanence of the natural world using the ongoing metaphor of a natural (forest/bush) scene as a cathedral. It speaks of the awe and peace that immersion in nature can provide, and is notable for its consistent use of the central metaphor, strong rhythm and rhyme, and the use of imagery that is well-suited to its purpose.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

Thank you so much to all involved for reading and selecting my poem – it was an unbelievable surprise and means a great deal to me. My Cathedral was inspired by a beautiful tree here in our National Park where I used to sit and write – just allowing the words and thoughts of what came to me in this special place to flow through my pen for the benefit of any who chose to listen to nature's song.

My Cathedral, --not made with hands
for in its' midst tall Preacher stands,
his head upstretched toward the sky,
his leafy arms welcome the shy.
For all are equal in his gaze,
each seeking traveller who now strays
along the aisles of forest church,--
believers who would not besmirch
the fallen logs that form the pews,--
who render upright trees their dues
as Deacons in this place of God
where Congregation springs from sod.

And I, a mortal, stand in awe
of all the ages come before,--
I wonder if they've felt its' Peace,
this great Cathedral, where no lease
can ever buy what Nature weaves,--
can never shine bright sun on leaves,
or tip with dew a spider's web
till diamond necklaces be spread
about this untouched, Holy place
where my heart sings Amazing Grace!

FREE VERSE

1ST
PRIZE

JUDGE'S COMMENT

'Sunday in Surfers' contains several unusual typographical elements, which add a certain *je ne sais quoi*, without hijacking the poem. Many of the images the poem conjures are squalid, but the poem itself has an irresistible energy. It's full of concise and vivid images, like 'Daybreak candles plate-glass', and 'gutters awash with the golden / yawn of tequila'. There's also an element of whimsy, as in 'a morning seasoned / with sea salt and gulls'. 'Sunday in Surfers' is technically very proficient, and beautifully condensed. A skilled, sensual and highly atmospheric portrayal of a wild night and its aftermath.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

I am deeply grateful to the Sutherland Shire Council and the Sutherland Shire Libraries, as well as their sponsors, for their support and funding which makes this literary competition accessible to writers. Quality competitions give writers an audience; both in terms of recognition and an outlet for what is mostly solitary work. And shortlisting in a competition is always affirmation for a poet that they have been heard and that they have touched a reader with their words. It provides encouragement to keep honing their craft and keep submitting to other competitions and publications.

I relocated from Sydney to south-east Queensland a little over five years ago. I draw on the inspiration of my new backyard and aspects of this often appear in my poems today. Surfers Paradise is an iconic location with many facets; some polished and some still a little rough. I do hope I have done it justice with 'Sunday in Surfers'.

Thank you again for the generous first place prize and your support of the Arts. I am both thrilled and honoured to accept it.

SUNDAY IN SURFERS

David Terelinck

Biggera Waters QLD

2 am is fractu^{red} by screaming
& relentless sirens.
When you fail to lure the sandman
3 hours later, you head downstairs.
Night reception tell of the teen

who jack^knⁱ
f
e
d to the pavement
from a high-rise 'round the corner.

Daybreak candles plate-glass
as you walk to Cavill Avenue.
Surfers isn't waking;
it just naps, one eye cracked,
waiting for the early-opener.
You watched the glitz 'n' glammed,
the sequined & spangled,
straggle out of SinCity.
Cobbled together with booze
benzos & barbs, they trickle
to a 24-hour burger bar
for a hit of saturated fat.

You inhale the acrid burn
of gutters awash with the golden
yawn of tequila
& far too many
happy-hour beers.
Surfers smells of pimpled youth
pretending to be much older,
jilted testosterone,
the morning-after pill.
The air tastes of regret
& you can feel the city aching
to be forgiven its trespass
of last night's hangover.

A graphic of a dark blue ribbon with a white scalloped border, featuring the text "1ST PRIZE" in bold white letters.

David Terelinck

You head to The Esplanade.
The miasma of lust,
drunk on inexperience,
gives way to a morning seasoned
with sea salt & gulls.
An on-shore breeze feathers
your skin & the sapphire
of the Pacific
s t r e t c h e s
beyond tomorrow.

The warming air is garnished
with coconut reef oil,
bacon & eggs,
 & the board wax
of sun-bleached gods
praying for the perfect tube.
Your feet make love to toasted sand,
flirt with a tide too shy
to hang around.
The grains hourglass

between
your
toes
&
the
ocean
whispers



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FREE VERSE

**2ND
PRIZE**

HOME CHRISTMAS

Margaret Clark

Riverview NSW

JUDGE'S COMMENT

'Home Christmas' might seem like a simple poem, but it does a lot in its fourteen lines. Alliteration, assonance and rhyme are found throughout, but none of it is extraneous – each example works to the poem's advantage, creating a vivid picture of one kind of Australian Christmas. There is compression, clarity, and beauty of language – for example 'Awnings drawn dark down / Against the blazing blue'. A small powerhouse of a poem that works perfectly on its own terms.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

It's so nice to receive encouragement for my writing, and I am grateful to Sutherland Shire for this initiative and for their generosity.

Heat haze of Christmas

Days. Daze of wine

And waft of white gardenias.

Awnings drawn dark down

Against the blazing blue.

We've eaten now. Full

bellied elders are asleep

wine-deep in chairs, thighs

wide and teeth askew.

Beyond the blinds, bright

dazzle splash of pool

where slippery children shriek

and spin through arcs

of tinsel-silver spray.

FREE VERSE



JUDGE'S COMMENT

'The Housing Commission Flat' is clever and amusing. In its four seven-line stanzas, a narrator appraises the flat they've been offered, using the language of home design and improvement – think Grand Designs. The poem is gently mocking as it contrasts the genteel, aspirational tone with the reality of the situation ('And it's just a whimsical stroll / along the Parisian side of Sutherland to Centrelink'), seeming to make the best of a less-than-ideal situation – or at least to enjoy making fun of it.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

I wanted to say something hopeful about feeling content in life without the need to aspire for ever bigger houses so I made the hero a social housing candidate. Having him mouth the pretensions and faux-academic posturing of architects and classical music reviewers would, I hoped, provide a touch of irony to make my point of finding happiness in the mundane a little stronger.

THE HOUSING COMMISSION FLAT

Mark Best

Sutherland NSW

Do I like it, you ask? I'm smitten.

The apartment screams Frank Lloyd Wright
but with a soupçon of rococo charm.

Those glorious views of Woronora cemetery
are replicated in the tombstone grey walls.
And it's just genius to let the plaster fall away
to reveal those peek-a-boo pops of colour.

