

RESULTS OF POETS ON THE WRITERS WALK COMPETITION 2023

Humour, inventiveness, ancestors and journeys in Writers Walk-inspired poems for Poetry Day

For Phantom Billstickers National Poetry Day 2023, we celebrated the poets (and poems) that feature in Wellington Writers Walk – in its 21st year in 2023.

The POETS ON THE WRITERS WALK competition, run by Wellington Writers Walk and the Wellington Branch of New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa, set five challenges drawing from sculptures on [Wellington Writers Walk](#).

At a salon on Poetry Day at City Gallery Wellington to announce the winners of the competition, current Chair of Wellington Writers Walk committee, **Philippa Werry**, said, “I see the Walk as an installation that is there to honour 23 writers in particular, some of whom we are honoured to have with us here tonight, but which also represents all Wellington writers, and shows we are a city that values words and literature and creativity and the imagination – all of which are going to be on show tonight!”

At the salon we were joined by very special guest **Dame Fiona Kidman**, who read from her poem ‘Speaking with my grandmothers’ that [her Writers Walk sculpture](#) quotes; and by **Marilyn Duckworth**, another distinguished writer [represented on the Walk](#).

Competition judge **Janis Freegard** was tasked with awarding a winner in each of the five challenges, as well as overall winners – across all five challenges – from a total of 80 youth and open entries submitted from across the motu.

Janis said, “There were many excellent poems and I had to whittle the entries down to just a few and make some difficult choices. It was a pleasure to meander through all the entries. Along the way I met sheep, whales, seagulls, hills, coffee drinkers. There was humour; there was inventiveness; there was sorrow. Many poets wrote about family and ancestors, and their journeys here. Not all poems were set in Wellington, but many were. The Beehive made several appearances, as did our well-loved bucket fountain.”

Wellington Writers Walk chair Philippa Werry said, “We are delighted and thrilled that so many people took up the challenges we set for the Poets on the Writers Walk competition and have woven such wonderful and enticing words with them.”

The overall winner in the **Youth category** (from writers 18 years or under) was **Oshadha Perera**, for his poem ‘Falling’. Janis Freegard said, “This was a poignant poem, with its talk of gathering dust conveying a sense of loss in just three lines.” Oshadha is a Year 13 student at Southland Boys' High School.

In second place in the youth category was 11-year-old Wellington poet **Bill Kelly**, with his poem ‘Rainbow Walk’. In third place (youth) was Tauranga-based poet and writer **Sarah-Kate Simons**, for her poem ‘Kiss’.

The overall winner in the **Open category** was **Adrienne Matthews** for her poem ‘Passport to Reside – Pōneke’. Janis Freegard said “Adrienne’s was a very active poem. It moved from Wellington as the subject – moulded, upthrust – to the personal – a father walking Ngauranga Gorge, an aunty and uncle taping picture windows. This was the story of a city and the story of a family in that city.”

Adrienne is a Nelson-based freelance writer and artist, who says, “Crafting words into poems is a spontaneous occurrence that completes the pieces of who I am. It was a joy to choose Patricia Grace’s words as my inspiration for this poem.”

In second place in the open category was poet and essayist **Heidi North**, for ‘There’s always an edge here’. Awarded joint third place (open) were Waikanae writer **Bryony Rogers** for ‘Evening Edge’, and Wellington writer **Zac Hing** for ‘Interstices’.

The winners of each the **five competition challenges** were also announced.

[The Grace challenge](#) – write a poem that starts “there’s always an edge here” – was won by **Adrienne Matthews** for her poem ‘Passport to Reside – Pōneke’. Adrienne’s poem was also awarded overall first place (Open) in the competition.

[The Kidman challenge](#) – write a poem that includes the line “not a straight town at all” – was won by **Matthew Chamberlain** for his poem ‘Form’. Janis Freegard said, “The winning poem was one that asks questions about fitting in, about unseen borders, about being in an unfamiliar place.”

[The Manhire challenge](#) – write a poem in 3 lines and/or 11 words – was won jointly by **Emma Neale** for her poem ‘Command-Save’ and **Oshadha Perera** for his poem ‘Falling’. Janis Freegard commented, “Both poems gave us a tantalising glimpse of a whole story. With only three lines these poets provided a window into something that’s happened without giving it all away. These were the challenge entries that left me wondering.”

[The Edmond challenge](#) – write a poem that includes (or responds to) the line “It’s true you can’t live here by chance” – was won by **Saige England** for her poem ‘There Is No Loss When Freeing A Poem From Itself’. Janis Freegard called the challenge-winning poem “intriguing”, and noted that it “drew heavily on sound: *silver babble, keening, sighing* as well as some very physical imagery about fishing and how we might fish up poems.”

The Writers Walk challenge – write a poem that uses [words from one or more of the 23 sculptures](#) and puts them together (or adds to them) in a different way – was won by **Kristen Phillips** for her poem ‘Writers Walk Sculptures’. Janis Freegard said, “Kristen’s poem nicely encapsulated the writers walk as a whole and made good use of rhyme.”

Five additional entries were commended: **Sherrie Lee** for ‘A Hard Place’, **Jax Clark** for ‘Place’, **Mia Farlane** for ‘Twenty-three Wellington Writers, 2023’, **Wes Lee** for ‘Night Harbour (Te Whanganui-a-Tara)’, and **Bronwyn Hughes** for ‘my crayons’.

