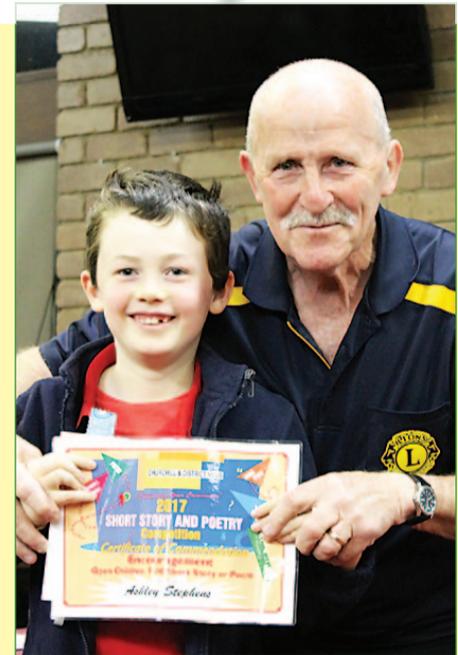




Writing and Poetry - a winner



Writing and Poetry Competition photos by Brenda Cheatham

... From page 1 ...

for our primary age entrants, so everyone can feel encouraged to keep writing.

Special thanks were expressed to the following guests, sponsors and supporters on the night, for making this competition possible each year:

Darrell White of Latrobe City Council, a major ongoing sponsor who contributes a regular column.

Latrobe City Council for our annual grant.

Alan Roach ENGIE_Hazelwood

Peter Gray from AMPWORKS - an annual sponsor of our Writing Competition and the provider of our P A System for the Junior Fishing Day.

The Rotary Club of Hazelwood and District - an annual sponsor which designates part of its sponsorship to our Writing Competition.

Bob Lowick from Churchill Lions Club - a great supporter of our paper and its activities.

Sally of Glamour Puss and Alley Cat.

Reverend Brenda Burney parish minister and Ian Combridge

Chairperson of the Co-Operating Churches in Churchill. The Co-

Operating Churches oversees the Churchill & District News, which operates independently.

Allen and Unwin Publishers - which supplies us with books.

Reader's Emporium, which donates vouchers each year.

Gippsland Trade Printers - which contributed notepads

for our participants.

Thanks were expressed also to the entrants, their teachers, principals and mentors for encouraging and supporting the writers and ensuring entries reached the news by the deadline.

The Churchill & District News team and the judges were applauded for their tireless efforts in running the competition each year, as well as all the other things like eleven issues of the paper, the sporting come and trys, and Junior Fishing Day (October 28).

This is a huge effort for this team of dedicated volunteers, but they do it conscientiously and well.

An appeal was made for advertisers to help pay for the paper which has been running at a loss at times, especially in the lead up to and closing of Hazelwood Power.

The special time of the night was the presentation of awards to our winners.

This was aided by our guests who did a great job of congratulating the successful entrants.

The following is our list of award winners:

Category 1A Open Children 7-10 Short Story/ Poem: Codey Jackson - Boredom - Equal 1st. Olivia Henning - The Shell Necklace - Equal 1st. Zoe Couper - The Maples of Life - Equal 1st. Tyla Peters The Trapped Animal - Equal 2nd. Liam Evans The Red Birthday Dragon - Equal 2nd. Lauren Basarke The Dog that turned Green - 3rd. Jade Gualter - The Ned Kelly Gang - Encouragement Award. Max Godden - The Flash - Encouragement Award. Andy Johnson - The Heros - Encouragement Award. Ella Nowacki - The Crazy Dream - Encouragement Award. Mac Dawson - The Evil Sandwich - Encouragement Award for Illustrations. Ashley Stephens - The Cow Adventure - Encouragement Award. Bradley Powrie - The Box - Encouragement Award.

Open Story or Poem Children 11-13: Ali Godden - Backwards Land - Encouragement

Award. Juliette McLean - I know you see me - Encouragement Award.

Open Children Story 14-17: Kodi Sawtell - Love's Decision - 1st.

Open Adult Short Story: Margot Ogilvie - The Test - 1st. Jenny Canty - Powder Blue - 2nd. Margot Ogilvie - Comfort Zone - 3rd. Jacqui Kelly - Saturday Morning - Encouragement Award. Vickie Walker - Number 61 - Encouragement Award.

Open Adult Poem: Caroline Tuohey - My Mate Jim - 1st. Janice Williams - Embarkation, Pinkenba 1914 - 2nd. Rory Hudson - Endings and Beginnings - 3rd.