The windows are unburdened by curtains,
while those iron bars offer anti-defenestration security
and usher in the solidity of Euclidean geometry.
But the great joy of this flat is the connection to sky.
You float on an ethereal threshold
where the boundaries blur between past and present
so that the object/space dichotomy dissolves.

The highway is a soaring crescendo and diminuendo
reminiscent of the bravura passages of Brahms.
Whereas the passing trains
manifest giddily sparse chordal textures.
The road and rail together provide a subtle consummation
of great dignity, voluptuous and spartan by turns,
exalted and free from cloying nostalgia.

And it's just a whimsical stroll
along the Parisian side of Sutherland to Centrelink.
It is an oasis, a garden of Eden,
Xanadu's stately pleasure dome.
It won't be easy to click out of holiday mode
in this haven of hedonism.
When can I move in?

FREE VERSE



FRAGMENTS

Felicity Conneely

Caringbah NSW

JUDGE'S COMMENT

'Fragments' appears to map a journey out of grief. The opening stanzas suggest the dreary, difficult time after a loss, perhaps a death. By the middle of the poem, there are portents of change (though they go unseen by the poem's protagonist). Some of the descriptive words (for example, 'betrayed', 'battered') add to the atmosphere, enriching the reader's understanding of the protagonist's experiences or mental state. The poem closes with a reminder of the bittersweet nature of new beginnings in the wake of loss.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

Fragments was one of those rare moments as a writer when the mixture of language and ideas was almost effortless. Using as few words as I could, I was drawn to capture the essence of a moment in time, one that was long waited for, while also attempting to convey the rich minutiae of everyday life.

For too long,
her days had been filled
with dust storms crawling
across the hills,
a trail of fine powder,
deep ochre in colour,
wherever it passed.

And her nights,
those nights, lying abed,
awake.
Betrayed by that last
cup of coffee.
The hallway clock
guarding time,
hands at a standstill.
Waiting for the dawn to break.

The chill in the air,
warranting a worn jumper
thrown over the shoulders,
had failed to act as a signal.
The lullaby chorus
crooning in the back paddock
was strangely silent.

Intent on pegging out the washing,
a motley assortment of Frank's old shirts
and the flotsam
buried deep
at the bottom of the basket.
She was caught
by surprise by the large droplets
exploding
round her battered boots.

Turning over her palm,
she marvelled at its strange beauty.
Breathing in the heady mix-
menthol and honey.
She had flung back her head,
gulping to taste
the bittersweet
fragments of
new life.

SHORT STORIES



THE WALKERS

Freya Cox

Turner ACT

JUDGE'S COMMENT

An air of great mystery surrounds the opening of this story, leading the reader into a potentially post-apocalyptic world. The narrative reveals an isolated man living as a recluse, by choice, in the remote Tasmanian outback. Usually, when tourists hike into his territory he resents their presence, but when all signs of human life suddenly disappear, he's forced to make a choice that will forever change his life. Beautifully detailed prose with an assured narrative voice.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

I am honoured to receive this award and would like to thank the organisers of the Sutherland Shire Literary Competition. I wrote this story after going on a bushwalk with my family to Lake Rhona, the walk that features in the story. I am grateful to be able to experience such inspiring natural places and share them with you through my writing.

They haven't come for weeks. The walkers. Normally they traipse through in a semi-regular stream at this time of year. Groups of two or three, sometimes a lone individual, sometimes a family of four, with adult children carrying the heavier packs. Clad in sturdy lace-up boots and waterproof bushwalking gear, no doubt to them the peak of rustic Tasmanian practicality. This walk is out of the way enough that it doesn't attract tourists from the mainland who climb up to Wineglass Bay look-out to photograph the gentle curve of crystal blue ocean or hike the Overland Track.

To me though, their ultra-light packs and waterproof gear still advertises the comforts of their lives back home, only bracing the elements for 2-4 days before heading back to steaming showers and electricity. Sometimes if they have extra food they offer it to me, a packet of dehydrated mince and vegetables, a few apples they don't want to carry back out, some instant coffee. People are usually feeling generous by the time they reach the lake.

It's a long flat walk in, hopping across rocks and inching along fallen tree trunks to cross streams, trying not to lose a shoe in sticky black bogs, traipsing for hours across button grass plains with craggy mountains forming an imposing wall along the side. The washed-out grey peaks in front of the pale sky could be a watercolor painting if it weren't for the constant drone and itch of flies to bring you back to reality.

Then there is the final climb and scramble up a steep hill, dislodging white and pink rocks scattered among the heath and spikey shrubbery. By this point your breathing is getting harsher, taking in deep lungfuls of the crisp mountain air, and the backs of your calves are on fire. After a few false pinnacles, where you think you've reached the top only to see another peak rising in front of you in a seemingly never-ending game, you finally summit the last one. Below you, nestled among the mountains like a secret, is the lake. Dark blue in the center, fading brown to almost pink at the edges where it becomes shallow and rose-colored sand shows through. The strip of sand along the lake edge is framed by scrubby green trees, clinging to the bottom of steep mountain-faces, tendrils of mist sitting upon their heads like crowns.

The walkers come down with sighs and whoops of relief to pitch their tents upon the sand, fluorescent orange and red mounds like the shells of gaudy beetles.

Sometimes when walkers come in, I stay in my cabin behind the sand dunes that lead down to the beach, up an overgrown track that few hikers will find. It's a single room, used by a trapper decades ago when this place was even more remote.

The rangers know where I am and will wave in my direction when they hit the beach, a gentle invitation to come say hello if I wish. When it's a ranger, especially if it's Sally with her silver nose ring, red raincoat, and Kindle full of books I will go say hello. She is sent in here over long weekends and public holidays to greet tourists.

Unlike most other people, she tells me the news that interests me. Scientists have discovered a new species of plankton in Antarctica. She saw a circling eagle on her walk in here and has photos on her phone to show me. Track maintenance is planned for next month.

I've lost the art of easy conversation after three years up here alone, but Sally never seems to mind. If I get stuck on one topic and talk about atypical wind flows down the mountains with enthusiasm for half an hour she will nod and look interested, although it often occurs to me afterwards with a flush of embarrassment that she probably wasn't. At least not after the first fifteen minutes.

I know she is good at more conventional conversation too, the 'Hi, how are you? How was the walk in? Where are you from?' because I hear her chattering away with the walkers when they come in.

When I feel the need for more conversation and Sally hasn't been in for a few weeks I will wander down to the beach when a new group of walkers arrives and try to emulate Sally's conversation style with varying levels of success.

