

CAMPBELLTOWN

LITERARY AWARDS 2020

ANTHOLOGY

AWARD WINNERS

Overall Winner

Without Warning
Bethany Cody

Open (25+ years)

Gold

Plot 30
Nick Carney

Silver

One Person at a Time
Christopher Page

Bronze

Dial a Change
Sharon Trappel

Youth (15-24 years)

Without Warning
Bethany Cody

Now and Then
Surpreet Jaiswara

#Me Too
Akhila Peacock

Junior (7-14 years)

Small Actions Can Change the World Too
Aaron Nadakal

A Place for James
Jingming Li

Books Can Change the World
Zavier Silvestri

Providing a quality lifestyle



Open Category
(25+ years)

Gold Winner

Plot 30

Nick Carney

Plot 30

Gao Yihong stands on the little balcony of his cramped fifth-floor Guangdong apartment. He is looking across the freeway, just beyond, to the undeveloped acreage. A squadron of bulldozers, an armoured division of scrapers, has appeared on the site. He watches. A bulldozer scrapes aside the undeveloped earth, scrapes all that is in its way, scrapes away the long-nurtured vegetable plots. He watches as the bulldozer rips his own garden greens right out of that borrowed soil.

Before the bulldozers, Yihong had uprooted himself from his village and negotiated the corridors of Guangdong province; he left fields of green vegetables and paddies of rice to study in the city, the province's growing child of concrete and progress. From the apartment—where he and his wife, Jin, lived—Yihong looked up from his probing of Shakespeare's tomes, looked beyond the freeway and wondered, enviously, if he too could join the after-work gardeners tending their communal plots.

He remembered his family farming furrows and the bitter and the sweet of those times. Yihong and Jin had hoped that together they might bring forth a seed of their rural past, something of their parents' and their grandparents' ways. They had hoped to bring forth life from the soil in a cultivated corner of this largest of Chinese provinces, this manufacturing workshop to the world, this voracious, creeping city. It was time, Yihong decided, to visit the gardeners and their vegetable plots, time to cross the freeway.

When he spoke with those green custodians he found commonality, freedom in their expression of an urge to grow vegetables. After work, after supper, just enough light in the day, Yihong and Jin would dash across the freeway together and step into the ancient arts of

the gardener: the giving of seeds, the receiving of seeds, the exchange of what grows best and where to walk to haul a bucket of pond water. She laid out the seeds in their bed, the right depth, the best distance. She tucked them in. He understood that that was because she knew—that she was practical; he was not—he cultivated literature. But he took charge of the watering. He was there for the emergence from the soil, a sense of green becoming and reaching. Like Tai Chi, watering and weeding were profoundly meditational: negative emotions evaporated, Yihong floated in his mind, he moved with the moment.

One month later the developer erected his angry eviction sign. They were warned, untenured gardeners, to gather their old tools, to take their leave of this sacred nursery, to get off this land standing in the path of inevitability, land gestating the reaching, clinging, blossoming tendrils of a high-rise.

Then the bulldozers came.

Jenny Bates is the president of the Lochiel Park Community Garden. But before there even was a garden, decades before Campbelltown even had a Lochiel Park, Jenny and her husband relocated to South Australia. Their first home had a good-sized block. ‘I wouldn’t say I had always loved gardening,’ she said, ‘but I remember breastfeeding my baby and reading gardening books. I had to figure out what could grow here.’ She figured it out.

One day, quite a few years later, as she passed through Campbelltown seated in an O-Bahn bus seat, Jenny glimpsed a vision of land being developed, something sustainable. ‘One thing led to another,’ she said to me, and she and her husband and other aspiring residents found themselves owners of plots and participants in a partnership, the building of a new kind

of home, the growing of an ecovillage—Lochiel Park. When their carbon-competent house was ready, they moved in.

Jenny has a history, too, of caring about others. She can understand their sense of disconnection having uprooted herself and her family from more than one community, having put down roots in others. She has worked professionally with people suffering the fraying of their social strands. And she has known what it is to strive for a balance of being there for children, for family and for career.

And while she did all that, Jenny attended a residents' meeting. The Lochiel Park project manager had issued a challenge to the small but growing number of residents to finish unfinished business: plan and design a sustainable community garden; grow fruit and vegetables—build a community.

These social agents of change had the foresight to incorporate the garden as a legal entity, all the better to apply for community grants, and they held elections. That's how Jenny got elected president.

I sat there with her in the flourishing vegetable garden while a woman watered a thriving raised bed, while a man sat in the shade with his dog, while I tried to imagine this green retreat as its former self. Jenny said of the Lochiel Park Community Garden, 'To me the word "community" is just as important as the word "garden" in the title.'

Gao Yihong did not dwell for long on the scraping and the ripping. Yihong and Jin got on with their quest for another garden, another empty space, for uncommon soil because there was none that was common. Yihong found it, a slog of a walk from their apartment, and he and Jin staked a claim. But it was just too far away, just beyond sustainable. There was a

sense of insecurity, a sense of theft, enough of a cleft between good gardening intention and guarding against vandalistic pillage of the vegetables. Yihong tells me, ‘We give up—we work one or two days then we give up.’

His loss of another garden does not reveal much in the way of emotion. Instead, it is me who feels the dispossession on his behalf. It is me who infers that at some privately said level Yihong picks himself up and walks on past his horticultural disappointment. He holds on to a promise of a little allotment, a garden which he might share, an accessible, respectful and communal third space that is not work, is not home, where he and his wife and their son can grow.

Eight years passed. Then Gao Yihong took a brave leap, turned his name on its head and landed in Adelaide: Yihong Gao and family. They rented near a school, the best they could parentally provide, mindful of their son. But you can’t garden, not really, in a rental property. You can’t dig up the lawn and sow it all in white spinach, worrying about the next rental inspection, risking your bond, worrying that your transgression might bring disrespect on your embryonic reputation. So they didn’t.

But Yihong and Jin worked hard. They gathered their frugal savings, put them away for a coming day, for the right place, the right time, for a home that might be called their own. They knew when the time was right because they found the place that was right. They put down their deposit and they took ownership of their own home—in Campbelltown.

‘We had a big plan. The backyard garden was the biggest excitement for us,’ Yihong says to me. He turned the sods of his own small lawn and fertilised the soil. He turned it over to vegetable garden. Yihong and Jin met like-minded gardeners on what Yihong says is WeChat’s most popular thread, the gardening thread, entwining its way through green-thumbed people. Some of those people invited Yihong and Jin to see their home plots,

gardens five-times, ten-times bigger than their own. They partook of an ancient exchange, ideas and tips, giving and receiving.

But Jin is an economic pragmatist. Their tiny plot was never going to put a dent in the grocery bill. Yihong tells me that Jin spoke to some of her TAFE classmates, that she learned that there ought to be a community garden nearby. Jin asked Yihong to do what he had done in Guangdong—it was time to go hunting for another garden.

Sunflowers: that's what they decided. Jenny Bates and the community garden pioneers sowed a flag of optimism in the centre of the undeveloped plot. Development requires effort, people labouring on a garden's fencing and paving. Making change in your world might demand funds, proceeds from the raising and selling of your own native seedlings, perhaps seeding granted from a government. Taking the first step in constructing your garden pavilion just might excite mutual benefit from a local hardware store. All of that happened in the Lochiel Park Community Garden.

Having completed their pavilion, Jenny and the pioneers would have put down their tools, perhaps they straightened their backs, and maybe they tilted their sun hats to take in the result of their voluntary efforts. Despite her unhesitating dispensing of credit to other garden members, Jenny might have reflected in a quiet moment on her hope that these social entrepreneurs might create, as Jenny puts it, 'A happy, safe space—trying to be open to the community as much as we can.'

