

**New Zealand Post National Schools Writing Festival 2009**

For the 2009 Festival, students were asked to prepare a piece of prose that related to food, and to write a poem of praise. They were given Damien Wilkin's *Proposal* as a springboard for the prose piece, and poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins, American poet Edward Hirsch and a song of the Passamaquoddy Indian as examples of praise poetry.

Below is a small sample of work students brought to the festival, polished in their workshops and read or performed at the Write Out Loud sessions on the second day.

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Coordinator

New Zealand Post National Schools Poetry Awards and Writing Festival 2009

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**Rosie Bolderston: 'Marshmallows'**

One time we used marshmallows to test the speed of light in physics. It was Friday afternoon, the last lesson of the day. Never a time for thinking about accelerations or circular motion or gravitational constants. The day before, a girl had left the class and switched to geography. The numbers, she said, they were just too much. I don't know why she left on the thursday, when she knew about the marshmallows. That would be the perfect way to announce the change, 'thanks for the food', her mouth half-full, 'and just so you know, I won't be here on Monday. Or ever.' She'd leave with a pocketful, as we all did.

We already knew that the speed of light is  $3 \times 10^8$  metres per second. This allows the universe to expand in all directions by twelve million miles each minute. When we sit still we travel at nearly two million miles an hour. When we look at the closest star to the sun, we look back to four years in the past. When we look as far as we can, really squint, we look at what things were like 13.7 billion years ago. marshmallows can show you this.

You can hardly see an inch of the wall in the physics room. Every little segment is covered with old, faded calendar pictures, of what used to be the newest photographs of the universe. To me, they look like paintings. Because we needed a microwave, we moved downstairs to the food technology room. We sat on the tables, and no one washed their hands. A group of brown-haired girls, focussed only on the weekend. Everyone else was loud and bubbly and energetic,

from the thought of sugar alone. There were six microwaves in the classroom, and our microwave was just a small white box with a rotating plate for cooking on, just like all the others. We dismantled the inside, because without the spiraling plate a microwave is useless.

First we had to put all of the marshmallows on a plate. I never touch marshmallows because the powder on the outside makes me shiver. My physics teacher did that for us. Because we were a class of girls, everyone fussed over the placement of pink and white. No area could be too densely populated by one colour, and in the end it looked like a wedding cake, with layers of marshmallows. Apparently though, that cannot allow us to show the speed of light and so we ate the top few rows. We then put the plate in the microwave and cooked for twenty seconds. The marshmallows puffed up, close to explosion, and then sunk into themselves. We took the plate out, and there were still some marshmallows still uncooked. This is why a microwave spins: the energy condenses in a few spots only and this is where the marshmallows had billowed up and stretched their skins as if they were about to shed them. It spins to avoid this happening. By measuring the distance between these puffs, we could calculate the speed of light. Much more important, though, was eating the melted marshmallow before it solidified. We scooped it up in biscuits and had competitions to see who could eat it without spreading it all around their mouths. The teacher did all the work.

It would have been nice to walk out of that class with a pocketful of marshmallows, and never go back. We calculated the speed of light as being much too fast, but it didn't matter. The bell rang, and then all of a sudden we didn't have to think of velocities or thermal physics or wavelengths. We rapidly left the classroom, and while we did the universe expanded another twelve million miles.

*In 2009 Rosie Bolderstone was a Yr 12 student at St Margaret's College.*

## **Tessa E Forde: 'Pineapple Lumps'**

We had been burning our problems. Down by the wharf where the male prostitutes find work and the p dealers stand by trees. Well that's what mum said anyway. We had been burning our problems, wishing that sometimes life could slow down for a while and let us catch our breath, unravel our thoughts, and put our hearts back in place. We had been hurting for a while. It was satisfying to watch the folded pieces of refill curl at the edges and flutter in the wind, smelling of smoke, sticking fast to our clothes and stinging our eyes. Tears on top of the ones we already had. We watched each piece till it landed in the water, till it sunk. And we felt lighter with every one. We didn't really say much. There wasn't much to be said. And as the sun went down we figured it was time to leave. We waved goodbye the p dealers by the trees and the male prostitutes waved back.

We didn't have much luck at first. Down at the park. The tide was out and the mud rose thick to our ankles. The wind would blow out the lighter and my holey shoes fixed with duct tape were no good in the forming pools. We sat barefoot in the overgrown grass for a while, eating pineapple lumps and watching the sky. -We should paint it one day, we should paint the sky- A new shade of blue or green or maybe even purple. We all agreed and sat in awe of the moon hanging low in the blue and the sun still fighting the clouds. -We should paint it like that see. With the moon. - We smiled, because the sun had been shining, and while we had all our problems written on ripped pieces of refill in our pockets, the sun was something to smile about.

We didn't know whether or not to give up at that point, with a failing lighter, a tide creeping further away and the sky darkening, home was the better option. But we knew it needed to be done, to move on, to forget and forgive. We said that again and again in our heads, to make sure it stayed there, branded in front of our eyes. -Forget and forgive- The pineapple lumps tasted sad, of sick family and instability of broken hearts and broken homes but we ate them anyway. We didn't have to talk if our mouths were full. Weaving our way through ferns and twisted trees, their gnarled arms snagging our clothes as we walked by.