I know most of the walkers have heard of me; the strange man who lives alone in the mountains. Some places people are unkind to hermits, recluses, strangers who exist separate from society. However, Tasmanian bushwalkers, at least the type that bother to come this far in, are a kind type of people. Maybe to some extent they understand the drive that led me to live out here all alone, since they seek the same sort of wildness and solitude on their weekends off.

They greet me with handshakes or a nod; a 'Hey mate, how's it going?' and I think of Sally as I say, 'Not bad, how are you?' They normally follow up with something like 'You live up here all by yourself? To which I nod because surely they already know the answer. If they ask, 'What's it like living here all alone?' I reply 'Good'. They follow up with 'Bet it's peaceful eh?' and I nod again. Sometimes a nosier walker asks me why I live out here all alone. That's normally the time I decide I've had enough conversation for this week and disappear back up the hill.

But now the walkers do not come. Not a single person has appeared down the mountainside and onto the sand for 7 weeks. It's the right season for them to come, balmy March and April days with blue skies and a gently warm sun.

At first, I wonder if there is maintenance on the tracks, so I walk a few kilometers out till I'm at the last peak before the flat stretch. I can see far into the distance. The mountains grow hazy and the track winds until it disappears down a gully, but there is no sign of maintenance.

No sign of humans at all.

I start to wonder if something bad has happened. The sorts of things that happens in those movies my son liked.

Aliens invading. Another country invading.

Generally, the plot involved someone invading.

I brush that off as fantasy for a few weeks, but still, the walkers do not come. I start to feel like the only person in the world. And while seeking that feeling was one of the reasons I came here in the first place, then I knew life was going on as it always had outside the bush, back in the towns and cities.

Now I feel alone in a way I never have before. It frightens me.

So, I pick up my old backpack (initially grey and red when I walked in three years ago, but now dirty grey all over), put in the dried meat I have been curing, fill up my metal drink bottle with water from the lake and start walking. Normally whenever I need more supplies, I walk into the nearest town, Maydena. This is a rare occurrence; I grow my own vegetables, hunt and cure my own meat and have an abundance of water. I've been in once when I got an infected cut that wouldn't heal and once to get nails when a plank fell off my cabin.

Maydena is two days walk away. I walk quickly, taking half a day to reach the dirt carpark at the start of the walk. It is empty. Devoid of vehicles or tracks to indicate any had been in recently.

The logging roads I walk along are deserted, and eventually I reach the main bitumen road. I don't pass any cars on my way into town. My feet used to ache from walks this long, but the past few years have toughened them.

SHORT STORIES



(cont.)

THE WALKERS

Freya Cox

Turner ACT

When I reach the town the main street is quiet, but I see a few people out walking. I breathe a great sigh of relief. I had begun to wonder if they had all vanished and I was the last person left on this vast aching empty planet.

The people seem different though. They walk with purpose but are going nowhere. A few have light blue masks over their noses and mouths.

I head to the store I normally get my goods from, hoping Mark will be able to shed some light.

When I reach the store it's open. I push the door and walk up to the counter to greet Mark.

He looks at me. 'Good lord, I wondered if we'd be seeing you.'

'The walkers have stopped coming,' I say by way of explanation.

He nods. 'Everything has stopped, mate.'

I walk closer to the counter and he waves a hand. 'Nah, nah sorry. 1.5 meters away.'

'What? Do I smell that bad?'

'It's the new rule. Stay 1.5 meters away from other people at all times if possible.'

'What's going on?'

'There's a virus.'

'What?'

Mark shrugs as if he doesn't really get it either. 'Some bloody sickness everyone is getting. It's around the whole world. Even spread to little old Tasmania if you can believe that.'

I'm struggling to process this.

'A virus?'

'Yeah.'

'Are people dying?'

Mark nods. 'Yeah. Loads. More in America and Europe than here. But it might get worse here. We don't know.'

Squirt some of that on your hands eh.' He points at a bottle of clear liquid near the front door and I confusedly backtrack and squirt the alcoholic smelling fluid onto my hands.

'So, the walkers...?' I trail off.

'Won't be coming no more for a while mate. No one is meant to leave their homes unless they're an essential worker.' He looks around at his store and nods. 'Essential.'

'People aren't leaving their houses at all?'

'Nah. Not for weeks now. Everyone is inside all day. You can leave to buy food and do exercise and that sort of stuff though.'

This feels as bizarre as the alien invasions from my son's movies.

'How did this happen?'

'No one bloody knows. Someone ate a bat or something and then suddenly the entire world is in lockdown. It's a weird, weird time.'

'So, what's going to happen?'

Mark scoffs. 'That's the question everyone is asking, don't know what answers you're thinking I'm gonna provide.'

Hey mate,' he scratches his neck, 'you in touch with your kid still?'

Mark is one of the only people I've told why I moved into the mountains. Him and Sally.

My wife died three years ago in a car crash. The drunk driver who killed her, who had a head on collision with her coming around the bend to our driveway was our son.

I waited a month for my son to be released from hospital, trying to find within myself and within a therapist's office how to forgive him. I sat with him each day in the hospital and listened to him talk about getting sober and tried to feel anything apart from a deep sense of loss and anger. It was an ugly struggle which culminated in me fleeing into the mountains; the wild open landscape devoid of emotions where your thoughts can tumble away down the button grass plains and over mountainsides and be lost to you. Its emptiness slowly emptied my grief and anger too.

I shake my head.

'Might be time to think about that. This ain't the time to be holding on to long grudges.'

I'm silent and eventually Mark says, 'You know your son's address in Hobart still?'

'Yes. Unless he's moved.'

Mark points at a collection of boxes of blue plastic masks next to the counter. 'Grab a box,' he says. 'On me.'

I pick one up.

'Go see how he's going,' Mark says. 'Start walking.'

SHORT STORIES

**2ND
PRIZE**

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A touching story about an observant and patient mother trying to help her daughter negotiate the physical and emotional complexities of puberty. The sense of heat during an intense summer is palpable, underscoring the simmering hormonal confusion of early-teenage angst. It is studded with realistic dialogue and sensory details. By the end, both mother and daughter have experienced growth and a subtle yet well-earned resolution.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

*I'm thrilled to receive a prize in this year's competition. I got the idea for *Hot in Two Ways* during a visit to my local skate park.*

HOT IN TWO WAYS

Jean Flynn

Ballarat North VIC

I give Lacey a box of Lego and a puberty book for her birthday.

'I thought you were getting me a phone,' she says, stretching her pyjama top over her knees so that Harry Styles' oversized face warps.