The pavilion is a shelter from extreme sun and rain, a shared watering hole for gardeners, respite for those who reap by sowing their sweat in the working bees. The pavilion is a forum where gardeners might sit in the presence of others, might chat and grow something

connected. As I sat there with Jenny she said, ‘That connectedness is really important. If people don’t feel connected, they don’t come. For me, it’s always been to get that sense of belonging to a place, belonging to somewhere.’

Perhaps Yihong’s informant was misinformed. Perhaps it was the English-as-a-second-language thing, but on his quest for a community of vegetable gardeners he found himself not in a community garden but, mistakenly, in an orchard. Maybe it was a grove of carefully tended fig or almond trees where he stood in error. Maybe he was on the precipice of giving up the search, remembering failed metro-gardening in Guangdong. An orchard’s fruit and nuts are wonderful and bountiful, but that’s not what he needed at that moment.

What is it that motivates a guy to strive onwards and upwards, another unexpected peak, climbing, hauling himself up obstructed terrain? Maybe it’s the pressure of household expenses, his need to save at the strained margins of a budget. Maybe it’s the bitter-sweet memory of gardening with his parents and grandparents: bitter because that was the daily scraping of a living from the earth, a job and a chore, wondering if his parents were unable to clamber out of the furrow; sweet because he savours the memory of their horticultural nurturing, the witnessing of their caring custody, a trellis upon which greenery can become.

Jonathan Kingsley, an activist and researcher at Swinburne University of Technology, thinks people are motivated to join community gardens for diverse reasons. Yes, they join for their love of gardening; but gardening in a community also grows their sense of ownership and identity. Yes, they join for their need for cheaper veggies; but the veggie garden builds social and community connections. Yes, they join in search of a meaningful connection with nature; but in their own nature is the need to connect with their past. That past connection is

what Kingsley describes as ‘familial and nostalgic motivations—shared memories of parents or grandparents gardening during their childhood.’

Yihong might be in another world as he says to me, ‘When you see the seeds, see the greenery as they grow up, you can imagine these are human beings. And sometimes I think if I was like them I could grow—they give you hope.’

But it’s not just about cost-effective produce nor connecting deeply with nature. He says, ‘Every Chinese people when they grow up in the village, planting, farming, harvesting and you migrate to another area as an adult, you really want to revisit that child memory.’ Past and present, that world and this world, his move from rural to mega-urban, from there to here, that now-foreign language, this language so hard-won: he connects a thread through the changes in his worlds.

And while he had erroneously found himself in a beautiful community orchard somewhere in Adelaide, seeking his vegetable opportunity, perhaps for one little second he looked from here back to there, decades, to another continent and understood the stakes if he were to give up the hunt, refuse the pursuit of a child’s memory, an ancestral sense of family community, a togetherness in nurturing and growing. Kingsley says the research is clear: ‘community gardens provide a sense of belonging.’

Yihong went home and found Lochiel Park Community Garden—online. He found an email address. He wrote his enquiry. He clicked Send. A helpful stranger, Jenny Bates, responded and asked if Yihong wouldn’t mind completing the attached application for a garden plot and to pay his annual fee. He didn’t mind. Then she invited him to meet at the gate to the garden.

‘It’s a wonderland I am looking forward to. I met Jenny and we talk, we chatted for more than one hour. Firstly we talked about the community garden and then our conversation spread, you know, stretch out to other area.’

Jenny entrusted Plot 30 to Yihong's custody. She gave him the code to the keypad on the gate. Yihong says, 'The whole time I think I was treated like a guest, an honoured guest. She stressed she hope that every gardener would come forward to share the knowledge, the new things, the experience and also participate in the working-bees.' Then he adds, 'I never expect in Australia that we would have a community garden again.'

Yihong Gao stands at Plot 30 watering his and Jin's snake bean plants with care and respect, beans that I have not seen before, greenery reaching and bewitching, bejewelled with little, scarlet, floral gems. And after the heat of the day, as I watch him, he looks as if he is at his daily vespers, as if he is paying these battlers a deeply mindful reverence.

I ask him when he first felt a sense of connection here. He says, 'I think it's the time I showed Jin this Plot 30 that belongs to us for one year.' And Yihong says to her, 'Oh, this land belongs to us—we can at last work on it.'

Look here and you might see Jin being the planter, Yihong being the waterer, she being the initiator, he being the follow-up guy, Jin's careful furrowing and planting and covering of seeds, Yihong standing by with the hose attachment set to misty.

'If you are watering them,' he explains, 'you are really immersed with them. You are thinking you're part of them.' It is as if he is swept off his feet by this magical sense of nature, as if his thought sprouts an emerging understanding: 'That Plot 30 gives me a sense of community,' he says. 'Plot 30 is a connection. It is a bridge that you can cross over—reach other people. I have a sense of belonging there I don't want to give up.'

Open Category
(25+ years)

Silver Winner

One Person at a Time
Christopher Page

One Person at a Time

Tim's heart sank the moment he saw it. He knew the darker impact it would have on his father, Song. In a time of such turmoil around the world it was hard to understand why anyone would create more trauma by attacking a small business. Tim had experienced casual racism so frequently that such an act did not shock him, it just hurt that his family were the victims. He was determined that his generation would change attitudes so that when he had children they would not be exposed to such unnecessary hatred. Seeing such an offensive slogan spray painted across his family's restaurant was a reminder of how much needed to change.

As the impact of Coronavirus grew the range of impacts on the Chinese community in Australia increased directly impacting the Liu family. There was already a reduction in turnover for the restaurant. Media reports highlighted that some people were fearful of anyone of Chinese extraction while others sought to lay blame inappropriately.

The difficulty for the Liu's had predated this attack. In February they had heard that Song's Uncle Deng and Aunt Wu had both died from Coronavirus. Deng and Wu had relocated to Hubei province in 1991, two years before Song emigrated to Australia. After spending much of his formative years with them he had not seen them since the relocation. It devastated him to hear the news and even more to think that his children had never met them.

Song Liu had grown up in the Chinese city of Guangdong. After marrying Jiang, the couple moved to Australia to give the greatest possible opportunities for the children they planned to have. Nina was born in 1994, Amy in 1996 and Timothy in 1998. Song wanted them to have the typical Australian upbringing despite never feeling connected to his new home land. He never regretted his choice as he was adamant that the life they'd given their children was something better than they could have had in China. Six months ago when Nina gave birth to

his first grandson he knew that the next generation would experience these benefits even more so. While he and Jiang had worked incredibly hard to provide a moderate upbringing for their children, it had been sufficient for all 3 to advance to tertiary education. The girls had excelled in law and dentistry respectively and Timothy was now well into a Journalism/Media Arts double degree. He had met a young lady, Sophie Fletcher during the university holidays and although she wasn't of a Chinese background like his sister's partners had been, his parents were happy.

It had taken time for Tim to meet Sophie's family, but he was invited to a dinner to celebrate her mother's birthday. He never could have foreseen the reason the night would be so awkward. While her parents Rohan and Jenny seemed very welcoming, the issue was her younger brother Andrew. The moment their eyes met Tim was horrified by the realisation that he had encountered Andrew once before.

'What are your slanty eyes staring at?'

As it turned out these had been the first words any member of the Fletcher family had ever said to Tim, months before he met Sophie. He had been on his regular late night jog and had stopped as always to evaluate his performance about 50 metres before arriving home. He heard some commotion and noticed 3 teens leaving the tennis club just in front of him. He also noticed the side wall of the club covered freshly in meaningless graffiti. As they continued to hurl racially abusive comments at him, he stopped staring and began to start jogging again without responding. Before long he peaked back to notice they were heading in the opposite direction, now more concerned about getting caught than they were about Tim. He didn't want them to see which house was his so he continued on briefly before turning back and going home. The face had remained entrenched in his mind for 8 months, and now here it was. The look on Andrew's faced confirmed to Tim that he had been equally certain of who he was meeting.

