

OutStanding LGBTIQA+ Short Story Competition

Judges Report 2018

Judges: Sophie Robinson, Robert Tait, Gail Hewison

Robert Tait

After the rigors of 2017's marriage equality debate and the catharsis of the fortieth anniversary of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, a fitting theme for the 2018 OutStanding Short Story Competition was Next Big Thing. But it's a creative writing competition so entries didn't provide a definitive answer. Quite the opposite in fact: a myriad of possibilities! There were personal stories with highly individualistic hopes for the future, political stories demanding further justice, and stories about things as diverse as robots, bushrangers, and horse riding. The winning stories show how brilliantly diverse our community has become, and hopefully this competition will continue to bring all letters of the acronym together, to heal divisions, and to increase awareness and broaden respect for each other.

Gail Hewison

We were delighted to receive 116 stories from all over Australia, and several from New Zealand, from all age groups, and from all the diversities of our rainbow communities.

As usual the judges enjoyed the huge task of reading, deciding on a short list, then choosing the winners. At least twenty stories, maybe more, could have been considered as prize winners, and of course the judges see the stories with no identity attached.

We feel very privileged that writers share their stories with us. Although mostly fiction, many stories portray authentic events in LGBTIQA+ lives, and many were touching in their expressions of fear, despair, as well as joy and hope. Through the stories a picture emerges of our shared lives. Even though our rights here in Australia can only be marvelled at, it seems that coming out is still frequently an ordeal, rejection still happens, and our streets, parks, and even our homes, may not be safe spaces for some of us. Transgender and gender diverse voices are becoming clearer and louder in the quest for acceptance, understanding and safety. At least 2 stories appeared to be from writers identifying as A (Asexual). A number of writers used they/them pronouns for the singular. We were overjoyed at the quantity and quality of stories in the Youth Section. Many writers showed originality and humour and several of our winning stories are quite unlike anything we have received before. If only we could publish a book of twenty or thirty stories instead of just choosing 8.

Sophie Robinson

My main sense from this year's batch of stories is that our writers continue to express resilience in creative ways, especially in the wake of the marriage equality postal survey. There were some quite deep and intriguing attempts to speak to the human condition, diversity within the LGBTIQA+ communities and to also acknowledge ongoing exclusions or silenced voices. The cohort this year was so diverse in content and method, and therefore difficult to judge. We really had to think deeply about which stories, characters and writing styles spoke to us.

Our congratulations to the 8 winning writers, your stories were standouts in an exceptional year.

Gail, Robert and Sophie.