'You're eleven,' I say, stroking her hair.

'So? Heaps of kids at school have one.'

Raf climbs onto the bed and grabs the book. 'Girl Stuff,' he reads. 'Eugh. You're going to get hair down there, you know.'

Lacey scrunches her eyes shut and sighs.

'So are you,' I say to Raf, who screams and slides onto the carpet like a wounded soldier.

The room smells musty. I open the venetians and pick up a discarded sock. 'Anyway, who wants pancakes for breakfast?'

'Me!' Raf shouts, coming back to life.

Lacey opens her eyes and unfolds her legs. 'Did you get some Nutella?'

'Of course. Can't have birthday pancakes without Nutella.'

The next day I catch Lacey pushing Girl Stuff into a dark crevice on her bookshelf, in between Harry Potter and Ranger's Apprentice.

'Aren't you going to read it?' I say.

She stares at the floor. 'I've got other books I have to read first.'

I look at her hunched shoulders. She's been standing this way for months. I want to tell her that I understand. That I remember what it was like when my nipples swelled and I realised t-shirts no longer sat flat against me. I want to whisper something poignant and helpful. Instead, I press my thumbs against her shoulder blades and say, 'Stand up straight!'

I wake early on Saturday morning due to the record-breaking overnight low of twenty-six degrees. Raf puts ice cubes in with his Weetbix.

We get to the skate park just after seven. The vast concrete wasteland is unoccupied; it's all ours.

'The teenagers are still asleep!' Raf says, pulling his scooter out of the boot.

'I wish I was still asleep,' says Lacey.

The bowl is a conjoined set of three hollows with a rail and stairs along one side and two spectator benches on the perimeter.

'Are you going to sit with me?' I ask Lacey.

'I guess.' She pulls on the ends of her flawless Dutch braids that she must have done in the car. They should bring about a sense of motherly pride but instead remind me of my hairstyling (and

therefore parenting) inadequacies.

'Why don't you bring your scooter next time? That'd be less boring.'

'It doesn't go properly.'

We watch Raf drop into a shallow part of the bowl and glide up the other side. The sun has just reached the top of the tall eucalypts nearby and I can already feel its warmth on my skin.

'Aren't you hot?' I ask Lacey. I want to say, 'Take your bloody jumper off!' but I'm trying to nag less and praise more. It's hard. Criticism flies out of my mouth so easily. Some days I wonder if I've said anything nice at all.

She wraps her fingers around the cuffs of her windcheater. 'Nope.'

I know what she's trying to cover up, but honestly, we're in the middle of a heat wave. I try a different approach. 'How far away is the sun?'

She doesn't even pause. 'A hundred and forty-nine million kilometres. Approximately.'

'Wow. Don't you think it's incredible how something so ridiculously distant has such a huge effect on our lives?'

She shrugs. I suppose if you're about to start high school the sun doesn't feature in your Top Five Influences list.

On the way home, Raf says, 'If you're pregnant and you have sex, can you get pregnant again?' I relish his openness. It won't last, of course. In two more years, he'll be staring out the window like his big sister, keeping his thoughts to himself.

Lacey comes outside when I'm hanging up the washing. 'This'll be dry in half an hour,' I say, as though that's exciting news. She hooks her arms over a low-hanging branch on the magnolia tree. Her windcheater rides up and I catch a glimpse of her smooth belly.

'Do you need any more of these?' I ask, pegging a crop top to the line.

'No.'

'Anything else? Socks? Undies?'

She shakes her head and pulls her feet up off the ground.

'I remember when you couldn't even reach that branch,' I say.

The next day we end up at the skate park in the evening. The bowl is crowded but Raf doesn't seem bothered. Lacey sighs as we take our places on the bench. She begged me to let her stay home alone, but I'm not quite ready for that.

There are groups of BMXers, scooter riders, skateboarders. All boys. One of the skaters is

practising apart from the others. He looks about thirteen. Uncombed blond hair. Scabs on both knees. Lacey's eyes follow his sinewy tanned legs as he passes in front of us. Just before he hits the fence he spins around and rolls back, then flicks the board so that it flips on its axis. He lands on his feet but the skateboard flies straight into Lacey's sneakers.

'Shit, sorry!' he says, pushing hair off his face.

She doesn't reply. Her cheeks flush and she sandwiches her hands between her thighs.

The following evening the air is thick with moisture. The world has turned a dirty yellow colour and we can smell smoke from a not-yet-under-control bushfire fifty kilometres away. All I feel like doing is lying on the couch with the fan aimed at my face, but Raf has other ideas.

'I'm ready!' he announces, coming into the lounge room with his helmet on.

'I don't know,' I say. 'Maybe we'll give tonight a miss?'

He pouts.

Lacey looks up from her book. 'I don't mind,' she says.

The skate park isn't overrun tonight. There are only seven boys – eight if you count Raf.

'Ooooh,' he says, pointing at some new graffiti. 'Tyler loves Bianca!'

'That's romantic,' I say, reading the black-marker revelation. 'Unless it's unrequited.'

'What?'

'If Bianca doesn't love him back.' I wave my hands around. 'I mean, she's not here, is she.'

'There's never any girls,' Raf says, spinning the deck of his scooter.

'I'm a girl,' says Lacey, hands on hips.

'Yeah, but you don't do anything.' He scoots off before she can reply.

Just as we head down to the car park to leave, the blond skater from the night before gets out of a dented ute that immediately does a U-ey and takes off. He looks at Lacey as he walks past, but she keeps her head down.

'How many of your friends have a phone?' I ask Lacey. I'm chopping celery for a Waldorf salad. There's no way I'm putting the oven on tonight.

'Most of them,' she replies, taking an apple from the fruit bowl.

Her hair – the top two inches of it, anyway – is oily. I open my mouth to comment, then catch

SHORT STORIES

**2ND
PRIZE**

(cont.)

HOT IN TWO WAYS

Jean Flynn

Ballarat North VIC

myself. 'You might need to wash your hair every second day now,' I say, as casually as possible. 'Especially if you're going to wear it out.'

'Okay.' She bites into the apple and leans against the bench.

I scrape the celery into a large white bowl and sprinkle a handful of sultanas on top.

'But if I did get you a phone, there'd be very strict rules.'

She smiles at me for the first time in days.

The next time we go to the skate park there are two roller-skating girls amongst the regulars. Lacey and I watch them in silence for a while. They take it in turns to roll down an incline and over a mound. No jumps or three-sixties, but they're steady and graceful. The orange rays of the setting sun emphasise their leg muscle definition.

'Can we look up skates on Gumtree when we get home?' Lacey says.