LOCAL SECTIONS

Children 7 - 10 Short Story/Poem: Kallarnie Francis - The Golden Rock - 1st. Kayla Stevenson - Help - 2nd. Toby Grant - The Wishing Stone - 2nd. Oscar O'Brien - As Strong as a Bull - 2nd. Logan Jay - One Dark Stormy Night - 3rd. Natalie Baker - One Dark Stormy Night - 3rd. Ryder Morrison - Milly is Lost - 3rd. Rigaroix Strack - The Toys and the Necromancer - Encouragement Award. Shannyn Laughton - Friends - Encouragement Award. Alana Helyar - Don't be scared - Encouragement Award. Stephanie Wilkinson - Lightning Strikes - Encouragement Award. Illustrations. Hamish - Catslo - Encouragement Award. David O'Leary - The 3 boys threw the snake in the sky - Encouragement Award. Connor McKenzie - Sharks - Encouragement Award. Chelsea Hahn - Cats - Encouragement Award. Laura Tarrant - Lost in the Forrest - Encouragement Award. Prep Harding - What does our Principal do all day? - Class Entry.

Short Story and Poetry - Children 8-10 Poetry: Jarrod Thomas - Stage Fright - 1st. Aaron Kennedy Redmond - Soccer - Equal 2nd. Elijah Sanders - Chickens - Equal 2nd. Isaiah Taylor - Earthquakes - Equal 3rd. Melina Turnbull - Willow Tree - Equal 3rd. Olivia Gilham - Bunnies in the Bathroom

- Encouragement Award. Jada Sutherland - Rain - Encouragement Award. Tahlia Runge - Pandas - Encouragement Award Illustrations.

Short Story: Amnah Ahmed Saad - The Great Find - 1st. Tahlia Runge - The Flying Girl - 2nd. Abby Riddell - In the Middle - Equal 3rd. Hunter Leahy - Operation Sea Lion - Equal 3rd. Cohan Hasson - One Dark Stormy Night - Encouragement Award. Zeerus Ghayan - One - Encouragement Award. Malachi Sanders - Epic Rock Solo - Encouragement Award. Summer Harding - The Lost Child and the Unicorn - Encouragement Award. Grace Harding - Gold House - Encouragement Award.

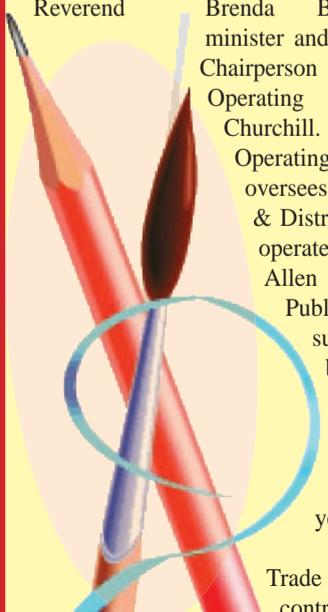
Short Story Children 11-13: Darcie Gridley - Pet Squad - 1st. Bridie Byrne - Sleeping Mermaid - 2nd. Tayla Mcavoy - The School Mess - Equal 3rd. Alyce Perez - The Teddy Bear - Equal 3rd. Nathan S. - The Haunted House - Encouragement Award. Charlotte Ryan - The Man - Encouragement Award.

Poetry Children 11-13: Jackson Gray - Tree - Encouragement Award. Alyce Perez - Waterfall - Encouragement Award. Corey Xuereb - Spiders - Encouragement Award.

Adult Short Story: Maurice Sharrock - A Yowie's Prey - Encouragement Award.

Adult Poetry: Henry McDonnell - Hazelwood - Encouragement Award. Rosaline La Vie - Distilling the Essence - Encouragement Award.

A Story for Children: Suzan Parker - Lolly and Black Bean Holiday Guests - Encouragement Award. Tessa Just - Chaos Falls in Love - Encouragement Award. Olivia Langley - The Hungry Ant - Encouragement Award.



Boredom

by Codey Jackson

Boredom feels like a blank spot in your day
Like a conscience telling you to stay
Like an emptiness in your head
Like the need to stay in bed
Like when you try to run a race
All the redness in your face
Boredom feels like a blank spot in your day.

Boredom looks like a plain empty space
Like an astronaut in space
Like a person still asleep
Like a school mate left to weep
Like the grass when it snows
And no sympathy is shown
Boredom looks like a plain empty space.

Boredom sounds like a moaning kid
Like a sound that was hid
Like the sound of nothing
Like when a phone doesn't ring
Like a song never sung
That needs more work to be done
Boredom sounds like a moaning kid.

Boredom is awful in every way.

Category 1 - Children 7 and Under Short Story/ Poem

The Golden Rock

by Kallarnie Francis



One sunny day my friend Rosie and me were playing tiggy in the backyard. After a couple of games we sat down for a rest and I saw that my pet butterfly had escaped from its cage. "Wait here," I said to Rosie, "Stay for a minute."