As a child he was exposed to teasing based on his race and it had a real impact, but the turning point for him came when he started playing soccer for Campbelltown City at age 10. He would often hear racist remarks made towards him from people on the sidelines or from his opponents, but the environment of his club became the ultimate protection. Playing in a midfield with D'Angelo, Obegunde, Bartkowski and Smith the team was built on an ethos of inclusivity. With any taunt, the network closed around the victim giving them strength. More than ten years later Tim was still playing for the Red Devils. He loved the game but he knew the greatest gift he'd received from it was the feeling of self-worth that the environment had given him. Tim didn't need to be in the club's red shirt to feel this way. The lessons he'd learned were carried with him through every aspect of life. Over the years any remark about his race told him only about the person making the remark, not about him.

While waiting for their main courses Sophie brought up the vandalism attack on the restaurant and how much it had hurt Tim's father. Tim's eyes stayed on Andrew who refused to make eye contact.

'Sadly, it's part of life' Tim explained. 'I think the Coronavirus has given some people a belief that their hate can be validated but it's wrong. Cases are connected to cruise ships, to people flying in from the USA and Italy but there's no cases connected to Chinese restaurants in Australia. The people who did this are ignorant. I don't feel angry, just sad for my parents, and sad that our country has people so thoughtless.'

'It's China Virus' Andrew said sick of squirming defensively. 'You guys caused it and it wouldn't be an issue here if not for you.'

Tim knew the importance of staying composed and dignified in front of his girlfriend's family but was determined to have his say.

'You guys?' he asked calmly. 'I'm Australian like you. I'm a man like you. I'm a millennial like you. If there's two people at this table who can be grouped, it's you and me.'

‘Twist it all you like. I’m Australian. You’re Chinese.’

‘You’re an embarrassment’ Sophie interjected, pointing at her brother before sensibly changing the topic of conversation.

Andrew was silent throughout the rest of the meal. Tim continued to participate as though nothing had happened. He did shoot several looks Andrew’s way, but eye contact was never returned. While eating, Tim continued to think of the tags he saw alongside the racist slogans. He wasn’t certain if they were the same as he’d seen at the tennis club months earlier, but he was suspicious.

The next morning Sophie confronted her brother about his conduct.

‘What is your problem with Tim?’

‘He’s Chinese’

‘You mean he looks Chinese’

‘Same thing’

‘What is your issue with Chinese people anyway?’

‘I don’t know. Gotta blame someone.’

‘For what.’

‘Anything. Everything.’

‘So basically you don’t like someone who has spent more of their life in Australia than what you have just because they are a different race even though one of your best mates is African. I think you’re just trying to fit in with a group of people who actively choose what to feel in order to be united in something. You can’t back up your opinions with any facts.’

‘Sometimes you just got to fit in with people, ya know?’

‘The right people in the right way at the right time. I mean you know what they say about if others jumped off a cliff would you, right. Be yourself, think for yourself and do what

you believe. You will fit in with the right people that way, and you'll lead people rather than follow them. That's when your life will mean something.'

He asked his sister if she was demanding him to like Tim, but she clarified that this was not what she meant. She explained all the things the two guys had in common and said she couldn't believe they wouldn't get along well as long as Andrew opened his mind. She also said that if he did that and found he did not like him she would be surprised but not upset.

Following a full day at university on Wednesday Tim headed to work at the restaurant. Before he went in he saw Andrew waiting outside.

'How are you doing Andrew?'

Andrew struggled to look back at Tim as he nervously spoke 'You think I did it, right?'

'I have no idea but it's irrelevant. It's been cleaned up, the matter is finalised. Knowing who did it doesn't change anything so I don't want to know.'

'Seriously?' Andrew couldn't believe that Tim showed no sign of anger, no desire for revenge and seemingly no inclination to say anything to anyone else about it. He'd spent the past few days focussing on Sophie's words and accepted they were right. He thought a lot about his friend Jaheem and the impact racism had on him. Although he'd previously believed that this was very different, Sophie really had convinced him otherwise, and he was seeing in Tim just how right she was.

'Hopefully I'll get to know you better and in that time I like to think I will be getting to know someone who doesn't think those things and certainly wouldn't act in that way. Then I'll never think it was you' Tim said.

'And you won't tell Sophie? Even about the tennis club?'

'Like I said, I don't live in the past. It doesn't matter what the issue is, you can apologise for the mistakes of the past and it doesn't fix the damage. Alternatively you can focus on the present and the future and you can help stop mistakes being made. You, Sophie, me – it's our

generation that can make the world better, and we've got more chance when we put our energy into looking forward than looking back.'

Andrew asked if the restaurant was open during the lockdowns and Tim said only for take away and delivery. Andrew offered to assist with deliveries for a couple of weeks voluntarily if it would help.

'All along I said we were alike' Tim said.

The next Saturday Tim turned up to the Fletcher house to see Sophie on his way to soccer. Without hesitation Andrew joined them and participated in the conversation. Tim suggested Andrew come and watch given it was a home match just a few minutes from their place.

'The way different sporting leagues are being stopped around the world right now means today might be the last chance for some time' Tim said.

Sophie had been surprised to see Andrew's attitude towards Tim had changed so much over the past week as neither man had mentioned Wednesday's events to her. She told Andrew she'd be walking up to the ground a bit later to watch so he should join her and explain the intricacies of a sport she'd never been interested in.

Tim had only appeared as a substitute in the first 3 matches of the season, but a couple of injuries meant he started today. He was heavily involved right from the beginning and Sophie and Andrew were impressed with what they saw. They were watching with a couple of the players partners who Sophie had met previously in an area of the ground surrounded only by Campbelltown supporters. Late in the first half Tim tackled an opponent just in front of them, and although it was a perfect tackle, the opponent remonstrated with him and used a racial slur as he got to his feet.

'You racist pig' Andrew yelled out across the fence.

The player turned in his direction and sneered while Tim was already charging back across the pitch focussed as always on the next moment rather than the previous. Andrew noticed that nobody else in the area had stood up about the incident. At half-time the issue was raised and a few people said they were so used to hearing those things they barely noticed anymore but primarily it was because they knew it didn't impact Tim. If anything, it inspired him more they all said. This was all new to Sophie and privately she said to Andrew that she was proud of the way he stood up to something unacceptable. She also said that she felt embarrassed that she had been too shocked to do so herself.

Andrew wandered throughout the 2nd half watching the game from different spots. 3 times he heard racist remarks directed at Tim from people in the crowd. Each time he called the person out. He stayed composed, but he made sure they knew that what was unacceptable. One of these people wanted to start a fight, but Andrew just shook his head and kept walking. The other two tried to intimate that they didn't mean anything and effectively apologised. Tim was close enough to the last of these during a stoppage in play to see exactly what had happened.

5 minutes before full time Tim rounded an opponent and laid off a pass that led to the only goal of the match. Tim was more than happy for the goal scorer to get most of the attention as they celebrated, but every member of the team rushed to Tim as the creator of the match winning goal. Andrew wanted to find every person who'd said a bad word and rub their faces in it, but he knew that Tim deserved to have the moment celebrated in his way – understated and with an eye to what was still to come.

As the players left the pitch Tim searched the crowd for Andrew and applauded him once they'd made eye contact. Andrew left soon after so that Sophie could have some time with him in the brief period before he had to rush to work at the restaurant.

‘Maybe we can change the world Tim. A week ago he was racially sledging you and now he’s taking on people for doing the same thing.’

Tim wished he could tell Sophie about the incident when he first encountered Andrew and the near certainty he had that he was involved in the attack on his parents restaurant to emphasise how much change there had been in him, but the bond he’d built with Andrew was more important.

‘It’s great, but it’s hardly the changed world’ he replied, though Sophie refused to step away from this achievement.

‘The only real way to change the world is one person at a time.’