'That's a great idea,' I say. 'Maybe I'll get some too.'

She shakes her head.

'No?'

'No.'

'They swear a lot,' says Raf.

We're driving to check out a pair of skates for sale. \$25, used once. Bargain.

'Who?'

'The teenagers at the skate park.'

'Oh. Them.' I glance at him in the rear-view mirror.

'One said, "Fucking crumb!" the other day.'

'Raf!' says Lacey, turning around.

'Well he did!'

'Fucking crumb,' I repeat. 'Haven't heard that one before. Oh - here we are. Number 32, wasn't it?'

We're in a late-nineties housing estate - curved streets lined with red-brick houses, matching but not identical. Number 32 still has a string of Christmas lights attached to its gutter. We're greeted by a teenage girl with the biggest breasts I have ever seen. I'm surprised she's able to stand upright. No puberty book could prepare someone for that.

'Here for the skates?' she says.

'That's us,' I reply.

We stand in the hallway while Lacey tries them on. The advertisement description was accurate – they're spotless.

'How do they feel?' I ask.

'Good,' she says, with no discernible emotion.

I turn to the teenage girl. 'Will you take twenty?'

It turns out that Lacey has no natural skating ability and very little courage. Nevertheless, seeing her glide robotically around the skate-park perimeter makes my heart swell. Plus, she is the only female in a sea of testosterone. If I could whistle with two fingers stuffed into my mouth, I would.

We stay longer than usual. Afterwards, I say, to both children, 'Well, how was that?'

'I saw Tyler,' says Raf. His little cheeks are red and his hair is slicked with sweat.

'What, Tyler-loves-Bianca Tyler?' I say.

'Yep.'

'How do you know?'

'Because someone said "Tyler!"'

'Maybe Bianca'll come tomorrow,' Lacey says.

I look at her freckled face, all ruddy and glistening. 'So you're keen to go again?'

'Skating is so much better than sitting on the bench.'

Researching phones is exciting but difficult, like decorating birthday cakes or following Danish crime shows. In the end, I get a second-hand Samsung and a \$16-per-month, no-contract plan.

'You can text or call,' I say. 'That's it.'

'No data?' Lacey asks, sliding a finger over the screen for the first time.

'There is data. Technically. But I don't want you to use it.'

She gives me a look, but it's only half-serious. She knows I have the power.

On the way to the skate park Raf says, 'At lunch today, Mila said to me, "You're hot. In two ways."'

'Meaning what?' I ask.

'I don't know. Hot because I was sweaty from playing tiggy. And hot because I ... can run really fast?'

'That's probably right.'

Lacey and I exchange a look – squinty eyes and tight smiles.

When we arrive, we see the blond skater gliding around the concrete bowl. As soon as Lacey sits down to change into her skates he flies over the metal rim and lands nearby. The other boys at the park are all older – maybe early twenties – and on bikes. We watch one of them ride up the vertical edge of the bowl and flip backwards.

'That was sick, Tyler,' the blond skater says.

'Thanks little bro!' says Tyler, as he drops back in.

I nudge Lacey, who has just pulled herself up into a standing position.

The blond skater turns towards us. 'Nice skates,' he says.

Lacey smiles.

He picks up his board and flicks something off one of its wheels. 'Aren't you hot?'

She tugs one of her braids. 'Not really.'

'What's your new friend's name?' I ask on the way home.

'Don't know,' Lacey says, staring straight ahead.

'Lacey's got a boyfriend, Lacey's got a boyfriend,' chants Raf from the backseat.

'Raf,' I say sternly.

'He asked for my number,' she says. 'But I told him I couldn't remember it.'

When we stop at the next red light she undoes her seatbelt and takes off her windcheater.

'Who wants ice cream for tea tonight?' I ask.

'Me!' shouts Raf.

'Me too,' says Lacey.

SHORT STORIES



JUDGE'S COMMENT

Narrated from a child's distinctive point-of-view, this is a delightful tale about the unbreakable bond that exists between a boy and his beloved dog, and what happens after the dog has passed on. Wildly imaginative yet simply told, it is a deeply moving expression of love and hope.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

Lazing on the deck one afternoon, I saw the jacaranda tree with the late sunlight glancing through its ferny leaves and remembered our dear old dog Meggsie, who is buried underneath it. He was quite a character and this story started as a tribute to him, but took a strange twist and became a ghost story. It's what I love about writing; one never knows how a story will end. I am very grateful to have been selected for a prize in the Sutherland Shire Literary Competition, which is such an encouragement to my writing.

BOB'S ON THE JOB

Margaret Harris

Gymea Bay NSW

There is nothing like a boy and his dog.

Bob was a pound dog. He was big, shaggy and ginger, all goofy grin and tongue hanging out the side of his mouth. He woofed at me, our eyes met and I knew then he'd be a good mate. My parents were looking for a small female puppy, but when Bob put his paw through the fence and tried to shake hands with Dad, he was hooked.

'How clever is this dog!' he remarked. Bob did that cute thing dogs do, tilting his head.

'He's a smart dog and a friendly nature too,' said the ranger standing next to us, 'but he's a sad case. He was found in the National Park. We think he was tossed out of a car by someone. He charmed the picnickers out of their lunches for months and no-one could catch him. It's a pity he's on death row. His time's up. He has to be put down tomorrow.' Mum and Dad looked at each other for about two seconds. 'We'll take him,' said Dad.

'Woof!' said Bob. Translation: 'Getmeouttahere!'

'That's great!' said the ranger. 'Have you got high fences? He's rather a big boy and might be able to jump them. Make sure he gets a proper collar with your phone number on it.'

'How big do you think he's going to be?' asked Mum.

'We're not sure. He's really still a puppy, so he could grow a little more.'

Bob did grow... to the size of a small pony. He was a champion escapologist and met all our neighbours in the next few days. He was also thief, bringing home odd shoes from verandahs, an umbrella, pizza boxes out of someone's recycling, a teddy bear and a tin can, stuck on his nose. Bob always seemed to grin as he dropped things at our feet.

Once we got a call from a man on the station.

'Do you own a dog called Bob? He's a lovely boy! He followed me all the way from home. I've stopped him getting on one train, but there's another due in ten minutes...'

Bob also had a strange fascination with cars. He seemed to have a sixth sense about when we were about to go for a drive. He'd be sitting there beside the car, waiting for us. One Saturday, Dad parked the car and left the window open by mistake. I found Bob later, sitting in the driver's seat with his front feet on the wheel, ready to go. No way was Bob ever being left behind again.

