

## Katharine Susannah Prichard Writers' Centre Poetry Competition 2023

### Judges Report by Elizabeth Lewis

Hi Everyone,

It was a privilege to read more than 300 entries to the competition this year and it was a tough job to narrow them down to select the winners! What a talent of poets we have!

Poetry is magic because it can distil a felt moment or a story into a word-image to be shared and felt anew, it is craft and deep attention. Thank you to all the poets who submitted this year. Thank you for the time and learning and connection that you put into your poems. Thank you above all for your bravery. It's a big deal to press send. To let your words go out into the world in the hope that someone unknown will value the piece of art you have poured your care and creativity into.

I wanted to give special mentions to more poems than there are places. So, if you do not win a place today, please continue to write, and please find uplifting people to encourage you in your poetic life and work. You may well be next in line for the prize.

Without further ado,

### The Youth Category

Our young poets this year submitted pieces on fantastical creatures, epic battles – the external mirroring internal growth and change, gratitude for parents and significant relationships, physical desire, love, loss, death, nature, illness, sport, love of pets, the pitfalls of social media, desire for change, our robot future, naming the things they love – food friends, holidays, resilience, the futility of war, understanding autism, belonging, passion. There were also quite a few very creepy spooky stories in miniature! What a ride! Thank you to our youth entrants for teaching me, for reminding me that our young people are the future and carry a great depth of passion, concern and drive, if these poems are anything to go by. I even learnt a new word – pulchritudinous, which is, the longest word to mean 'beautiful'.

### The Shire of Mundaring Encouragement Award:

This year's **Shire of Mundaring Encouragement Award for a Poet under the age of 14** goes to Aditya Paul, aged 12, for *A Rainbow Race*. The shape of this poem, with stanzas alternately on either side of the page, gave momentum to the piece, which cleverly laid down clue upon clue, building suspense to reveal the final surprise of the poem – the bright powder thrown at the end of a colour race. Great rhyming stanzas too! Humour, intrigue and joy, congratulations!

### Youth:

**Commended** goes to Sophie Salloum for *Lebanese Wedding*, the detail of tastebuds dancing to the delicious cuisine echoing the wedding dance was a perfect last line which reflected back

through the occasion of this celebratory poem. Jordan Elias for *The Common Guy*, a heartfelt plea for a culture that allows male sadness to be felt, discussed and shared openly so healing can occur. Sam Agnew for *Extinct*, a powerful outcry to respect the animals we share the earth with and Jack Johnston for *Winter's Wrath*, a lament on the challenges of the chilly season, with some delightful detail.

**Highly Commended** goes to Rania Aldanu for *On a Day Trip to Ephesus*, a passionate prose-poem that asks deep questions of the self and of history, "Did they walk like me, did they talk like me, did they sing?" and Selina Decarlo for *Ochre: maire, parama*, a meditation on connection with the present and the natural world, the "paperbark thin zephyr, skimming the tops of the waves, soft as a flute."

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize:** Congratulations Paige Duncan for *My Dad Came to Dance Class*. The form of this poem is neat and organised with even stanzas and clever rhyme, however, the reason it earned 2<sup>nd</sup> place is the humour, cheekiness and delight contained in the storytelling. This poem made me smile and smile again. The story of a Dad enthusiastically joining in with a dance class, complete with leg-warmers, twirling, demi plies and full make-up is fabulous, unexpected and celebrates the spirit of giving everything a go. Well done!

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize:** Congratulations to Jayda Brain on the winning poem *Straight From the Bottle*. This short poem contains a family history, the complexities of family relationships and what is handed down in the effects of war, addiction and the stories we tell to survive. These themes are delivered via a granddaughter's retelling of her grandmothers wild and tragic stories, the weight of these laid on the family. So much captured in just the right details.

### **The Annette Cameron Encouragement Award for an Unpublished WA Poet**

The successful poems in this category all offer clear and poignant images that stayed with me, that made me sigh with feeling, that moved me to a softer place than where I was before reading. They explore the everyday moments we share with loved ones, the ways in which the small moments are the big moments, and also consider what the loss of these loved ones will mean.

