

**KSP Short Fiction Award 2017**  
**Open & Youth Section – Total Entries 108**  
**Judge’s Report**

It was a pleasure to judge the 2017 KSP Fiction Award in the Youth and Open categories. There were several stories that deserved to win, and as I read and made my selections, I realised that many lovely stories would miss out, because that is the nature of competitions. I say this, because it is important to acknowledge the high standard of most of these entries and I hope the writers will try other avenues of recognition and publication.

While reading the stories, I looked for the way each writer conveyed their sense of the world, minutely, enigmatically and lyrically. A short story does not need to provide an entire world; a sideways look, a glance, a nod to the largeness that contains its brevity, is all that is required. The ones that stayed with me were the ones I read and re-read several times, each time discovering something new in a turn of phrase, image or observation. A number of writers used language exceptionally well, conveying complexity of form, voice and structure with economy. The most successful stories had a sense of the unexpected, and rendered people and situations in new and tender ways. However, there were also a number of entries that fell back on cliché, insensitive cultural portrayals and excessive explanation. Some were burdened by too many adjectives and adverbs while others needed rigorous editing and proofreading.

In the Youth Section, these are the Commended entries:

*I'm not scared* by Grace Bettison from WA, is an evocative story of a damaged childhood and the effects of addiction on a pair of young girls. The writing is assured, showing a well-developed sense of narrative, character and voice.

Congratulations Grace.

The second Commended entry is *Mum* by Lara Mathew, also from WA. This story effectively links the ‘normal’ teenage angst about mothers who have no sense of fashion to the climactic horror and lament in its last paragraphs. Congratulations Lara.

The third Commended entry is *The Journey Home* by Janice Tan from WA. This is the story of a family coming together and apart after the death of a father. Told from the point of view of the daughter who sees everything, this is a reflection on the stages of grief and acceptance. Congratulations Janice.

The Mundaring National Young Writers Encouragement Award for a writer under 14 goes to Kylie Delanoy from Victoria, for *Speechless*. This story explores selective muteness as a response to grief. This young writer shows a tremendous amount of poise and promise. Congratulations Kylie.

The second prize goes to Jasmin Pradhan for *Lauren Belongs*. From the point of view of a young girl with autism, this story uses dialogue effectively to build up narrative tension and convey a sense of 'otherness' with quiet authority. The school scenes are rendered with authenticity, as are the internal thoughts of the girl as she watches, absorbs and reacts to the sounds, sights and smells that may trigger responses she cannot control. Congratulations Jasmin.

The first prize in the Youth section goes to Jae Briefflies for *Wind*. A story of youth and a lost childhood against a backdrop of a migrant boat rocking on treacherous seas, this is a warm and mature response to a situation we see played out nightly on our TV screens. In lyrical prose, this writer explores tragedy without sentiment and evokes an entire world reminiscent of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* with empathy. Congratulations Jae.

The winning entries in the Open section had a sense of conversations and lives lived within a quiet space, stories that suggested complexity as well as intelligence and humanity. In no particular order, here are the five Commended entries.

*Monologue Woman* by Brenda Downing is enchanting in its immediacy. The monologue woman enters a café with her toddler and without drawing breath, reveals a lifetime of privilege and insularity in her interactions with her child, friends, the waitress and her environment. The narrator is observer and philosopher, both ironic and astute. Congratulations Brenda.

*The Birdwatcher* by Christine Johnson is a deceptively simple story of country life and filial duty which builds to an unexpected, and shocking revelation that feels

utterly authentic in its unfolding. As a twist on the theme of familial abuse, this is a sobering story. Congratulations Christine.

*Rain* by Rosemary Allan is another acutely observed and finely detailed portrait of addiction and the maternal ties that bind. The dialogue is effortless and the rendering of female friendship, poignant. Congratulations Rosemary.

The oddly titled *My mother has a friend whose sister is a bunnygirl* by Kathy Prokhovnik is a witty and sometimes acerbic look at relationships, ageing and friendships. Dense description that never feels too much is a highlight of this unusual story. Congratulations Kathy.

And the final Commended story is *Gelato* by Deb Wain. This beautiful story combines the complexity of an immigrant's allegiance to his mother and homeland with the urgent beauty he finds in his new life. This story, as a reflection on what is loosely called 'the immigrant life' made me smile and ache with its precise rendering of a particular experience. Congratulations Deb.

Second prize goes to *The Dumbo Effect* by Suzannah Churchman. A story of domestic abuse told with restraint for the first few pages until it escalates along with the violence. As a woman and as a mother I felt it had a satisfying, if biblical end. Mouse will stay with me for a long time. Congratulations Suzannah.

First prize is awarded to *Daniel, you're a star* by Melanie Hall. This supremely accomplished story uses first person plural (we) to draw the reader into an intimate world in which we are both participant and observer. I heard the rhythm of this story like a primal beat, each time I read it; its musicality alone would make this a winner. But it is also a compelling story of childhood, adolescence and irretrievable loss and it plays with these big themes without sentimentality. Strong, rich, lyrical – this is enormously satisfying.

Congratulations Melanie.

Rashida Murphy

KSP Short Fiction Judge

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