Open Category
(25+ years)

Bronze Winner

Dial a Change
Sharon Trappel

Dial a Change

The world is changing.
How will we cope?
We're all rightly concerned
But let's not lose hope.
Love is not lost,
And we all need our share,
We need to be kind
To show that we care.
Support is what's needed,
From small business to pub,
Come laugh with the folk from
East Adelaide Tennis Club!
If we can't shake hands,
Let's share a bright smile,
Changing the world
Is right on our dial.
Call into your local,
Who's doing it tough,
A kind word of support
Is often enough.
Drop into the playground,
The "crown jewel" Thorndon Park,
Enjoy the fresh breeze

And get out of the dark.
The world has a chance,
So let's all make a stand,
The future is ours,
But please wash your hands.

Youth Category
(15-24 years)

Gold Winner
&
Overall Winner

Without Warning
Bethany Cody

Without Warning

Our cat pooped in the kitchen last night and mum didn't clean it up. This morning she steps in it and doesn't realise as she walks it through the kitchen and the lounge room and out the front door leaving stinking, half-formed shoe prints in her wake. My bowl of coco pops goes mostly uneaten from the underlying scent of cat faeces as I watch TV. Tim-Tam doesn't seem to care as she struts toward me from the hallway, meowing. She stops in the doorway to sniff rank kitchen air before she joins me on the floor, her tail thick and fluffy and animated.

Mum works on Saturdays. She leaves my little brother Jayden and I home and our neighbour babysits us. Angie knocks on the frosted glass beside our front door at eight o'clock and I toe Tim-Tam out of the way to let the woman in without her escaping. Her smile is always kind. She strokes my hair a few times before she sets her blue woven bag on the kitchen bench. Today her smile is sad and her spotted hand a little heavier on my head. She sees the dirty tracks mum made earlier and steps inside.

She smiles as Jayden comes down from his bedroom in rumpled, sleep-warm pyjamas.

"Let's get this cleaned up then."

During the day Angie sits on our couch, puts her feet up and knits. Her clean, red slippers barely touch the end of the recliner. She giggles along to the funnier parts of my kids program and around lunchtime she changes the channel to a gardening show. She scribbles notes on a piece of paper from her bag when she hears something interesting. Her front yard is full and vibrant, her driveway lined with ankle height bushes with stark white flowers. Two large trees shade the close-cut grass of her front lawn. Their highest branches weave through the powerlines connecting our houses and their flat, golden leaves pepper our driveway.

When mum returns, they talk in the doorway for a long while. She rests her hip in the doorjamb and Angie wraps wrinkled fingers around the navy fabric of her cotton bag. She nods her head a few times but I can't hear what they're saying. When she catches me watching she smiles and winks and mum keeps talking. Eventually her voice softens and stops and Angie brings mum in for a hug that she clings to. When mum closes the door on our house, her cheeks are pink and she disappears in her bedroom until Jayden gets loud and restless. We have leftovers from last night and eat around the kitchen table feeling hollow and incomplete. Jayden makes his usual mess, squirming in the confines of his special chair. Mum doesn't try to calm him.

Two weeks after the world changes, mum doesn't drop me off at school anymore. I watch her reverse down our sloped driveway with Jayden in the back, tapping fingers on the window and wriggling in his food stained car seat. When they round the corner I step off the verandah and start down Hillside Drive on a nine minute walk, feeling the sharp jab of every twig and stone underfoot. The streets are flanked with sprawling front lawns and grey, grid-patterned driveways. Dark rooves stand out against the blue morning sky streaked with stray clouds. A lawnmower drones in the distance and a cluster of large golden wattle trees dampen the sound as I turn the corner to cross the road for my school. Some teachers, like Angie, smile at me more now. There's something in their eyes when they look at me coming in with the other children from recess. They linger long after I find my seat. It makes me feel weird and the other kids notice it too.

Two weeks after the world changes, there's no hair on the toilet seat. Our milk lasts longer. The lorikeets in our tree by the curb can't poo on mum's car now that she parks it under the safety of our carport, on top of the dry, old oil spatters where dad's car used to sit. My tummy lurches every time I hear the 'ping' of the roller-door lifting, signalling mum's arrival. I wonder if she'll look at me, say something, or I'll find out I'm invisible again. She gets letters

in the mail that make her cry, printed pages of paper she leaves open on the table that Jayden puts his dirty, vegemite-smeared fingers on and I try to read but can't. There's a lot of numbers and symbols and I've never been good at maths.

Our dog Gemma lies on dad's chair sleeping all day. She misses him. He was nice to her, let her sleep on his lap at night, fed her out of his hand when she was too sore to stand and eat from her bowl and walked her around the block if he wasn't in the shed drinking. We weren't allowed to walk her, he wouldn't let us. We walked too fast and hurt Gemma's neck tugging on her lead to make her catch up. For years before the world changed, we visited Lochiel Park every weekend and ran around the vivid green grass with Gemma. Jayden wasn't big enough to stand on his own so mum sat and cradled him in her arms while dad chased me and tossed around a gnawed, wet tennis ball for Gemma. She was his good girl.

The day before the world changes and spring holidays start, dad keeps us home from school. Mum has work, so it's just us three boys. Dad's still asleep when Jayden and I run amok in the kitchen leaving scraps of kaleidoscope coloured foil from hurriedly unwrapping chocolate Easter eggs mum stashed in the back of the pantry. When dad wakes up, he tells us off for spoiling the surprise and makes himself a cup of coffee, spending most of the day in his shed. Jayden and I play with Gemma in the backyard and sometimes we knock on the thin, metal door so dad will play with us. He keeps it locked behind him.

The day the world changes I'm the first awake. I creep up the hallway until my feet halt in front of Jayden's door. It's quiet. I can see movement, disturbance in the sunlight leaking through the gap at the base of the door. I know dad's in there with Jayden. I heard him walk into the room a few minutes ago when I moved from the kitchen to the lounge with some cheese slices. I thought dad was still sleeping. It's 11 o'clock and he likes to sleep in late when he doesn't have work for a couple of days.

"Dad?"

A beat passes in silence and I try again. When I'm about to turn around and go back the door opens and dad peers down at me through the gap.

"Hey buddy."

My silence must unnerve him because he opens the door wider, inch by inch until it's fully open and I see most of the room, save for where dad's blocking my view of Jayden's bed.

"Hey," he steps towards me, "*hey*." He's getting closer, "It's okay buddy, it's okay."

I still can't see my brother. His blanket's on the floor, his plush toy lion is lying on its side on top of it, sun-faded and threadbare.

"It's *okay*."

The more he says it, the less I believe him.

Dad makes a grab for me and I dodge out of his grasp into the path of sight of my brother. He's lying on his back, his face towards the wall, eyes open, hair messed up. His spaceman patterned pyjama pants are down by his ankles. He's not moving but for the soft rise and fall of his chest.

"Jacob."

It's a question, a plea, a command out of dad's mouth and for a moment we both freeze, our feet fastened to the floor beneath. I'm aware of my heartbeat and a tightness in my back. I want to run but I don't know where I'll go. Jayden still hasn't moved.

When dad shifts towards me again I dash out of the room, down the dusk of our hallway and out the front door before he can catch me. For a second I panic on the driveway. I don't know where I'm going or why I'm running away but Jayden doesn't get diaper changes anymore and there was a strangeness in dad's eye when he looked at me, like I didn't belong in that moment, like I was interrupting.

To my right I see Angie kneeling on her lawn. Her white floral shirt is loose and rippling in the breeze. She's digging small holes at the base of a tree and before I'm aware that I'm moving, I'm running up to her and my cheeks are wet and there's salt on my tongue.

"What's the matter Jacob? What's wrong?"

"Dad did s-something to Jayden."

I don't sound like myself.

Her short, silver hair glimmers in the sunlight and her fingers tighten momentarily on my upper arms. For a second I'm worried she's going to hurt me, instead she stands abruptly and brings me into her house. I've never been inside before and the smell of flowers and home cooking is strong. There's a lot of wood furniture and warm light from outside pours in through a large window behind her couch.