I ran off down the road but the butterfly was too fast for me so I ran back up the road again. I saw a golden rock. I picked it up and threw it while I was crying out, "I wish I had my butterfly back."

I came back to Rosie and said, "My pet butterfly got away and I couldn't catch her. She was the most beautiful butterfly ever because she had all the colours in the rainbow."

Mum took Rosie home. I went to bed crying. I finally went to sleep.

When I woke up in the morning my pet butterfly was back in its cage! I thought back about yesterday and I remembered the golden rock. I ran to mum to tell her the news. "That is AMAZING. Do you know how it happened?" said mum. I told mum the story...

Well, when I was walking back from all that chasing, I found a golden rock. When I dropped it I was yelling that I wished I had my butterfly back.

Mum said, "Do you know where you threw that rock?"

I thought I had thrown it near a bin in town.

We walked back down the road and there it was near the bin. Mum picked up the rock and we ran back home. We hid it in the attic!

Category 1A - Open Children 7-10 Short Story/ Poem

The Shell Necklace

by Olivia Henning

It was only dawn but Clive was wide-awake thinking about his mother. It had been two months since his mother's death but he still couldn't get over losing her. She was everything to him. He loved his father but nothing could ever replace her lovely caressing hands and her soft comforting voice.

His father came into his room and Clive turned to him. "Ahh boy you'll never get over her will ya." Clive sighed. "Cecilia was lovely to ya, treated ya like a little lamb she did." He walked out of the room. Clive sat in bed a little longer and then he got up. The tiles were cold as he walked down the steps to the kitchen. It reminded Clive of the morning that he hated. The morning his mother died. He remembered walking into her room and seeing a doctor standing at the end of the bed and mother lying hardly breathing under the covers. He shivered, just thinking about it made him want to cry his heart out.

He walked into the kitchen and there was his father as jolly as ever singing his happy song as he got ready for work. Clive didn't feel hungry so he went through the door that led to the shop. He was just checking that everything was ready as the shop door jingled and in walked his best friend Molly. "Hey Clive what ya doin?" she said. "Feeling terrible," he wanted to say but instead he said, "Not much, just getting the shop ready." Molly headed for the shop door, then she turned around and said, "Come on I've got something to show ya." Clive sighed and reluctantly followed her.

As they neared the harbour Molly veered right, down a dark alleyway that led to their secret hut in the hidden cave they found. They had named it Cannibal Cove, because they dreamed that once pirates had lived there! Molly ran into the hut and pulled out their treasure box. It was glowing slightly. She opened it up and inside was a necklace. It had a brown string and a shell that looked like it was made out of pearl. Clive gasped as it was so beautiful. "Wow it's amazing!" he said. Molly suggested that he take it home. It would be safer there they agreed. Clive hurried home with the necklace safe in the box. When he got back to the shop his dad was serving a young lady. He hurried through the back door that led into the kitchen and dashed up the stairs into his room.

As he opened the box the glow got brighter and once again he saw the necklace in all its beauty just sitting there untouched by his quick run up the road. The necklace was glowing brighter now. He closed the lid and put it away. The next morning Clive got up and checked his necklace. He looked in the drawer but the necklace was gone! Clive was going crazy. What should he do? He then saw a black figure outside his window clutching a glowing box. The figure turned once then ran in the direction of the harbour. Clive recognised his or rather her face. She was the young lady in the shop. She couldn't have stolen it in the night because his dad was staying up late to do some work so she must have crept in seconds before he'd woken up. There was a great panic rising in Clive. The necklace somehow made him feel so close to his mother. He needed to get that necklace back!

Down at the harbour Clive had the villain cornered. Next to him stood Molly. She had joined him in the chase. "Give it back!" said Molly gruffly. "It-it-it's mine!" the girl stuttered. I said, "Hand it over!" This time she did. Clive guessed that the girl was scared of Molly's angry mood and didn't want to get a punch in the nose. Molly looked happier now. In fact she looked quite satisfied and asked Clive to come over for tea.

Clive once again felt the same deep happiness he had felt the day before when he'd held the necklace close to his chest. He told his dad about the necklace that night at dinnertime and when he went to bed he thought happy thoughts. Although there was still sadness he thought of the fun times his mother and he had shared together. Then the shell on the necklace started to shine as if it wanted him to put it on. When Clive put it on something strange happened. His mother was standing there at the end of the bed. "Mum!" Clive gasped. "Hello Clive. Yes it's me. I'm here in spirit," she said softly. "I must tell you something Clive, it's about your father. Go easy on him Clive. I know that you find it hard without me and you don't understand how he is so happy all the time after me just disappearing. I can help you to understand. Your father does not want to be mopey and upset. He just wants to get over it and go on with life.