All include perfectly selected sensory detail: dancing with the ashes of a lost love, a runaway balloon as a metaphor for the way life travels between joy and grief, a child riding on the long skirt of a strong, earthy and ageing Nanna, large fallen leaves, soft as dog's ears, reflecting tenderness. These poems deserve to be read slowly, multiple times. I won't spoil the surprise for you of hearing these poems read by the poets, here they are:

**Commended:** *The Bit Player* by Bev Johnson

**Commended:** *Balloon* by Jenifer Hetherington

**Highly Commended:** *Towed by my Nanna's Wake* by Elizabeth Green

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize:** *The Tensile Strength of Aluminium* by Rhian Healy won for it's beautiful layering of tender detail upon detail, describing a family completing a task together, the emotion of the

speaker on watching their father, stirring in every detail of the scene. A poem that notices the small miracles of everyday life and love, “Metal filings like little stars of silver”, “Solitary dewdrops”, tiny spiders and dogs keeping company. Every word has purpose in this piece. It is a finely wrought moment, a gift to read.

### **The Open Category**

The successful poems in the open category avoided cliché, allowed room for surprise, were brave in their use of fresh imagery, measured rhythm, the sound of the poem on the page. Many entries were so close, they just needed tightening, a final edit. The successful poems showed attention to craft by selective detail, considered word choice, precision of storytelling, a connection to tenderness, not shying away from honesty of feeling and therefore sharing emotion effectively with the reader.

#### **Commended** *How Safety Pins* by Scott Patrick Mitchell

A delicate examination of ageing, loneliness and the gift of kindness, safety pins to keep the cold out of bedsheets. How poetry pins the ache of history and understanding so it can be shared.

#### **Commended** *Something Beautiful* by Gail Willems

Reminiscent of William Carlos Williams *The Red Wheelbarrow* and *This is Just to Say*, this lovely poem collects the vibrant moments of a day in the life of a mother, as an offering for the absent partner who will be coming home from work. “These ordinary things that shine luminous in the morning won’t last...I’ll uncork the bubbles of a smile I saved”. A poem holding out small handfuls of light, it made me slow down and smile and feel grateful.

#### **Commended** *Armfuls of Grief* by Diana Meservy

A heartfelt poem on the loss of a child. Such a devastating and important piece to share, to make space for grief, to bear witness to “the tiny toes... downy head...our empty arms.” To remember.

This next poet needs to be recognised for several of the wonderful pieces they submitted. This competition was judged blind, meaning none of the poet’s names were on their pieces. I had no idea when I was selecting the successful poets that for the next certificates, I was selecting the same person 3 times over, such is the skill of this poet. Each poem is very different in its subject and voice, however each one hit me straight in the heart. Jan Napier is awarded

**Commended** for *The Stranger*, **Commended** for Woodbridge House and **Highly Commended** for *No Rainbow*.

#### **Highly Commended:** *Spaces of Loneliness* by Virginia O’Keefe

A brave poem in 3 parts that takes us through the tender and mundane moments of long-term partnership, to the ache for intimacy that comes from living alone, to the sensual

pleasures of a night time dance in the rain. This poem is gutsy and rich in visual imagery, I could picture myself in each scene, feel each observation in my stomach, as if drawn into the poem.

**Highly Commended** : The Nose of the Dog by Anne M Carson

A clever re-telling of a story that ancient caves were discovered because dogs “fell” into them, this poem personifies the caves as lungs, as belly, as “deep mineral breath” and lets us consider all the scents that history calls up, through the clever noses of the dogs.

**2nd Prize:** *The Rain in Black Jeans* by Jaya Penelope

I couldn't get this poem out of my head. Fresh! Spunky! Strong! A perfectly formed poem that takes us into a dream-body walking the nighttime city streets. This poem explores how costume can give us power or perhaps awaken the power already within. We see into the mind of a woman finding her strength, lifting her voice. Best last lines I've read in a long time. Thank you and congratulations Jaya.

**1st Prize:** *Early: A morning* by Jan Napier

Superbly crafted and original, the winning poem demonstrates the skill, attention and experience of this poet. It made me chuckle, multiple times. This poem is full of fresh images used to describe familiar moments. It tells a story and defines a character using short phrases stacked like bricks, one on top of the other. The voice of this character is colloquial, likeable, could be any one of us. Life can feel hard, this poem offered a moment of levity. It brings the reader back to the present moment, the small laughable things that happen day-to-day, crystalline images of a raven hunching under eaves, kettle huffing clouds, ducks on the pool, felt hat melting in the rain, remembering the bin has to go out just as you hear the rubbish truck. Each individual image is a delight and accumulated, this is a joyful package of a suburban life. Congratulations Jan!

Congratulations to all of the successful entrants. Thank you everyone for supporting this fabulous writing centre, this community competition and for supporting the value of writing, and in this case poetry. Poets really do make the world wiser, kinder and more connected.