

2016 My Brother Jack Awards – Hardie Grant Egmont Junior Secondary School Short Story Section

Judged by Annette Trevitt

Judge's Bio

Annette moved from Sydney to Melbourne to study animation and stayed. She teaches short fiction, screenwriting and TV comedy in professional writing and editing programmes, and works as a freelance structural editor. Her short stories have been broadcast on ABC radio and by the BBC and published in literary magazines and anthologies, including *Best Australian Stories 2015*. This year, a story was a runner up in Ireland's international Fish Short Story Competition. It will be published in the *2016 Fish Anthology*.

Judge's Report

Thank you for letting me read your stories. This year there were 108 stories. It was a pleasure to see so many of you writing fiction.

I looked for stories with:

- a point.
- a clear structure of beginning, middle and end, not necessarily in that order.
- tension to make a reader read on to see what will happen next
- clear prose
- action
- a satisfying resolution.

In a competition, it is best to stay as close to the word limit as you can. A few stories went over, and a few stories would have benefited from being longer and more developed.

You all have shown that you can write about anything. When you think of a character in a story, think of what they want that is hard to get. It can be anything: peace of mind, a friendship, a skateboard or as Kurt Vonnegut wrote, 'make your character want something straight away – even if it's a glass of water.' This will engage the reader as they read on to see what will happen next and to see how it will end.

To write the way you talk is better than to write how you think you have to write. You don't need to develop a 'writer's voice'. Stay with your own voice. It's this voice, which brings a story to life.

I recommend you read the final draft of your story out loud and to edit it on paper. It's easy to miss typos and grammar mistakes on the screen.

Please don't be discouraged if your story wasn't selected this year. There were many entries. All the stories had a spark of something worth pursuing. Please keep writing. As I mentioned last year, when writing your story, trust your observations and perceptions. Some of the fun is finding a way to express them.

Highly Commended

I would like to commend the story, **The Message**, for its flawed character, its honesty and its topical subject.

Third Place **Way of Life**

In this story, a boy's father dies. It is an evocative coming of age story, as the boy witnesses the villagers celebrate his father's life.

Second Place **Misshapen Love**

This story is about a deflated circle pining for a disinterested square. It is rewarded for its humour and imagination and for its clear and direct prose.

Winner **Seven Hundred and Seventy Seven**

This story puts the reader in a hall with a nervous, edgy crowd. An unpleasant MC enters and controls the room and sets up a sense of foreboding. It builds suspense very well as we read on to find out what is going to happen. It has great images including 'teeth that seemed to get sharper' and 'the silence felt loud as the speech finished.'

The story is well-paced and visual, and this makes it memorable.