
1 October 2009

MINISTER APPLAUDS POETRY WINNER

Minister for Citizenship, Virginia Judge today congratulated a Queensland secondary school student for winning the annual Community Relations Commission prize for poetry.

Ms Judge said Jack Burnham from Caloundra Christian College won the Commission's \$350 poetry prize as part of the national Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards for school children.

"Jack wrote a magnificent poem *Lost and Found*, which explores the concept of isolation in a foreign country," she said.

"His poem tells the story about a stranger in a strange land and the fear of being lost in a crowd where you do not understand the language or the culture.

"Jack's poetic style draws the reader into the narrative and I am sure that this is the start of a great writing career.

"Poetry opens the soul and allows an exposure to language that no other literary form provides.

"It is amazing how often young people can see the reality of multiculturalism more clearly than adults and find brilliant ways to express it."

Ms Judge said the Community Relations Commission Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Award encourages students to write poetry that highlights the value of cultural diversity within the Australian community.

"The judges look for a poem that celebrates cultural and linguistic diversity and canvasses issues arising from Australian migration and settlement," she said.

"I congratulate the Community Relations Commission for supporting this award which has created some wonderful and uplifting expressions of the joys and pain of the migration experience."

Please note: Jack Burnham's Poem is attached.

LOST AND FOUND

July evening in Ikebukuro
Spartan simplicity of sushi bars overshadowed
By the salty allure of fast food franchises.
The tinny tinkle of karaoke harmonises
With the dull underfoot rumbling
Of trains navigating their subterranean maze.
Wrapped in humidity's blanket
I stand – an immovable object
Buffeted by the milling throng.
Head and shoulders above the stream
A craggy atoll rising above an ocean
Of students and businessmen flowing past
Caught in the lure of an unseen siren current.
I am lost – adrift – astray
Stranger in a strange land
Bereft of compass and sextant
Unable to find my way.
As self control threatens to slip
And hot tears prick swollen eyelids
I feel a gentle tap on the shoulder.
Lifeline thrown by a total stranger,
“May I be of assistance?”

December evening in Mooloolaba
Designer surf stores and juice bars
Jostle for space on the busy esplanade.
The thunder and crash of surf a counterpoint
To the hum of myriad conversations
Punctuated by sudden arpeggio of laughter.
Energized by summer's heat
I sprawl – indolent, content
Passively observing the passing parade
That swirls round and past a frozen figure.
Defeat and terror ooze from every pore
Tourist map clutched convulsively
Between white knuckled fists,
Eyes that beg – beseech - implore.
I am roused from lethargy by a quiver of recognition
Having owned that fear, known that trepidation.
The bond of kinship connects us,
Blood calls to blood
No stranger this - my brother under the skin.
An invisible cord reels me closer step by step
Until I gently tap his shoulder and bow,
“Hajime Mashite”.

Jack Burnham