Bob's other obsession was food. A batch of muffins, sitting on the kitchen bench, cooling? Property of Bob... ate them all, wrappers included.

On Sunday, Mum made a roast, left the serving platter on the table and went to call us. We sat down to a serving plate with roast potatoes and pumpkin and a big empty hole in the middle where the leg of lamb should have been. I guess Bob buried it up the backyard somewhere- must have burnt his mouth.

Eventually, we managed to teach him manners and he learned to sit beside our table, his big brown eyes fixed on us, making a puddle of drool, until a hunk of juicy meat was dropped into his bowl.

Bob grew up to be one of the most friendly and loyal dogs you could ever imagine. He knew when someone was sad. When my Gran died, he stayed with Mum and put his head in her lap when she cried. When my baby brother, Harry, was born, Bob would hear him cry and beat Mum and Dad to his cot every time. As Harry got older, my parents would listen to him on the baby monitor before getting up. If Harry's cries turned to giggling, they knew they could go back to sleep. Bob was on the job.

Bob was my best buddy. He slept on my bed every night. He had a bed of his own, but I couldn't sleep unless he was there, a snoring, hairy lump at the end of my bed.

He went fishing at the wharf with me, played fetch in the backyard and was part of the cricket team at the park. His position was outfielder. He knew he had to get the ball to the bowler fast and he did. The only thing Bob didn't like was when anyone went in the pool. He'd run up and down, barking to tell us to get out at once. If we ignored him, he'd try to rescue whoever he thought was in danger. He'd plunge into the pool, grab an arm and swim for the steps.

One hot summer afternoon, my Aunty Jan was over for lunch. We'd all eaten way too much of Dad's barbie and were lazing around the pool. Aunty Jan was just floating in the water totally at peace, when forty kilos of Bob, entered the water and dragged her spluttering to the steps.

'Do you think he was a lifesaver in another life?' she asked Mum.

'No, just a pest!'

One day when I got home from school, Bob was not waiting at the back gate. I saw he was asleep under the jacaranda, on a carpet of mauve flowers. But he wasn't asleep, he was gone. Gone to the great kennel in the sky. I sat there for a moment, talking to him and telling him what a good dog he was. I touched his rough, ginger hair and ran my hand along that fluffy tail that would never wag again. I imagined Bob floating up through the clouds and standing outside those pearly gates with his tail wagging. Saint Peter would open the doggy door for Bob.

We buried him there in his favourite spot. Dad made a little cross for him and Mum painted on it, 'R.I.P. Bob, a good and faithful dog'. I picked some flowers from our garden. For weeks after, Harry kept saying, 'Bobbadog!' He'd only just learned to talk a bit and it made us all sad.

But the nights were hardest. Sometimes I'd wake and reach for him and then remember. One night I had a strange dream that he was there. For a moment I thought I heard snoring. I sat up and looked around. Nothing, so I fell asleep again.

As I came downstairs the next morning, I heard Mum laughing.

SHORT STORIES



(cont.)

BOB'S ON THE JOB

Margaret Harris

Gymea Bay NSW

'...Oh yes you were Jim, snoring like a pig! Harry started crying about two o'clock, but he stopped almost straight away. Then, he started laughing! I could hear him on the monitor, saying, 'Bobbadog!' over and over in that sweet little voice of his, until I fell asleep again.'

Harry was sitting in his high chair eating porridge. More like spreading it about the kitchen. He'd made a Picasso-style drawing in the porridge on his tray.

'Hi Harry,' I said, sitting down. He gave me a toothless grin. Mum put a bowl of porridge in front of me and I added some milk and way too much sugar. A shiver ran along my spine when I saw little droplets of water forming out of nowhere and plopping onto the floor. I dropped a lump of porridge and it disappeared right in front of my eyes.

Harry began squealing, 'Bobbadog! Bobbadog!' and I felt something swoosh against my leg, just like a fluffy tail brushing against me. I still said nothing. I suppose it all felt so unreal, would anyone believe me?

'There he goes again!' said Dad. 'Why Bobbadog? Bob's been gone for weeks now. You wouldn't think a little child would even remember!'

'He doesn't. He's just playing with words,' said Mum. 'Watch this ... Oogabooga!'

'Oogabooga!' said Harry, blowing a porridgy bubble.

'OK, you win,' said Dad from behind his newspaper.

'Come on Harry, let's get you cleaned up. Hold him will you, Ryan?' Mum put him on my lap while she went to get a face cloth. Not quick enough. I felt something heavy on my leg and saw the porridge residue disappearing like magic from my brother's face.

‘Bobbadogga!’ he burbled, laughing and gurgling.

When Mum returned with the cloth, Harry was spotless. I pretended to be wiping the last of it off with my napkin. Mum stood there looking annoyed.

‘It’s still in his hair, Mum! I was just trying to help!’

Before I left for school, I went to Bob’s grave. Could Bob really still be with us? Then I jumped as something licked my leg. I heard panting beside me and I knew it was true. We were haunted, by a ghost... dog.

I kept my secret for ages. I knew Bob loved us. He wasn’t doing any harm and by now I was used to the big lump at the end of my bed again, so everything chugged along until the day of Harry’s second birthday party. Mum invited a few kids and their parents from Harry’s playgroup. I was helping Dad with the barbie and Mum was busy, making drinks and serving food and swapping parenting disaster stories. The lawn was overrun with two year olds, screaming and tumbling about like puppies. Then for some reason, Mum and Dad looked at each other and yelled, ‘Where’s Harry?’

In the horrified silence that followed, we spotted the pool gate. It was open! Somehow in the chaos of the party, Harry had wandered off, climbed onto a chair and opened the gate! We all ran. We were stuck for a moment, all trying to get through the gate at once. In my mind I could see little Harry lying at the bottom of the pool, with his eyes wide in the blue depths and his pudgy little arms floating...

But there he was, floating impossibly on his back, heading towards the steps. He was laughing and saying, ‘Doggy! Doggy!’

The other parents caught up and one father remarked, ‘Good thing he can float! Have you been taking him to lessons?’

‘Er, yes! You really should make sure they’re water-safe!’ said Dad, thinking on his feet.

Later I told Mum and Dad about Bob. They both looked doubtful, but it was a miracle that Harry was still alive and since then, I’ve seen both of them ‘accidentally’ dropping food on the kitchen floor and watching it disappear. Sometimes, when Harry wakes in the night, I feel that lump jump off the bed. If I hear laughing, I know that Bob is still on the job.

There is nothing like a dog and his boy.