Clive said, "Well mother you know what. I will too. I will be brave and strong and I will always be sad of course but I will go on with my life once more."



The Maples of life

by Zoe Couper

I loved the sound of the wave at night. It was like a lullaby soothing me to sleep but it was hard with my mum so unwell. My mum spent all of her day in bed since, well it felt like forever, but it was really only since I turned twelve. My dad spent most of his time on the farm so my only happiness is my horse Chestnut.

One morning I crept into my mother's room and I saw my father sitting on the end of the bed with a grave face, then I noticed that my mother looked like she had been crying. Quickly I sat on the bed fears rising ...

I felt weak at the knees. I was only a twelve year old girl named Carla but I had to go to the forests that are on the other side of the bay to find the maples of life to cure my mother. I remember reading about the maples of life in a book of folk tales and I was intrigued by the healing powers of this amazing plant.

I felt like I couldn't do it, but then I felt something change, like a sudden rush of hope flooding through my heart. I felt all the fear and tension melt away as my mum put a necklace in my hand (it had a tiny bottle connected,) and I quickly slipped it on my neck!

I got dressed and went down to the stables to saddle up Chestnut because I would ride on Chestnut to the forests. I went inside to grab the saddlebag and a change of clothes, then with a quick goodbye I rode away across the beach.

I woke when the dawn light was streaming into the valley that I was camping in. I was heating water over the fire when I heard a cry for help so I quickly walked to where the noise was coming from. I saw big red flames burst in front of me and then I saw a boy about my age running towards me. He came to me panting and choking from the smoke. I quickly helped him walk to my camp.

"My name is Beau," said the boy gesturing to himself. "I'm Carla," I said with a puzzled look on my face. "So what happened?" I asked. "Well," said Beau. "My father died when I was very young and last night it was windy and a big tree fell and crashed into the house. The tree killed my mother! " I smiled and said, "Don't worry, you can come with me because I am going to find the maples of life to cure my mum so you can come and help me."

"Carla look," hollered Beau. Are they the forests we're looking for?" "Yep" I said grinning. I liked having company. It had been three days since I met Beau and we had been riding nonstop. Beau rode his horse called Midnight and I rode Chestnut.

As we neared the forests we jumped off our horses and tied them to a tree. Pushing the branches away with our arms we gaped at the beauty of the forests. There was every colour that you think of, from lush blues to beautiful reds. As we neared the centre of the forest, I got this tingly feeling running through my body. I was excited but scared as well because, what if there was something dangerous!

Beau and I pushed the last couple of branches away and then I saw the most beautiful maple tree I had ever seen - it had glossy red leaves that were redder than red and an amazing soft brown trunk. I crept towards it and there was a little glass bowl filled with maple syrup filled to the brim. I took the glass bottle off my necklace and filled it up. Then I went back to where Beau was still staring at the wonder in front of him.

As I rode across the last stretch of the beach doubts filled my mind. I could see the house but the fire was going and the door was open. When I crept into the house my worries ceased as I saw my mum and dad sitting on the bed. I crept in and Beau crept in after me. I uncapped the bottle and handed it to my mum. She quickly took a sip and sat up and then very suddenly fell back down again as if she was in a magic sleep.

A couple of hours later I was sitting in the sitting room with my mum, dad and Beau and we were all talking about what to do with Beau. After a little bit of discussion we decided that he could stay with us as if he was my brother.

When I went to bed I felt as if I was on top of the world, my heart felt like a cloud.

Category 2 - Children 8-10 Poetry

Stage Fright

by Jarrod Thomas

It was time,
Time to shine,
And have a spectacular play.
The curtains opened,
Sweat trembling down my head.
It feels like I'm in the middle of an earthquake,
My feet are wobbly,
I can hardly stand.
I hear cheering,
Hands clapping and feel my body shake,
A humongous crowd has just gone silent,
One chance to impress the crowd,
The crowd is now waiting.
I go out onto the stage,
The light turns on,
It feels like I'm in a boiling hot sun.
I did perfect,
The play was a success.



Category 2 - Children 8-10 Short Story

THE GREAT FIND

by Amnah Ahmed Saad

Once, there was a nine year old girl named Lily. She lived near the seashore with her family. She had a brown horse, and her family also owned a little rowboat. She loved nature and going on adventures. Her hobby was reading books.

One evening, she was reading a book under a tree in the garden, when she thought that she would go for a row to a little island near the shore. She took her blue backpack and packed a water bottle, five apples, a sandwich, a bar of chocolate, a torch, a rope, a raincoat, a compass, a small first aid kit, a pencil, a pocket notebook, and also four carrots for her horse and went out to the stable. There, she fed her horse Grace, a carrot and gave her some water. Meanwhile, she put her saddle on Grace's back and rode her to the shore. There, she tied Grace to a tree, and put three carrots and four apples in front of her along with a bucket of water and some hay, which she had brought from the stable.