In the kitchen, she lifts her phone from the receiver and I'm left standing near the entryway, hesitant and afraid. A soft wash of air from a fan set up in the corner of the room passes over me and dries the sticky tracks tears made down my cheeks. Angie's talking to someone in a language I don't understand, clutching the phone in each hand tightly. I'm scared dad's going to follow me.

"Jacob," she calls me over with the frantic wave of her hand, "my husband will be here soon. I'm going to make another phone call."

I wait by her side and although this time I understand the words she's saying, I don't understand what they have to do with each other. She says my brother's name a few times and gives out our address. I hear someone tell her to lock her front door and wait.

Five or so minutes pass. I'm watching the oversized clock hanging on her kitchen wall above the receiver. Before long the distinct wail of police sirens somewhere in the neighbourhood reaches our ears, becoming louder with each pulse of the second hand on the

clock. Angie leaves me in the kitchen and watches the street from the window by her front door. I don't want to go look with her.

Three weeks after the world changes and mum still doesn't look at me. I walk myself to and from school and every night the sounds Jayden makes in his sleep escape from under his door and into the dark of my bedroom. Sometimes it sounds too real and I sneak into his room to check that he's alone. He always is – the pillow on the chair in the corner of his room is cold, his closet is open and vacant, the window is shut and locked but I'm scared there's something in his head he can't escape.

Youth Category
(15-24 years)

Silver Winner

Now and Then
Surpreet Jaiswara

Now and Then

Now.

He woke. The boy was asleep. The cold was still there.

What a shallow thought. The cold was still there. As if it could ever disappear.

The senator's weary eyes scanned the expanse around his frail, quivering body. The fog hung close to the ground, as if an invisible force was keeping it there. He stood up slowly, trying not to disturb the sleeping beauty that was his son. The boy was deep in his sleep, in another world, another life. A better one.

The senator inhaled. The air tasted like fire, a raging fire that could not be put out.

Did he call this bleak wasteland home? What was home? What was a warm embrace? What was family? He knew not what those words meant. They were all part of a world now past.

The new world was here to stay.

He sighed.

The boy, who was hardly alive, stirred under the thin blanket. He scrunched his face.

"Dad?"

The senator sank down to put his face in front of the boy's.

"I'm here. Don't worry."

The boy breathed a sigh of relief.

"I thought you'd left me."

The senator smiled softly.

"I would never, ever, leave you. Not in a million years."

"Good."

The two figures trudged through the dirt. Or was it ash?

The sun was absent. It was physically there, but its rays that used to caress the senator's bare arms while he worked in his beautiful garden were long gone.

Strange.

They were cold, colder than they'd ever been before. But they were being suffocated. Not by heat, but something else. Something...sinister. Something invisible, yet so heavy.

Night began to fall, as it always did. The same, relentless, unforgiving night that lashed out for their throats every time they let their guards down.

They searched aimlessly for wood. The thin trees, either charred by fire or broken by the force of the water, drooped sadly.

They piled together the wood they had. All in all, it was a small pile. The naked trees offered them nothing but disappointment. Every time they saw a new branch, it turned out to be too wet to use for fire. They could do nothing with wood like that.

He wished to plant a tree, say sorry to the Earth.

The senator reached inside his right coat pocket. He froze. There was nothing in it. Where was the lighter?

He had a horrible thought. What if he had dropped it?

He gasped.

He ran his hands all over his body.

He breathed a sigh of relief, pulling the lighter out of his left pocket.

The fear passed, as did the clouds after heavy rains, revealing a clear sky.

Except there was no clear sky. Or rain. Only nothing.

He got the fire going and seated the boy near it. He sat on the other side, picking at the skin of a potato he had been saving for a day like this.

"Tell me"

The senator looked at the boy from across the fire.

"About what?"

"About what it was like. Before all this."

He gestured to the wasteland around them. The senator shook his head.

"Even if I did tell you, what would be the use? You won't be able to imagine what I'm saying." "I'll try. I don't care, I just want to know. Please, dad."

The senator tried to look away. He could not. The boy's pleading eyes cut his soul. His aged hands held his falling head.

The boy sighed and looked away, dejected.

A heavy silence choked the conversation until the senator and the boy sat like strangers, meters apart.

"There used to be a bridge."

His voice came suddenly, out of nowhere.

"It was a small one, but big enough for a curious 10-year-old boy like me to crawl under."

The boy leaned in, intrigued.

"Where did you live, dad?"

"Here. Campbelltown. So quiet, so peaceful. And so beautiful, decorated with trees, flowers, little streams. To a little boy, it was the perfect place. So much to explore. My friends and I used to wander the streets all day, in search of something new. And we'd always find it."

"Tell me about your friends, dad." But the senator was lost in his world.

"Ma used to say that Australia had the best sunsets. We used to drive up to Windy Point, up in the hills, and watch the sun go down. We even watched the sun come up, some days."

"What was it like?"

"Vibrant. Bright. It made me cry every time, even when I was a young man. I grew up with reds, pinks, oranges, and yellows. When they ceased to exist, I feel as if a part of me did the same."

"Dad?"

"Hush, boy. Now that I have begun speaking of the things past, I cannot stop."

The boy stared at the man in front of him, full of awe. How could a man living in a world without love speak of such things? He had been estranged from humanity, from love for so many years, yet he still knew what those things were. How?

The senator stopped talking, his voice dying out like the embers of their fire.

The sun rose, the only proof of its existence the cold light that barely shone on the two figures seated in the ash and filth of a world long gone.

The senator looked up to the clouds. He closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. He opened his eyes slowly and examined the boy.

"I've said too much, haven't I?"

The boy said nothing.

"Listen, son, there's no meaning in the words I say. You understand?"

The boy shook his head slightly.

The senator sighed.

"What's the point of talking about colours when there are none? What's the point of loving when love is a foreign concept? What's the point in living when everything around you, everyone you love, is dying?"

The boy shuddered.

"You said the word. The d-" he mumbled.

The senator lowered his head.

"You're going to be hearing that word more often, son. Be prepared."

Then.

He woke to the sound of his wife humming softly as she worked her way through a book.

Seated on a high chair in the kitchen, she looked like a goddess, even in her old age. 30 was old, right? He smiled shyly.

"How do you manage to read while your mind thinks of other things? Are you even retaining any of the stuff you're reading?"

She looked up at him and smirked.

"You know some people can multitask, right?"

He scoffed softly and stretched his arms out.

Her expression changed, the playful smirk replaced with a deep frown.

"Do you have to go to work today?"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's nothing. Just, something feels off. Like something's going to happen.

Something bad."

He smiled warmly, attempting to comfort the woman who cared so much about him.

"Honey. You've been working too hard lately, I think you need a break. You're tired and stressed,. that's making you think weirdly."

She nodded her head slowly as if she were trying to convince herself that nothing was wrong.

"Yeah. You're right. I think I'll go down to Glenelg. It's a beautiful day, the sun's out, I'm sure there are gonna be lovely waves."

"I'm sure you're right."

He checked his watch.

2:34 pm.

Great, another 4 hours of work. All he could think about what he would do when he got home - dive into his bed covers and never come out. Work was getting harder to manage, what with him being the newly appointed senator and everything. That trip to Canberra was coming up. He groaned silently when he thought about what it was going to be like in Canberra. Shouts and arguments dragging on for hours at a time, disputes about what the country needs to do about "climate change". Honestly, he found all that quite boring. Not the idea of taking action, but the constant arguing. Wasn't it clear to the government that they needed to do something? Especially after the fires that ravaged the land, taking life? Oh well, what could he do?

"This just in. "

He was distracted, only hearing snippets of what the chattering reporter had to say.

"... a huge, unexpected tsunami is scheduled to hit us... "

A tsunami? Without warning? They've got to be kidding. "...evacuate the citystay away from beaches ..."

