

The Toolangi CJ Dennis Poetry Festival 2010 was held on October 23 - 24 this year. This was the third of what started as a 'one off', but has become an annual event. Unlike in previous years, however, the township of Toolangi did not hold a festival this year. Last year's bush fires had taken their toll. (I am told that next year will be different, though.) Activities, then, were confined to 'The Singing Gardens', former home of the poet.

Once again, we had a fine marquee to shield us from the weather. The festival kicked off, as always, with the announcement of the winners of the poetry competition held in the lead-up. (See separate entry for results.) Jan Williams, owner of 'The Singing Gardens', did an excellent job doing this, and presenting the awards. She had put a great deal of thought into the prizes, and there was often a beautiful object to accompany the cheque. For example, the winner of the 'Birds of the Singing Garden' Section also received a beautiful framed print of a native bird.

Jim Brown then took over as MC, and did a great job. As we had done the first year, we retreated into the tea-room for the last part of the show, as the marquee was becoming decidedly chilly. There was a wonderfully warm atmosphere as performers followed each other in a very intimate setting.

Jim announced the formation of the 'CJ Dennis Appreciation Society' during the course of the afternoon, and collected a list of names of those keen to join. Jim's current plans are that members will meet a couple of times a year for dinner at 'The Singing Gardens', and share poems and stories of CJ Dennis. Jim already does a great job organising the Melbourne ARVOs, and if anybody can make this work, Jim can!

The following morning, we were treated to a radio play presentation of 'The Glugs of Gosh', presented by Pete Walsh and the Macedon Players. They did an excellent job, providing a very entertaining show. Sadly, numbers were down on Sunday, in spite of some beautiful weather. I think there are probably a couple of reasons for this. Certainly, the lack of town involvement made it much more difficult for us this year. Also I think, to some extent, the 'novelty' has worn off a bit. All festivals have to continually re-invent themselves to some degree to remain successful, and we are no different. We have already given some thought to this. We will certainly be back next year - hopefully bigger and better than ever!

It was very gratifying for me to see the number of interstate entries in the written poetry competition this year, and also to discover how many of the ABPA Poetry Forum contributors featured amongst the winners!

There were several festival highlights for me. Prominent amongst these were meeting Will Moody, down from NSW, and fellow Victorian Heather Knight. Ed Walker did a wonderful job on Sunday reciting Dennis' 'Rain' absolutely flawlessly. I can only imagine the amount of work that must go into memorising a piece like that! Another highlight was hearing the story of Frank Roberts and the 'Battle of Mont St. Quentin'. This has a very close bearing on CJ Dennis and the writing of 'The Sentimental Bloke'. I have since read a book on this subject. I will elaborate elsewhere on the web-site.

All in all, it was another wonderful festival!

Here are the results of the 2010 Toolangi CJ Dennis Poetry Competition.

Adult Open Awards

1st 'True Blue Aussie' - Val Wallace
2nd 'CJ Dennis Style' - Will Moody
3rd (equal) 'Artie Illiwacker' - David Campbell
3rd (equal) 'In His Opinion' - Neville Briggs
Honourable Mentions
'The Brumby Man' - Leonie Parker
'I Thought that I might Emigrate' - Leonie Parker
'Is he a Bushie?' - Leonie Parker
'The Quiet Hour' - Jim Brown
'Another Doreen' - Valerie Folk
'Sunnyside' - Stephen Whiteside

'Birds of the Singing Gardens' Awards

1st 'Den's Garden' - Grahame Watt
2nd 'A New Beginning' - Zondrae King
3rd 'The Regent Bowerbird' - Will Moody
Honourable Mentions
'The Lyrebird' - Stephen Whiteside
'The Singing Gardens' - Robyn Tilley

'Adults Writing for Children' Awards

1st 'Parents!' - David Campbell
2nd 'The Gingerbread House' - Stephen Whiteside
3rd 'What I know about YABBIES!' - Grahame Watt
Honourable Mentions
'The Cat From Down the Swamp' - Zondrae King
'Where's Grannie?? A true story!!' - Val Wallace

Primary School Students' Awards

1st 'Twelve on the tree' - Tarik Henderson
2nd 'Our Mill Burnt Down' - Peter Church
3rd 'Native Grass Tree' - Max Thwaites
Honourable Mention
'My Dog is Looking' - Zachary Brace

Secondary School Students' Award

Honourable Mention
'Such Was Ned's Life' - Solomon Wright

Congratulations to all the winners!

All the winning poems have been published together in a book, together with last year's winners. (There was no book last year because of the bush fires.) All winners should receive a copy of the book in due course. Books are also for sale for \$10 at The Singing Gardens.

Contact details as follows:

The Singing Gardens
1694 Main Road
Toolangi
Vic. 3777

PH: 03.59629282

I would encourage as many people as possible to purchase a copy of the book. It's a great little production, and all profits from the sales will go towards the cost of running next year's festival.

Stephen Whiteside.