Then, on shore, she untied the rope of the rowboat, put on a life jacket, put her backpack beside her, took the oars and started rowing, and in half an hour, she was at the island. She tied the boat to a nearby tree, took off her life jacket, put on her back pack and got out of the boat. Suddenly, it started raining. Therefore, she went inside a nearby cave. There, she sat on a rock to rest for a bit. Then she started munching on her apple. After finishing her apple, she also ate her sandwich and had a drink of water. Then, she geared up to explore the cave and its tunnels and passages. As she went in one of the few passages, she saw that it led into another cave, almost as big as the first one.

When she walked in, she felt that the floor was hollow underneath. She knocked the floor with a stone, and there was the hollow sound again. She brushed off some dust from the floor and saw wooden planks and a hook attached to the floor. She tried to pull it but couldn't. Then she tied the rope to the hook and pulled the rope. Suddenly, some planks came off. She looked inside, and saw some big wooden chests and a small metal chest.

She saw some empty space and entered it. She tried to open one big wooden chest, but couldn't as it was locked. Then she tried to open the small metal chest. Its edges were rusted and so was its lock. The old rusted lock gave way in a few minutes, and the small metal chest opened. Inside was a bunch of keys with a different symbol on each one. The symbols were very strange. But then, all of a sudden, she noticed that there was a symbol on a big wooden chest which matched the symbol on one of the keys. Then she understood, there was a different symbol on each one of the chests which matched the symbol on one of the keys. Lily rowed back home, told her parents what had happened, had a good night's sleep, and then in the morning, went with her father to tell the police what she had seen, and then went with her father and some policemen in a bigger boat to the island to see and bring back the chests.

Afterwards, Lily and her family found out that the chests belonged to some smugglers in the old days. And now, the smuggled goods were in the safe hands of the government.

Some of the chests were also kept in a museum afterwards. To honour Lily's efforts, the government placed a metal plate with Lily's story engraved on it with the chests in the museum.



Category 3 - Children 11-13 Short Story

Pet Squad

by Darcy Gridley

just had a really bad feeling that it wasn't over.

The next morning I awoke in a big garage, with all the missing teachers and students. I saw two guards and through a high window I could see a cockatiel. Then I heard a bang against one of the doors, the guard opened the door and a sheep charged forward ramming the guard, knocking him over.

The other guard was attacked by a brown chicken that flew towards his head, and two dogs ran in and rounded up the guards.

I couldn't believe it, my pets were here, Lucy was chewing through duct tape setting people free. Jenna was growling at the guards as one of the teachers wrapped their hands in duct tape. GG flew to my shoulder, Brownie jumped on my lap and Murphy gave my arm a nudge. My Pets had rescued everyone, they were heroes.

Safe at home I went outside and sat down. Jenna and Murphy sat on either side of me. Jenna lifted her head and told me that all my

pets are secret agents who work for an organisation known as Pet Squad. Jenna is the Team Leader, Murphy her second in command, both very intelligent and strong fighters. Lucy has mad ramming skills, Brownie is good with technology, her chicken coop has a secret underground room full of computers. GG has amazing vision and can see everything, whilst Arora translates languages and codes to help us on our missions.

Jenna proudly told me that recently they caught a ring of poachers attempting to smuggle wildlife from the National Park. Now I know why they sleep so much. In regards to the kidnapping no one seems to know why this happened.

As for me life's now a lot more busier and full of adventures. I spend most of my time outside with my pets and have been made an honorary member of the Pet Squad and help out whenever I can. Oh! There goes the alarm, I grab my boots and race outside as I wonder where this adventure will take me today.

Category 3A - Open Children 14-17 Story

Love's Decision

by Kodi Sawtell

May 25, 1927. Eliza Jane Kelly.

She was staring at me, again. What did she want me to say?

Mum sat silently, tears in her eyes wringing her hands. I bit my lip and closed my eyes, but I could still see her tired face with the dark rings and deep lines surrounding her eyes.

Why finally tell me about my father now? I tried to imagine him, standing at attention along with thousands of other men. I'd heard stories about the fighting where thousands of young clean souls went in, but only a few hundred cracked tainted souls came home. Why did he go to war and leave us here?

Today is my twelfth birthday, and mum thought it was finally time to tell me about my father. How did she possibly think it was better for me not to know who he was and what happened? OK, so he was already married but doesn't she realise what I've been through? Does she even care? How did she expect me to react after years of being bullied at school because I never knew who my dad was. The names they called me!

He died before I even knew him, before I took my first step, before my first word. He was never there for me so why should I feel anything for him?