Beaches? His wife was at the beach.

Nah, he thought to himself. She 'll be fine.

He turned his mind back to his work.

He could only think of one thing as he rushed to the hospital- how wrong he had been. His car sped through the rain, tearing up what was left of the road. Stray tree branches carpeted the road for miles to come. The street that used to be alive with householders out and about was now empty, deserted like a ruined castle. Abandoned, save for the remnants of the homes that had been savagely uprooted from their places and tossed around like a ball. He swerved the car as a log rolled down his left side.

He examined the woman's expressions as she flipped through a heavy notebook lying on the table in front of her. First the hospital, now the relief centre.

She scrunched her face and reached for her phone. With a few quick taps, she was on the line.

"Yes? Hello, Rodney? There's a man here asking if we've found his wife."

He forced his mind to wander, to leave this place, and ignore what the woman was saying. He couldn't.

She covered her mouth, probably so he wouldn't be able to hear anything, but he did.

"Dead or alive, he just wants to know"

Silence, save for the steady rain.

"Oh. Okay."

She hung up. Putting the phone to rest on the table, she folded her hands and attempted to mask her pity.

"I'm sorry."

His body began to shake.

"Your wife has been found."

He did not need to hear any more. He knew what was coming.

"Thank you."

She nodded her head. He turned away and walked out of the centre, not caring about the rain that soaked his finely checked shirt and his pants. His collar seemed to shrink and constrict his throat. He could not handle it. The pain cut him to his heart. His knees could not hold the weight of his body. He slumped to the ground, the mud sticking to his khaki pants. The rain poured down, as savage as the tsunami that had passed. He could not cry, for he was numb. He could not shout, for his voice was lost. He could not come to make his body stand up, for his mind was absent. He felt like a child abandoned in a supermarket, a tornado of emotions overtaking him. Fear, anger, distress, anxiety, denial.

He heard faint crying. He raised his heavy head slowly. Through the pattering rain coming down to cleanse the Earth, he saw a small bundle of blankets lying in the corner. He couldn't make out what it was, but it was mewling and rocking side to side.

He did not know why, but he stood slowly and trudged himself to the bundle. He kneeled down and looked at it. Inside was a small, red-faced baby. Its eyes were clamped and its mouth was a gaping hole from which the crying noises were originating. It was a boy.

He picked up the whimpering infant and cradled him in his arms. The child stopped crying immediately and looked up at him with eyes as blue and deep as the ocean.

His mind turned over at the sight of an innocent child alone in his suffering. He could not bear to leave the infant behind.

"Son."

He pulled the child close into his chest and wound his arms around him.

His grief was replaced with questions, blazing questions.

They knew this was coming. They knew why it was coming, why it was happening. And yet, they dared blame it on Mother Nature.

They were looking for scapegoats, and they found one in pure, innocent, blameless Nature. Little did they know how much their hypocrisy and ignorance would cost them.

Now.

Thoughts, memories of the old world sped through his mind. He was surprised at himself. He did not remember things that mattered, like his work. He remembered coffee. Sweet potatoes. Pots. Big Macs. Things he thought he'd forgotten long ago.

He sighed deeply. If only. If only. If only he could bring them back. But he couldn't. They were gone, gone forever. All because of one thing, and the way that thing was neglected.

Climate change.

They called this change? He had never heard such garbage before. What an understatement.

Change.

What happened was far from change.

It was destruction, it was strife, it was pain, it was death knocking down the door.

He stared at the boy as he struggled to walk through the dirt. The same boy he had held in his trembling hands as he mourned over his loss. A frail body, faltering limbs. No child should have to go through something like this. No child should be punished in such a way. If only he could change things. Change the world. If he had the ability, he would hoist both of them up into the air and carry them away, far away from this.

This.

Absentmindedly, he shook his head. Another shallow thought. Change the world? It's too late for that now. If only they'd thought about that before all this. If only they'd listened to the screams of the Earth, those cries of agony, begging for the hurt to stop.

Youth Category
(15-24 years)

Bronze Winner

#Me Too
Akhila Peacock

#Me Too

Liliana – Three months before

The way I see things, I have nothing but hate towards the world. Today's struggles deserve a pitiful milkshake to make up for its distastefulness. I saw him today and even though he didn't look at me, I felt his eyes following me whenever I moved an inch. Dear God, I hate that he sits with his friends and banters care-free. I hate his smile. I hate it because it was the cruel and cunning smile that slipped onto his face after telling me *'it's okay, no one will ever know'*.

I will always know, and that is a dreadful fate he cursed me with.

After two draining classes under the supervision of him, I hoped to see Tyler at lunch. When I arrived at our regular spot under the gum tree on the oval, his presence was absent. I waited the entire thirty minutes of break, and an extra five minutes to be sure that he wasn't late. My stomach begins to churn as Ms. Brooks approaches me on my way to my final lesson.

"Liliana, I wanted to check that you're still coming to the protest tomorrow," she smiles with warmth, and I wish I could return the favour. "I was quite impressed with the approach you took on your *hashtag Me Too* essay and I want you to present a speech at the protest."

I'm shocked, and honoured I-

"No buts, I know you have the strength to stand up there and deliver the message. If you are uncomfortable with the idea though..." she says, her voice trailing off.

"No, I want to do it," my heart races with joy.

"Great I'll see you tomorrow then."

I sigh as I watch my English teacher walk away and exit the building. This opportunity is a chance for me to connect with others – to tell my story and get help. But my mood turns from happy-shock to frightened-shock when I am pushed against a locker in a matter of seconds.

“You’re not going to that stupid protest tomorrow,” he says with protruding dominance; a voice I know better than to argue with. His hands are so tight on my wrists that they bruise, I want to scream at him to let go.

“What are you doing?” I say, my body trembling as I dare to look him in the eyes.

“You know I can’t have you going around accusing me of something I would never do, I would never hurt you Liliana,” he says in a sympathetic tone.

“I am deserving of justice and you deserve your comeuppance,” I defend. His eyes widen with rage.

“You deserve nothing because you *are* nothing; you’re a crazy bitch and I got what I wanted from you. So, you keep your mouth shut.”

My eyes water as I distance myself from my body, and I shrink lower into the corner he has me buried in. I want him to stop this – to leave me alone.

“You’re a liar.” His words taunt me into despair, and it isn’t until he leaves me crouched on the floor that I fall apart into many unfixable pieces. I am engulfed in a million and one feelings – and the only thing I can fathom is that none of them are happy.

The world hates me.

Tyler – Three Months Later

The sky twinned my mood today. Melancholy and gloomy; an aftertaste I once enjoyed, but today I chewed it vigorously and discarded it into a bottomless pit.

I share no sympathy for my hair as I stand in the silent rain, surrounded by newly homed gravestones. Some gravestones have broken down over time and are no longer attended to with

flowers. I ponder that someday, when no one remembers Liliana, the flowers on her grave will wilt and get caught in the wind. Never replaced again... "*an ugly thought*" my Mother would say. Though, as I stare into the coffin-less hole in the ground, my thoughts are being justified. Another piece of my heart chips away when I realise that if Liliana were here – I wouldn't be here.

My Mother and Father hold a soft conversation with Liliana's parents on the other side of the grave. Upon arrival at the ceremony, Liliana's parents greeted the close family members and friends with soft sobs of heartache and comforting smiles. I decide immediately to take a walk before anyone could speak to me.

This is all too much.

Seeing her Mum's hands shake whilst holding a bouquet of flowers and her Dad in utter, abnormal silence.

I recall making the journey on my rusty blue bike to Liliana's little house in Campbelltown. The memories of the four of us sitting on her living room floor, huddled around the coffee table dance around in my head. We'd play monopoly – her Dad praising himself for all his good moves that made us look terrible at the game. Her Mum would laugh and pour us more tea, and Liliana would take on her Dad like a bull at gate. And Spike, sitting beside her, silently waiting for a biscuit.