SHORT STORIES



THE BARD OF THE BONNET, HENRY LAWSON

Leone McManus

Como NSW

JUDGE'S COMMENT

This story conjures a great sense of place, with evocative descriptions of the Woronora River, Scylla Bay and the Sutherland Shire in the late 19th century. It imagines the real-life story of writer Henry Lawson, who lived in a shack in the area and who often read his poetry in exchange for drinks at the Como Hotel. Full of colourful characters and rollicking humour, it also imagines how he came to be inspired to write his most famous short story, 'The Drover's Wife.'

AUTHOR'S COMMENT

The most insightful knowledge into the human condition is often gained by those who have endured depression, despair and disability. Henry Lawson suffered adversity for most of his life but he was able to transcend all obstacles and compose meaningful vignettes through observation.

Puffing and belching black sulfuric fumes high into the sky, like a demon from hell, the blackened sooty ogre, the ominous funeral train to Woronora Cemetery, gathered full force as it rattled and rumbled across the Como Railway Bridge. It had left Regent Street Mortuary Station in Sydney by two thirty, with several carriages of doleful mourners, attired in Victorian black, with the ever melancholy vicar and the recently departed stowed in the rear carriages. The train shook, shuddered and strained as the locomotive shunted up the steep incline past Como station and on to Sutherland.

The solemn soul in the fishing shanty did not see the train approaching nor hear it but felt distant rumbling vibrations and out of respect for the dead, poured himself another glass of whisky and saluted the dear departed. The funeral train always left in the afternoon at two thirty and later as it passed Oatley, gathered steam for the ascent, like an assault on Everest. As the train keened and screeched, its wheels determined to conquer the slope, the solitary soul was transported to the goldfields, where he recalled his mother had argued bitterly with his father. It was a violent disruption about her participation in the women's movement and her involvement with The Dawn publication. His early life had been loud, screaming, din, pandemonium and then total silence as complete deafness set in at the age of fourteen. He recalled a trek in the bush where he abhorred the rural idyll, finding it a barren landscape, harsh and unrelenting.

At Como, however, he found tranquility in the quiet backwater of the Woronora River, at the "Bonnet" with the hotel nearby overlooking the beauty of Scylla Bay. He had a small dinghy and would row to the hotel for the supply of liquor needed to fend off the ghosts. They troubled him, they disturbed him, they visited often with the intention of driving him to despair. He recalled in his writing the poem "One Hundred and Three" when he was incarcerated for drunkenness in Darlinghurst Gaol, a deep, dark depression.

In 1788, Captain John Hunter had surveyed the Georges River up to Como, then later Matthew Flinders and George Bass, in the Tom Thumb, made sketches of the river in 1795. Despite the coming of the train line and the growing population, Como remained a backwater, a hidden jewel, forgotten by most. The Pleasure Grounds near Como Station, where picnickers could enjoy the beauty of the river, were popular once the railway bridge was built in 1885. The Georges River abounded with a variety of fish, bream, yellowtail, Jewfish and flathead as well as bull sharks, jellyfish and oysters. The solitary soul occasionally met a Tharawal man in the bush, but generally he was left alone.

in the fisherman's hut, with only the ghosts from the past. His great companions were the Bottle, which neither insulted or demeaned his character, and Melancholy, which never left his side.

He realised that one of his better companions had left and he now needed to replenish his company. He launched the small boat into the river armed with several stories which he had composed by the dingy twilight of despair in the small hut near the Bonnet. Due to his deafness and solitude, he often found himself transported to other worlds, when reading Charles Dickens or Frederick Marryat. He particularly liked the Dickens' story, *The Signalman*, where the protagonist has a premonition of his own death, and the Christmas Carol where, like him, ghosts plague his very soul. With several stories in his pocket, he rowed to the familiar hotel, with its wide verandahs and sandstone retaining wall where he tied the craft to a mooring angle ring.

The Como Hotel which was built in 1887, was a grand edifice and looked like a huge wedding cake overlooking Scylla Bay. Wide verandahs wrapped around the building on three levels provided a panoramic view of the river and small boats could moor at its doorstep. Many a fisherman's journey would end up there, particularly if the marital relationship was strained or a job needed completion at home.

The Publican saw Henry and nodded with deference as he entered the bar which smelt of sour hops and slops of spilt schooners. No words of salutation were needed to convey his presence in the bar but several of the drinkers slightly sat up and nodded to each other. The bar stretched across the entire room, where half filled glasses, half smoked cigarettes, an empty bottle of sherry, betting tickets, newspapers, some fish wrapped in paper and several packets of cards with a buxom beauty peeking behind a fan, graced the length and breadth of the pub. A Chinese market gardener, Hop Sing, carried a huge basket of cabbages, spinach and greens which he plied to the indifferent drinkers. Two mongrel dogs with two mongrel owners sat at one end and an SP bookie with a bowler hat was busy with bets at the other

end. The visitor lingered under the lintel while his eyes adjusted to the dim, before he entered.

"Henry", the round, red faced Publican laconically smiled and greeted the visitor as he entered.

The two visitors whom the publican loved were Henry, the poet, as well as the voluptuous young lady from the Salvation Army who turned up on Friday night to collect money for charity. Myrtle, the Publican's wife and chief barmaid, had hunted the Temperance League vipers who could spoil a good evening with their wowserish, boring homilies and anti-alcohol nonsense.

The visitor reached for his pocket which was devoid of cash but was overflowing with his craft of writing. He extracted the papers which he nervously waited for attention as he prepared to read.

"What is this one about, Henry?", quipped the balloon faced publican with a wink to one of the patrons.

Henry was unable to hear the question but he anticipated it.

"It is about a Loaded Dog", replied Henry... "Then another nasty dog that gets his comeuppance".

The publican smiled because Henry's stories were far more entertaining than Old Billy on the out of tune piano or a fight between two drunken fools or his wife Myrtle when she fell down the stairs and everyone saw her drawers. The normally bombastic and belligerent bar fell silent as the visitor began.

Due to his deafness, he found he was unable to speak clearly but the urgency of his mission meant that his voice always rose to the challenge.

"First," said the raconteur, "I require a libation for this tale or tail of woe".

SHORT STORIES



(cont.)

THE BARD OF THE BONNET, HENRY LAWSON

Leone McManus

Como NSW

The homophone and intended double entendre were completely lost on the illiterati who sat in silence, suspended in anticipation and ignorance. At the very moment when the raconteur was about to resume his tale, another formidable and ominous being, the size of Mallee bull and just as dangerous, appeared at the door.

“Where is that blankety blank mongrel Frank Collins?”, bellowed Bertha Collins, who stood seething with rage.