Mum shifted so she sat next to me on the floor, grasping my hand.

"He was going to come back to us." She said, her voice soft and gentle. "He already loved you so much, he knew how special you were going to be. If he were still here, he would say 'look up, never down.'"

I felt a warm tear roll down my cheek. I wiped it angrily away with the back of my hand. Why am I crying? I didn't know him. Because he died, he made my life a living hell. I get bullied, pushed, excluded.

Spawn of a married man, born out of wedlock, so what! At least I could have told

everyone he was a soldier, or even just his name!

But my father never knew me, never saw me. He's dead to me.

I stood abruptly, towering over my hunched mother. I wiped away another tear as I rushed out of the room and into the street.

It was a dump. Dank and dirty. Depressed women shuffled to and from places, looking for their purpose in life, just like me. If he was still here, we wouldn't be in this hole, fighting for a good meal, being abused and excluded.

"It's all his fault!" I screamed.

A few heads turned at my outburst, shuffling on faster. I sat on the small stoop, head cradled in my hands. I was tired, hungry and depressed. Just like everyone else. Maybe if he was here, I wouldn't be as skinny, wouldn't be as poor.

Footsteps approached me from behind, stopping beside me. Mum sat down and looked out at the gloomy street. I rested my head on her shoulder.

"I met him at a fundraiser one day. He stood tall and proud, laughing with his mates. He was so perfect, so like you." She said, a ghost of a smile on her face. "He is watching over us, keeping us safe."

"Why me mummy?" I asked barely audible.

She sighed. "You always ask the questions I just can't answer." She paused for a moment. "I couldn't tell you until you were ready. I wanted you to be happy."

She stroked my hair as I looked up at her.

I was silent. Tomorrow is just going to be the same. Even though I now know of my father, he still has never been here. I'm still the poor excluded girl and nothing in this lifetime is going to change that.

Eliza Jane Cander, 1941.

I sat on my doorstep, 14 years later, in the centre of Strathbrook. Jerry sat to my

left. I rested my head on his shoulder as we stared out over the town. He planted a whisper of a kiss on my hairline. I smiled and closed my eyes, content.

The rhythmic rise and fall of my daughter's breathing, rested with a familiar heaviness on my lap. Fae, is only 4, her bronze silky hair fell in waves down her back. She looks terrifyingly like me. I stroked her hair absently surrounded by Jerry's warmth.

I never thought I would end up here. With a husband, a daughter and living in my father's town of origin. Life was the worst 14 years ago, dark gloomy streets, no food, no friends, no future.

After that day, life still hadn't changed. I am still fatherless, my mother still mourns for him. He was still never there for me. Although I suppose some things have changed. My life now revolves around my daughter and Jerry.

I felt a small tug in my chest as I looked down at Fae. Would I tell Fae anything if she lost Jerry, if I was unwed and pregnant to another women's husband? Would I wish with all my heart that I could protect her from the cruel judgment of society?

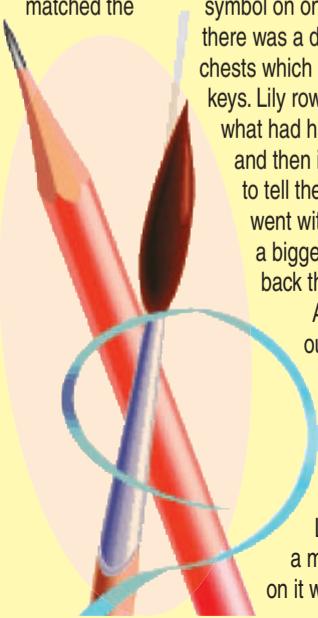
Or would I wait till she could understand how far you would go for love?

My goodness. She was right. Mum was right and I never listened.

A small trickle of warmth ran down my cheek as I looked up at Jerry.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" His thumb brushed away the tear, replacing it with a kiss. My lips curved.

"I'm happy."



Category 4A - Open Open Adult Story

The Test

by Margot Ogilvie

Andrew appeared to be way out of his depth. He timidly entered the well-appointed outer office of the biggest corporation in Melbourne. The richness of the space mocked him, as did the appearance of its occupants.

Snappily-dressed young business men and women with smart, trendy hair styles and pointed shiny shoes filled the available seats. Some were busy on smart phones; others were reading the Australian Financial Review or TIME magazine. They glanced furtively at each other, but there was no friendly conversation, no camaraderie.

The perfectly coiffed receptionist looked up from her computer at Andrew's approach.

'May I help you ... ah ... Sir?' she managed, as though attending to the likes of him was a serious and unwanted interruption to her morning schedule.

Her response left Andrew feeling extremely out of place. He looked even more so with his outdated, poorly fitting brown suit, his dirty well-worn boots, his scruffy hair well overdue for a wash and a cut.