All of these poets’ winning words were part of a celebratory salon in the Adam Auditorium at City Gallery Wellington on Poetry Day. They were read by eight of the poets who could be there in person, or – for poets who couldn’t be there – up on the big screen in audio or video clips they recorded for us, or read by poet and Wellington Writers Walk committee member Maggie Rainey-Smith.

The competition and salon were supported by seed-funding from Phantom Billstickers National Poetry Day 2023. The salon was supported by Wellington Venues Subsidy funding from Wellington City Council. We’re grateful to these funders, and to the fabulous crew at City Gallery Wellington for hosting us for the salon.

Read Janis Freegard’s judge’s report [here](#).

About the winning, placed and commended poets:

YOUTH WINNERS

YOUTH 1st place (also MANHIRE challenge joint winner)

Oshadha Perera is a student at Southland Boys' High School. He loves writing poems and short stories, and has won several awards for his writing. Oshadha was also one of 10 finalists in the National Schools Poetry Award 2023 with his poem 'How to Dream' – read it [here](#).

YOUTH 2nd place

Bill Kelly is an 11-year-old poet. His poem 'Rainbow Walk' is about Cuba Street and the diverse people and things you see when walking around Wellington. Bill adores writing, reading, poetry, performance and everything else in between. He recently organised and hosted an open mic poetry night for first-time and school-aged poets at the Vogelmorn Bowling Club. Bill would love to publish his own poetry book one day.

YOUTH 3rd place

Sarah-Kate Simons is a poet and writer originally from rural Canterbury but now based in Tauranga. She is widely published online, in magazines and in anthologies. She has a great affinity for moss, the theatre, and quoting mythology out of context.

OPEN WINNERS

OPEN 1st place (also GRACE challenge winner)

Adrienne Matthews is a Nelson-based freelance writer and artist.

Adrienne says: I was born into a world of books and learnt quickly that a book is more than its presence on a shelf. Our home library held the whole world in its shelves. I am a freelance writer and artist. Crafting words into poems is a spontaneous occurrence that completes the pieces of who I am. It was a joy to choose Patricia Grace's words as my inspiration for this poem. My father taught with her at Porirua College and I remember well feeling honoured to be in her presence.

OPEN 2nd place

Heidi North won an international Irish poetry award in 2007, leading to her debut, 'Possibility of Flight' (2015). Heidi was the NZ fellow on the Shanghai International Writers Program in 2016. U2 used a poem from her second collection 'We are tiny beneath the light' (2019) in their Australasian tour. She is currently working on an essay collection, titled 'My mother is a pirate'.

Heidi says: My winning poem is dedicated to my mum who lives in Wellington, a city I adore and was lucky enough to once call home.

OPEN joint 3rd place

Zac Hing is a writer of short fiction, who lives in Wellington and occasionally has dalliance with poetry.

OPEN joint 3rd place

Bryony Rogers, originally from the UK, has had poems published in a number of magazines and collections over the past 25 years. Her work is currently available in an ebook collection, a hardback

poetry inspiration journal and a spiritual biography. She lives in Waikanae and works throughout the Wellington region as a Voice Coach, a Sound Healer and a Reiki Master.

Bryony on her poem 'Evening Edge': *I was drawn to the prompt line for the competition and this poem just arose from that, based on an actual happening which had moved me. Like many of my poems, 'Evening Edge' explores a significant occurrence in nature, out of which a sense of the spiritual arises.*

CHALLENGE WINNERS

EDMOND challenge winner

Saige England is a poet, an award-winning human rights writer, and the author of *The Seasonwife*, a historical novel published (2023) by Bateman Books.

Saige says her poem 'There is No Loss When Freeing A Poem From Itself' derives from the line in Lauris Edmond's epic waterfront poem: 'It's true you can't live here by chance'. She says Lauris had written a stirring poem about a waterside city that causes us to take hold of life. Saige says: *I live near the water in New Brighton so I was responding from one waterside place to another, from one poet to another, talking to the poet about the flow of meaning from her past to my present, as though the poem is a bridge.*

GRACE challenge winner

Adrienne Matthews is a Nelson-based freelance writer and artist.

KIDMAN challenge winner

Matthew Chamberlain says: *I started writing fiction during the lockdowns and just kept at it until I finished my first urban fantasy novel. Poetry played a part in the story and this is the first piece I've ever entered into a competition. I was inspired by the idea of the choices we feel we must make when trying to fit in.*

MANHIRE challenge joint winners

Emma Neale is the author of six novels, six collections of poetry, and one collection of short fiction. She lives in Ōtepoti/Dunedin, where she works as a freelance editor.

About her poem, Emma says: *I loved being forced to be minimalist for this exercise: I found it bracing, happily distracting and energising. I entered partly because I still recall many things about being one of Bill Manhire's students and I guess the best teachers continue to offer guidance throughout our reading and writing development.*

Oshadha Perera is a student at Southland Boys' High School. He loves writing poems and short stories, and has won several awards for his writing.

WELLINGTON WRITERS WALK challenge winner

Kristen Phillips' first book, *Dad, You've Got Dementia: Conversations with my father*, was published in July by The Cuba Press. Kristen's regular walks from the station along the harbour to her home provided ideas for her poem.

For any enquiries about this competition, contact Wellington Branch of New Zealand Society of Authors via wellington@nzauthors.org.nz – ngā mihi nui.