Reality tugs me back in – today is not a monopoly afternoon accompanied by tea.

Today, we lower Liliana's coffin into the ground where she will sleep with the earth worms. Her new neighbours are the other souls resting in their beds below.

I take a seat on the bench, not caring to keep my clothes dry. The rain has dulled, and the clouds are parting to reveal sunshine. I contemplate my ordinary Sunday's – the lack of excitement they held and how Liliana always made a point of that.

I'd sleep until mid-morning, the smell of Dad burning bacon in the kitchen and Mum's bowl of honey-rich oatmeal coaxing me out of bed. I would play it safe with cereal, and fruit loops every so often if I felt adventurous. My Sunday would be slow and accompanied by movies and contemplation of schoolwork.

This morning, on my ordinary Sunday, I burnt my toast and didn't bother to make another. I sat at the dining room table and fiddled with my hands until my parents announced it was time to leave.

I curse Liliana, she was the type of happy that you could go without seeing the sunrise or sunset – because she *was* the sun, the light in all our lives.

I sigh as Liliana's Mum takes a seat next to me and places a cold hand on my knee.

"I know what she meant to you. I'm sorry for your loss, as well," she offers.

"I'm sorry I didn't come to you sooner," I begin, "her death is unfathomable."

Liliana's Mum leans back into the bench, "We didn't realise how serious it was, Tyler. Not even her Father and I..." She stares off into the distance, her eyes bearing no sign of emotion.

"Liliana never told us what those kids – what that *boy* did to her. She did not want to burden us with the truth, I believe she wanted to keep us happy. Though, I wish she hadn't done the latter because I want my daughter to be here so we could have figured it all out," her voice trails off. My heart is heavy; I want to scream at Liliana because no one is happy, and everyone is hurting. If that boy hadn't pushed her to breaking point, she would still be here.

"She left you something." Liliana's Mum pulls out a yellow envelope; addressed to me. She leaves it beside me on the bench and joins another group of grieving people. I shouldn't read anything that Liliana has written to me – I wouldn't be able to handle the grief in her words. She was suffering and I was too stupid to notice. Though, I miss my best friend. My hands tremble as I open the letter.

Dear Tyler,

I write so much; I always find a way to put everything into words. Of course, you already knew that. Even the terrible things. As I sat on my bedroom floor with Spike in my lap, I was stricken with heartache because the day had come for me to put this into words. Tyler, I don't know how to write this story. If I do, I want you to share it. I know I'm not there to laugh over a pizza or hold your hand, but I want to help. I took my own life, and when you read this I won't be there. I should have stayed a little longer and told someone instead of taking it into my own hands. I should have convinced Mum and Dad it was more than heartbreak. I should have let myself be honest with you.

I'm going to be honest now, I hope you listen.

When I started seeing a psychologist in fifth grade, I realised that I was a little different than most. For that, I can thank the horrendous bullying I endured every day. When I would get home from school, I'd get a break from it – because it didn't follow me home at the end of the day. Within the years of social media developing, so did the online bullying. It had followed me home; came crashing through my four walls and broke me down bit by bit. Like tearing a page out of book, one by one. Bullying happens to most people, it's when it becomes personal that it hurts. When I got older, the bullies only got more creative with their insults.

Bullied by my friends, the people I've been in relationships with, teachers and people I don't even know. From online and in person, it began to leave a mark - I felt alone. So, when he wanted to be my friend, how could I have said no?

I have kept a mental running record of all the awful things said about me. The pure malevolent behaviour people used to hurt me. It plays over in my head every night, flicking through and replaying all the horrible things I wish I could tune out. I would come to school every day and

he would wait for me. At first it was sweet, but after he held my hand firmly and paraded me around school like a trophy, I wanted to disappear.

Thankfully, he grew tired of me and threw me out like expired milk. Somehow, even that didn't stop him from making my life harder.

Then I met you, and I convinced myself that I could forget about everything. The world needs more people like you. Tyler, nice is an underrated word to describe you. You are exquisite and interesting; you are worthy of people's time and effort. You were patient with me in a way no one else was. I was blessed to be your friend when you needed someone most, even more so when it turned into a love that I will miss deeply. You made a difficult life easier to live. I always looked up to you, and when you decided to let yourself be truly free of pretending to be someone you weren't – you inspired me to do the same. I wanted to change the world – destroy the patriarchy if you will. I wanted to tell my story with hopes that it would make others, like myself, feel less alone. Though, I tried many times and failed to string the words together. I failed to overcome his persuasive ways and the anger he held towards me.

It'll be hard to tell my story because I'm not there, but Anne Frank inspired many people generations to come. She did so, through her writing, and constant hope for a change in people's hearts.

I wish to be like her. Remembered and not forgotten.

After everything, all I wanted was to be accepted. I wanted to be one of them – the people I surrounded myself with. I wanted to be considered equal to him and his friends and lost my mind in the process. I compromised myself for people who didn't deserve me. When I gave my all, they gave nothing and left me stranded. I tried to explain to Mum and Dad that I was struggling...

Tyler, I am tired of trying to convince people of things they don't have the capacity to believe. I am a broken record; forever playing a harmonious tune and forever ruining your favourite

parts. I wish to say that though I didn't stick around to see if it would get better, I am certain that those suffering will find a light at the end of the tunnel. Nothing will ever remain completely lost or unknown and that is the beauty of life. I found people who made life worth living, I had things to live for, and so do you.

If there was anything that I had learnt with my little time on Earth, it was not to accept anything less than what brings you peace. If you made a mistake, apologise. If you love someone, tell them. If you want to walk your dog, take your dog for a damned walk. If you are lacking inspiration, speak with the elderly. If you are struggling to breathe in this intoxicated society, talk to someone. You can change the world in your own little way, whether that be making your Mum a cup of tea or weeding the garden.

I should have. So, take it from me.

Do not dull yourself over my absence, for it will only cause you more pain. Instead, spend time with your family and look after Spike for me. He needs walking.

Never lost,

Liliana.

Junior Category
(7-14 years)

Gold Winner

**Small Actions Can
Change the World
Too**

Aaron Nadakal

Small Actions Can Change the World Too

Slumping from the weight of his heavy school bag and his cheeks still wet from the kisses his mum had given him, Jamil trudged through the shiny gates of his new school to start his first day there. His steps were steady and small. His surroundings were overwhelming him. The school was large and spacious with two green ovals and playgrounds that dotted his view. A black-stoned footpath weaved its way through the school and led to huge, modern buildings and courtyards. Around him, students chatted with each other, recounting the joys of their holidays and discussing the long year ahead.

Of course, Jamil had no idea of what school was like.

In war-torn Afghanistan, school had been cancelled for years and his parents taught him at home. They finally decided to move to Australia, to a small, coastal city called Adelaide and a leafy suburb called Campbelltown to live there as it would be safer.

Safer.

He wondered what that word meant.

Jamil missed his grandparents in Afghanistan but knew that his parents wanted him and his younger sister to be safe.

Kids ran after soccer balls on the lush, green sea of grass, and attempted shots at the goalkeeper, who had brought a pair of yellow gloves to school. Jamil decided he would join them. In Afghanistan, the sandy deserts were a perfect place to play soccer and he remembered the feel of the wind across his face as he sprinted on the burning hot sand after the plump ball that he made himself.

Walking across the grass, which was wet from dew, he dropped his school bag next to a goal post and jogged out onto the field. He checked his watch. Twenty minutes to the bell, he had plenty of time.

Suddenly, a boy attempted a corner kick. With his right foot he kicked it; it seemed to have power but not accuracy.

Thump!

With a sickening crunch the ball hit Jamil's school bag. Jamil recoiled in distress, his mother had packed bags of his traditional sweets in his lunch box. They would have surely been crushed; no good to eat anymore. He grabbed the bag in frustration, slung it over his shoulders and hurriedly walked away while kids sniggered at him; the boy who walked away because a soccer ball hit his bag.