The pub barflies, the SP bookie, the publican, the two mongrel dogs and their mongrel owners fell silent as the corpulent presence stepped into the bar, which was unfortunately off limits to the gentler sex. Frank Collins, who had been trying to borrow money for the next round, quickly exited up the stairs and as fast as his spindly legs would carry him. Coming down the stairs, unfortunately for Frank, was Bertie the Bruiser, a vile, unpredictable, short tempered alcoholic who picked a fight with anyone who crossed his path. Bertie was owed ten shillings by Frank and worse than worse, it was his shout. The two said nothing until Bertie the Bruiser let Frank have one right across the dial. Bertha, despite her size could run like a rat up a drainpipe, was beside Frank in an instant.

Bertha looked at Frank then at Bertie before belting him with her handbag which held three bottles of beer. Bertie the Bruiser sank down the stairs groaning and moaning, while the two drunken fools came rushing to see all the commotion near the stairs. Bertha then let one of them have the same treatment with her handbag and then somehow the entire bar was engaged in warfare. The two mongrels joined in the melee whilst their two mongrel dogs snoozed on the floor of the pub, in a coma, with the smell of hops. Henry stood and watched as the insurrection began and wondered about the cause.

On the small table, to his left, was a schooner of beer quite untouched and deserted by its owner. Henry seated himself at the table and began sipping the contents of the glass as he watched the fight.

Myrtle, who could move any beer barrel of one hundred and sixty pounds with the deftness of a fairy, launched an attack

on the barflies. She hurled the drinkers, the dipsomaniacs, the lushes and the soaks, out the door and three ended up in the shallows of Scylla Bay where they swam like drowning rats. Myrtle even removed Fritz the Hun and his brother Claptrap Klaus, who were quietly drinking wine in the corner.

In the sixteenth century, church reformer, Martin Luther, advocated the consumption of wine. The former monk stated that beer was man made but wine comes from God. Claptrap Klaus had told Myrtle the barmaid this and to her horror she felt that this odious message was an assault on her beer trade. She had been waiting her chance and finally her ship had come in.

Henry finished the beer as well as two others which were unattended. He was given three more bottles from the publican who despite the drunken riot, was keen for Henry to return to drum up business. The publican wanted to promote a seemingly 'civilised clientele' and Henry was just the ticket.

Henry looked at his watch and thought it was time to leave and return to the fisherman's hut. He wished the Publican and his wife a fond farewell and lowered himself into the dinghy. Myrtle liked Henry because he never spoke to her and she felt sorry for his deafness.

The dinghy floated silently across the bay back to the hut while the brawlers returned to the bar.

Henry rowed quietly and gently back to the bush shanty. The sun was setting in the west. Due to his deafness, Henry did not hear the rustle on the floor but he did see the red bellied black snake ready to strike. He stood still, frozen with fear. The snake slithered into the back of the hearth and vanished.

Henry was unable to move and realized he would have to wait for the snake to reappear before he could remove it. The clock yawned and time seemed to be slowed down to almost a halt. Henry could not drink and this night would be a long sober one. He waited and waited.

Around ten o'clock, Henry sat at the kitchen table waiting. Time seemed to be suspended. At midnight he felt that he was slipping into sleep and forced himself to wake. Towards dawn he was almost asleep when two black cold eyes appeared behind the hearth.

Slowly and silently he picked up the shovel. He raised the shovel above him. As the snake reappeared he let the shovel fall with all his might. There was a clang of metal and a cloud of dust rose in the kitchen.

Henry looked down and saw the dismembered snake which still coiled and twisted. He collapsed onto a chair and sat silently, exhausted but relieved. He reached for the bottle and took an enormous swig then picked up his pen and began to write.

POSTSCRIPT

The poet, Henry Lawson, frequented the Como Hotel in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He often read his stories and poems as payment for drinks.

Henry Lawson is one of Australia's most renowned writers.



2020 LITERARY COMPETITION WINNERS

TRADITIONAL VERSE Prize Winners

First Prize

A Precious Chance -
Shelley Hansen, Maryborough QLD

Second Prize

Ghost Child -
Brenda-Joy Pritchard, Charters Towers
QLD

Third Prize

From Gallipoli With Love -
Tom McIlveen, Port Macquarie NSW

Highly Commended

Old Man Drought -
Tom McIlveen, Port Macquarie NSW

Commended

Bushfire (The Dragon from the West) -
Kay Gorrington, Morayfield QLD

Commended

To Trash the Terrors -
Robyn Sykes, Binalong

FREE VERSE Prize Winners

First Prize

Botany Bay -
Penny Lane, Nelson Bay NSW

Second Prize

Still the Rain Kept Falling -
Denise O'Hagan, Northbridge NSW

Third Prize

East Coast Blues -
Penny Lane, Nelson Bay

NSW Shire Resident's Prize

I am Australia -
Tiarne Szemenyei, Gympie NSW

Highly Commended

I will never hurt you again -
Damen O'Brien, Wynnum QLD

Commended

Where Once She Danced -
Anne Casey, Northbridge NSW

Commended

Love You to Death -
David Terelinck, Bigga Waters QLD

SHORT STORIES Prize Winners

First Prize

Jeff and Jill -
Rachel Flynn, Fitzroy North VIC

Second Prize

Motel -
Beverly Lello, Yackandandah VIC

Third Prize

Bleeding -
Anthea Fraser Gupta, Fairy Meadow
NSW

Shire Resident's Prize

The Bay -
Kate Herring, Oyster Bay NSW

Highly Commended

Catching Crabs -
Yihong Gao, Campbelltown NSW

Commended

The Stars, Millie -
Helen Meany, Stanmore NSW

Commended

Traumerei -
Paulette Gittins, South Yarra VIC

Commended

Educating Radwa -
Alice Mantel, Concord West NSW

THEMED SHORT STORIES Prize Winners

First Prize

29th April 1770 -
Leone McManus, Como NSW

Second Prize

Old School -
Claire Riley, Bangor NSW

Third Prize

Clay - John Scholz, Willunga SA

Highly Commended

The 987 -
Tylissa Elisara, Mount Peter QLD

Commended

Our Destiny -
Marie Clear, Wagga Wagga NSW



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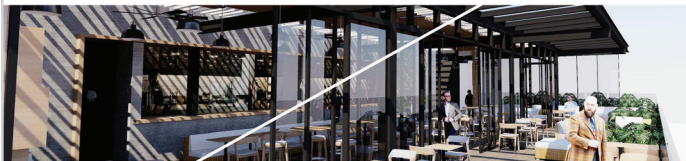


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