The policeman in charge of minding the wharf issued tickets while we slipped round the back of the yellow boat shed. We let the cold air stroke our bare arms and crouched close to the edge. The blood from the oyster cuts fought through white holes in our skin and dribbled down our wrists. But we took no notice. The lighter worked better here and that was all we needed. The first few burned slowly, breathing gently to keep them alight, the embers burning our fingertips black. It didn't take long though. The sun was sinking and this was when we waved goodbye to our seedy friends. We walked home in silence. Awkward tears and avoiding eye contact. The path seemed longer, the trees more sinister in the shadows. We took turns with the pineapple lumps. This time, they tasted of smoke.

*In 2009 Tessa E. Forde was a Yr 12 student at Northcote College.*

## **Kya Lal: 'For the Hip-hoppers'**

We speak colloquially

In rap  
Rhythm  
And rhyme

Clothes –  
Two sizes too big

Gangster  
Thug  
Gang banger  
Wannabe

Yet,  
We dance in a world  
Of angels and men

We soar the  
concrete jungles  
Glide through the soundtrack  
of our lives

With skinned knuckles  
Bruised egos  
And new kicks

Our feet barely touch  
The ground

We don't play  
Cops and Robbers  
Or Al Capone

We are dancers  
We dance with the divine

*In 2009 Kya Lal was a Yr 13 student at St Cuthbert's College.*

## **Holly Rabone: 'Oh for the love of cats'**

It is hard to love something  
that takes all  
and gives

a mere flick of the head,  
a one eyed glance,  
a tail swish.

They don't purr because you pat,  
you pat because they purr.

And so I would dare to suggest:  
The Egyptians ruined everything.  
Mortality is cheap  
when you have nine lives.

The master of the servant  
serves the servant.

Oh fool, this is madness.

You can't own a cat.  
God bless the cat lover  
whose pet is the master of the universe.

*In 2009 Holly Rabone was a Yr 13 student at St Cuthbert's College.*

## Lydia Warren: 'Jaywalks and Lollipops'

There is something familiar about the face of the checkout boy. His features speak of smiles and lollipops. Earlier, the man in front of me in the queue snuck a lollipop off the confectionary rack while his kid wasn't looking. It's in front of the milk now, first in line to be checked through. Funny. The operator has watched the whole lollipop episode without showing even a glint of tooth. Silent disapproval is sitting in his mouth, ready to roll out as soon as the lips slacken their grip.

Jarred stopped at the front gate of the school and started to dance the moves he'd learnt from a music video on T.V. *I smiled shyly. I never knew how to react when he spontaneously danced like that. He clutched my arms and started dancing again. In his imaginary world I was dancing too. Standing there dragging my reluctant arms into Jarred's comic poses, I wondered why he even bothered to teach me. By now he surely knew I'd have them forgotten to perfection by the next day. Jarred never gave up.*

The kid is sucking on his lollipop. What a treat.

*"Let's go to the dairy". I'd never been to the dairy. "You'll rot your teeth if you eat too many sweets", Mum would have said if I'd dared to ask. I looked at Jarred "I'm not allowed". "I can't go by myself. Come on Anna. I'll buy you a lolly. There's these new lollipops with chewing gum in the middle. You'll love them." Jarred had a way of making naughty things sound so right. And exiting. "I guess Mum doesn't have to know." Jarred started the Lady Gaga dance.*

"Just this?" The words are pinched. "Yes thankyou". What happened to the days when you could feel happy about buying a chocolate bar? I forgot to look at the name on his tag.

*"Do you like it?"*

*"Yeah. Thanks, Jarred."*

*"No problem. They're only ten cents. Can you believe it? You get a lollipop and chewing gum. They should be like, at least 50 cents."*

*"It's yum."*

*"Just wait till you get to the chewing gum! That's the best bit. Aaah."*

*"Your tongue's blue."*

*"So?"*

*"So mine will be too. Mum'll see."*

*"No she won't. Just keep your mouth closed." Jarred bent his tongue way out. I laughed. He looked like he'd walked straight out of a cartoon. "Can you touch your nose?" I tried. "Wow! That's cool. Almost. I can't go anywhere near that high." He tried again. I wondered how I would manage to hide the blue when I got home.*

I tear the wrapper off the chocolate bar. Damn. Those girls are blocking the bin. Can't hide the evidence. It will have to be the pocket for now. The operator is looking this way. Or maybe into space, it's hard to tell. He has nobody to serve right now.

*"Let's jaywalk". I imagined a jaywalk to be a kind of dance. No, I thought. No, please lets not jaywalk. But Jarred was heading for the road side, sucking hard on his lollipop as he looked right left right really fast. Some crazy dance. "Now!" He ran into the road dodging cars and I followed. I quite liked this new game. It got my heart pumping even faster than the rebellious*

*lollipop. When we safely reached the verge on the other side, we grinned. He stopped "Wait. I just need to tie my lace." He popped his lollipop back in his mouth.*

This is the place where we jaywalked. It's got a refuge island now.

*Jarred leapt up. "Shit!"*

*"What?"*

*"It's a cop car. Jaywalking's illegal." We ran the rest of the way to my house, Jarred looking over his shoulder to make sure the cops hadn't noticed us. I stuck the lollipop in my pocket. "But you haven't got to the gum yet."*

*"I'll finish it later." I made for the door. "Alright. Tell me what you think. And wait. Don't tell anyone about the jaywalking yeah?"*

*In 2009 Ldyia Warren was a Yr 13 student at Northcote College.*