

## MAPUA LITERARY FESTIVAL 2017 SHORT STORY COMPETITION

### Judge's comments

Short story as an art form has a long and noble history in New Zealand – it's something we know we're good at. What I'm looking for in a story is something that engages me, my attention and my emotions, so it's not enough to just give an account of either an incident or, in this case, a journey. Ask yourself in your writing, what is at stake emotionally for the narrator or another character? If it's based on a real-life incident, ask yourself, 'What if this happened, or he/she said that?' 'What if?' is a useful question to ask yourself in any writing – it can take you beyond the pedestrian into an imaginative realm – it's a lot more fun to write too! Fiction always tells the truth, the psychological truth, even if it's not *factual*.

So the stories that worked best in this competition were the ones that, while being grounded in effective description and believable characters, allowed a little imagination to sneak in at the door. They also showed to a greater or lesser degree:

- Immediacy
- Strong opening
- Implied complexity of situation and character
- Something that changed by the end; I want to be surprised or intrigued
- 'Conflict' – not an out-and-out fight, but some edge of question or pivot on which the story turns
- Believable characters, and dialogue through which they reveal themselves
- Back story – there's not a lot of space in 1500 words, so you can't ponderously meander into the story – jump right in, and imply the rest as you go along.
- Structure – always have in mind the classic shape of a story, 'The Hero's Journey' for example

In this competition, the runner-up made great use of dialogue, and managed to convey character as well as advancing the story – just what dialogue should do. It was well structured, feeding information in without telling us everything at once.

The winning story used language skilfully to set the story in time without *telling* us. It was lightly humorous, and the lyrical, rhythmic description of landscape and weather conveyed a sense of mystery, a dream-like quality, so that landscape became almost another character.

**Runner-up** – Final Journeys

**Winner** – Camera Drone

Bridget Auchmuty  
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