The playground was the next best choice to play in before the bell rang. He reminisced about his time in Afghanistan, when there were piles of rubble outside the city after a bombing raid and he and his friends would play around, sliding down metal sheets and playing catch with rusty screws.

For him, that was his playground.

But still, he wanted to give this one a try.

He once again placed his bag next to the playground fence and took a few wavering steps towards the monkey bars.

He climbed onto the platform and reached out to grab the first bar with his right hand. The metal was cool against his hands but also wet. His left hand joined his right hand and his legs waved in the air.

Then he reached out for the second bar. It was as slippery as soap and he could hold on no longer. He let go, his body falling and landing in a untidy heap on the ground.

Falling.

The bark cut into his skin, tiny knives piercing his flesh. He slowly got up, his hands laden with bruises. He could hear a group of girls giggling and watching at him on the other side of the playground, but as soon as he turned towards them, they looked away. His face flushed with embarrassment, he hurriedly grabbed his school bag and headed out of the playground.

Finally, he headed to a group of boys who had their heads buried in their phones and were playing some sort of a game. He sat next to one of them, but the boy did not notice. Jamil watched his screen, his eyes moving frantically. The name of the game was in huge characters

on the right-hand corner of the screen. It read, Fortnite. It showed a dressed-up character with guns in his hand. The boy began shooting one of the other players. Then the player fell to the ground, graphic displays of blood splattering around him.

Falling.

Jamil felt a tear fall down his face.

He had a traumatic flashback to Afghanistan. After bombing raids on his village, his family would head out of the town to see lifeless bodies, blood seeping into the ground, utter destruction. These boys were killing people in their games for fun, but he had witnessed it in real life.

Jamil could not hold back his emotion any longer. Tears flowed down his face, a river of emotion bursting forth. The boys turned to stare at him, wondering why he was crying, whispering to each other. The boys got up and left and then Jamil was all on his own. He had been annoyed, embarrassed, and even saddened, all within the first twenty minutes of his first day at school. He felt like sitting here forever, lost in his own thoughts, free from war and hatred and violence.

The bell rang, a shrill cry interrupting his wandering thoughts. With a sigh he got up and headed to his classroom. As he was walking up the stairs, a short girl with long, curly ponytails and a faded blue school bag on her shoulders that looked about the same age as Jamil came and stood next to him. Then she began to talk.

“Hello, my name is Jasreet. Are you new here?” Her words were soothing and kind but unexpected.

“Yes, it’s my first day here.”, Jamil replied with a smile. Jasreet told Jamil that she was from Afghanistan as well and she started a conversation with him. They talked for a few minutes, and realised that they shared similar stories.

As the teacher waved the students in for the first day of school, that girl changed the world for Jamil.

Junior Category
(7-14 years)

Silver Winner

A Place for James
Jingming Li

A Place for James

“Hey Nicky, want to go to a different library that you have never been to before?” asked Nicky’s dad as he walked in her room, “It’s a really nice library here in Adelaide!”

“Sure!” shouted Nicky as she jumped off her bed.

In the car, Nicky asked, “Daddy! Which library is it?”

“Campbelltown Library,” answered Nicky’s dad, “I heard that they have great video games for children to play with.”

“Hey Dad, can I look for some books?” asked Nicky.

“Sure, I’ll be in the non-fiction section if you need me!” answered Nicky’s dad.

“Now, where are the books about fractions and decimals that we’ve been learning in school?” thought Nicky.

After a few minutes, she had a glance over where many other children were playing video games on the computers and consoles. She saw a student from her school, James.

“I will never be a scientist if I don’t learn, I just can’t learn, it’s so hard for me!” cried James as he played a video game.

Nicky had an idea. She ran to her dad. “Daddy! Can we go home? I have something to do!” asked Nicky.

“Sure, if you want!” answered her dad.

When they got home, Nicky went straight to her room to organise her idea. She wanted to start a club to tutor younger kids and help them learn new things. She decided that this club will be held at Campbelltown Library and should be called 'The Tutoring Kids Club.'

On Saturday morning, Nicky decided to call her friends and ask them to volunteer in her club and tutor the younger kids. She made an email chain with everyone who wanted to volunteer and told them to meet on Wednesday at 4:30pm at Campbelltown Library to have a meeting about 'The Tutoring Kids Club'.

When Wednesday came for their meeting, Nicky has lots of ideas.

"So basically, we are going tutor kids each day for two hours, help them learn, and teach them new things! The tutoring will be here in Campbelltown Library!" explained Nicky.

Monday came around and Nicky was excited. When she entered the library room, she saw a girl.

"Hello, what's your name?" asked Nicky.

"Kate" the girl replied.

"What do you want to learn today?"

"I want to learn how to draw dinosaurs!"

"Okay!" answered Nicky as she took Kate to the art section of the room.

After looking for James for a while, Nicky finally saw him.

"Hey James, do you want to learn something?" Nicky asked James.

"Yes, but I can't learn anything! Even if I try, I just don't understand what the teacher is saying and I want to become a scientist but it seems impossible!" cried James.

"Well, we can help you understand! That's what we're here for!" said Nicky, "Follow me!"

“So, tell me one thing you would like to work on.” Nicky said.

“My teacher talked about osmosis, but I have no idea what it means,”

“Ohh, well James, it sounds scary but it is actually very easy to understand” Nicky said,

“Water will always move from where there is more water to where there is less water, to try to achieve a balance...”

Around 15 years later, ‘The Tutoring Club’ has helped thousands of kids. I guess you want to know what happened to James. Well, he did become a scientist and helped many people. I strongly believe that Nicky helped change Campbelltown and helped change the world.

Junior Category
(7-14 years)

Silver Winner

**Books Can Change
the World**
Zavier Silvestri

Books can change the world!!!

Boom! Oh, another fighter jet! Oh, hello there my fellow Reader I am Zac Campbell. I am a member of the CFS the Campbelltown Fighting Service. I have been making a plan for years! I am going to change the world! You might think I'm crazy. But trust me I am not. If this plan goes through Campbelltown will be a happy place again.

I remember the old days! I used to go into the Campbelltown library with my friends. We would sit there for hours talking about the last books we read. Me and my friends would sit in our secret area behind the wall of the C shelf in the fiction aisle. The Campbelltown library may sound like a normal library but it's not. It is filled with secret doors, hidden rooms, and trapdoors. But we don't pay any attention to those we would always go to the C shelf in the fiction aisle.

Ok now back to the plan. I managed to borrow a book in the Campbelltown library that told me everything! I found out that if I joined the CFS I could go inside the toy room (Which is our nickname for our equipment room.) And there is meant to be a trapdoor underneath the carpet which is meant to lead me to the secret planning room where the old librarians (Old way of saying soldiers) used to plan. And on one of the shelves there is meant to be a book that will show me if my plan will work or not. But by now readers you probably want to learn what the plan is. So here it is! I was thinking to myself about how happy it makes me when I read a book so I thought if I could give everyone in Campbelltown a book it would make Campbelltown a happy place again! But back to the planning room now. Ok I am in the planning room I thought to myself! This event could change the world! So, I looked at each

shelf from top to bottom but there was only one book. And it wasn't The one! Oh my gosh I said to myself right now I feel like I can just cry! But then something weird happened. I leaned against a shelf and it fell backwards revealing a secret passageway with a really small book at the end of it! I felt a sudden tingle in my bones. Could that really be the book I am looking for? I questioned myself. So, I walked through the narrow, winding passageway and there it was dusty but still in good shape! I opened the book and there it was on the first page "If you make a book it can change the world!" So that is what I did I made over one hundred copies of a book I made called, "Books can change the world!!!" It changed everything.

Campbelltown was a good place again and the book that I made was put in history books! I can't wait for my next journey in CAMPBELLTOWN.