But he was here with a purpose, and it was time to get on with it.

'Thank you. Yes. I'm here about the job.'

'I'm sorry. Applications have closed.' She turned away and sanctimoniously attempted to look busy. Andrew noted the silver nameplate on her desk and cleared his throat to regain her attention.

'I'm sorry, Ms Lewis, but I think you may have misunderstood. I'm here because I was invited in for an interview. I'm Andrew Cavanaugh.'

His rough, broad hand shot out to shake hers, then fell limply to his side when she failed to respond.

She glanced at her computer screen, appeared to find his name and, Andrew suspected later, moved it to the bottom of the list.

'Take a seat. You'll have quite a wait.'

He had been dismissed. He turned to the seating area in time to catch the other job candidates shuffle to fill any space Andrew may have attempted to squeeze into. Choosing to ignore the slight, he took the last magazine from the table and sat on the floor.

Much later, wishing he'd brought a packed lunch, Andrew was finally ushered into the interview room. He attempted a handshake with the first person he met, then remembered how that went with the receptionist, and withdrew his hand. These people may work in a fine office, and wear first-rate business garb, but they were not friendly.

Andrew sat opposite the interview panel.

They looked superior, and condescending. When they deigned to look up from their iPads, it was only to look down their noses at Andrew, who sank lower in his seat with the weight of their obvious disapproval.

'Sorry to keep you waiting,' one of them muttered, not looking sorry at all.

'We don't seem to be able to locate your resume. Tell us about your qualifications and experience.'

'Well, I left school after Year 11, then completed a Certificate 2 in IT several years later.'

The panel sniggered rudely. They coughed and raised their eyebrows, as if he wasn't sitting right there in front of them. Andrew pushed ahead with determination.

'I seem to have a knack for computers.'

'What about a degree, or some business experience?'

Andrew shifted nervously in his seat, looked down and seemed to notice his dilapidated boots for the first time. He hurriedly tucked his feet under his chair, took a deep breath and found the voice they'd momentarily scared off with their intimidation.

'I have no degrees, but, I've helped in my family's business for the past fifteen years. We've been very happy with its success. I . . .'

Mr Tomlinson, the panel spokesperson, stood and interrupted Andrew.

'I think we've heard enough, Mr . . . er . . .'

he looked down at his iPad, '. . . Mr Cavanaugh. Frankly, you are not what we're looking for, but all of our candidates are given the chance to undergo an aptitude test. If you think it's worth the bother, report to the receptionist tomorrow at 9am.

Other members of the panel whispered amongst themselves and shook their heads as they rose to leave. But Andrew wasn't quite done.

'Thank you for your time today. I'm grateful for the opportunity to meet with you, and to sit the aptitude test. I think I have much to offer your company.'

He looked each one in the eye as he shook hands and thanked each one personally.

The next morning, Andrew was waiting at the door when the prim receptionist unlocked it from the inside. Ms Lewis returned quickly to her seat without even acknowledging his presence. He took a seat. The wall clock indicated it was 8:45. The others would be here soon.

At 9:04 with still no sign of the other applicants, Andrew summoned his courage and approached the receptionist.

'I'm here for the aptitude test. It was meant to be at nine o'clock?'

'I'm sorry. It started at 8:30. Didn't you get the email yesterday?'

'No, I didn't. Can I still take the test?'

'I can take you through, but you've lost a lot of time. Is it worth it?'

She was getting ruder by the minute. Andrew refused to lower his behavioural standards.

'Yes, please, I'd be very grateful for the chance.'

The click of her high heels on the wooden floor of the long corridor taunted Andrew as he hurried to keep up with her pace, designed, he was certain, to keep him scampering along like a naughty puppy behind her. An air of agitation greeted them as they reached the conference room where the test was well underway. The well-dressed candidates from the previous day were showing signs of wear and tear. Ties were loosened. Legs were jiggling. Fingers were punching laptop keys with more force than necessary. Some candidates were sweating, some were sighing, some were checking the time.

Andrew calmly sat at the last workstation and worked his way through the test. By 10:07 he was reclining at his desk, browsing at his screen, checking his work one last time.

He hit the save button and quietly left the room.

Thirty minutes later, the job candidates commiserated together in the outer office.

'Whoa, that was tough.'

'Sure was. I didn't even get it finished.'

'Did you see the guy in the op-shop suit with the bad haircut? He came late and left early. Don't know why he bothered.'

The receptionist interrupted their banter.

'The interview panel will review your scores and announce the successful candidate here tomorrow at 9am.'

'What about that other guy? He left early.'

'I don't think that will matter, do you?' Ms Lewis smirked and shared a sinister chuckle with them. Assuming he'd failed somehow made them worry less about their own dubious efforts.

While they were busy laughing at his expense, Andrew sat in a state-of-the-art BMW, the scruffy wig he'd worn for the test beside him on the passenger seat.

'They moved the test up,' he said into his Bluetooth earpiece as he negotiated city traffic, 'so I was short on time . . . Of course I still blitzed it . . . You were right, they're a mob of stuck-up, self-absorbed pricks. They are certainly not interested in what's best for our company.'

'Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow. I'm looking forward to it.' The call ended as Andrew pulled into a private apartment complex, exited the car

and handed his keys to the parking attendant.

The following morning, the job candidates stood anxiously in the outer office, with no sign of Andrew.

Mr Tomlinson appeared even more smug than he had during their interviews, as he held their futures in his grip.

'You're all excellent candidates, but unfortunately, we only have one position to fill. We have chosen Ms Brown. We wish the rest of you all the best.'

Everyone gathered around Ms Brown, congratulating her, shaking her hand and patting her on the back. The buzz of the inter-office phone could barely be heard over the chit-chat.

When the receptionist finally answered, she stood up taller and responded crisply, 'Yes, sir. I'll send him straight in.'

Turning to Mr Tomlinson, she hissed 'The boss wants to see you in his office, immediately.'

The very distinguished boss was waiting rather impatiently behind his luxurious desk in his plush office when his employee arrived.

'I hear the interview process is complete,' he said, foregoing the usual niceties.

'Yes, Sir. We've selected a Ms Brown. She presents well, seems ambitious, and scored 86% on the test. She'll fit in well here.'

The boss leant forward in his chair, and pounded his fist on the desk.

'And what of Mr Cavanaugh? He scored 100% on the aptitude test, despite having less time than the others. Why was he not selected?'

'We simply felt he didn't fit the image this company strives to maintain, Sir. . . Umm . . . How is it that you know his score, Sir?'

'I am in charge, you know.'

'Yes, of course, Sir.'

The Boss reclined with a condescending grin. 'We'll hire Cavanaugh,' he boomed.

'But, Sir, I've already given Ms Brown the position.'

'That's fine,' he chuckled. 'Tell her to keep it. Mr Cavanaugh will be taking over from you.'

With that, he stood, strutted toward another door, and welcomed Andrew into his office with a smile and a handshake.

'Well done, Andrew. You've done your job well.'

'Thank you, Uncle Rodney.'

'Now, perhaps this company can get back to basics, like caring for our clients, like we did in the old days, hey Andrew.'

The forgotten Mr Tomlinson slithered out of the office, wringing in hands and wondering what had just happened.

Category 5A - Open Adult Poetry

My Mate Jim

by Caroline Tuohey

My Mate Jim
A while ago a girlfriend said "I've met a man named Jim."
And things progressed until she said "I want to marry him."
With wedding bells now in the air, I thought I'd better meet the man my friend described as kind and genuinely sweet.
So down I drove to Rochester to get to know 'The One', quite unaware he'd bring my life such laughter, joy and fun.

He greeted me with "G'day Darl," said slowly with a twang, then started conversation that was rich with Aussie slang.
He talked of bonzer cobbbers and of sheilas who he knew; Explained that Warwick Farm's your arm; that redheads are called Blue.
He made us all a cup of tea and laughter filled the house, when Jim described the scones and cake as tucker that was grouse.
A bushman from the city is a not-too-common find and I learnt very quickly, Jim's a true 'one-of-a-kind'.

He has a love of horses that began when just a lad, when riding at the country tracks - a jockey, like his Dad.
He loves his dogs, a fishing trip, a campfire and a beer, an Aussie yarn, Akubra hats, a footy crowd's loud cheer.
He speaks his mind; he's not ashamed to say he's made mistakes, and willingly will shed a tear when sadness overtakes.
But it's his role of step-dad where true colours have been shown; He loves and cares for Kathryn just as if she were his own.

He did this from the very start and made it crystal clear, that Hayley and Miss Kathryn were the two he held most dear.
So when their wedding day rolled round, I knew it would begin a journey made together that would last through thick and thin.
I saw that Jim's respect and adoration for his wife, would give my friend a truly special best-mate in her life.
And since that day, five years have passed and Jim's a proud new dad.
"There's never been," he said to me, "a finer job I've had."

I watch his daughter Ruby cradled safely in his arm - his gentle outback lingo is a soothing sleeping-charm.
I'm proud to know Jim Ettershank - the line he walks is true; He's there for you through good and bad, as that's what real mates do.
So during days when life has gone and got a bit too grim, I know that I'll feel better, once I've talked with my mate Jim.



Ian Combridge, Cr Darrell White, Rev Brenda Burney, Alan Roach, Peter Grey, Ruth Place, Bob Lowick