



**Brenda Strathern “Late Bloomers” Writing Prize  
Recipients 2001-2017 with jury comments**

**2017 Laura Nicol for *Watershed***

“*Watershed*, a novel excerpt filled with resonance and beautiful language, presents the sharply-etched story of Flora, an intelligent disgruntled 13-year-old, hauled, along with her three younger siblings, into the dystopian dreams of her embarrassing hippy step-dad and mom. Every sentence thrills as setting and suspense ably intermingle and Flora’s already-tenuous world reels deeper into chaos.”

“With a sharp eye for description and effective use of similes, the author offers the reader a gracefully written account of a dysfunctional family where the father – who thinks most city dwellers are unenlightened – sets out to create his own society in a ghost town where he expects the few remaining residents to share his idiosyncratic view of the world.”

**2016 First Place: Patti Edgar for *Personal Flotation Devices***

“This story provided an interesting and complex portrayal of mother-daughter relationships. With crisp writing infused with both humour and heartbreak, this author pulled me in, wanting to know what would happen to the characters after the story had ended. The author showed a strong ability to convey characters and emotions subtly, revealing through actions and dialogue, letting the reader draw their own conclusions.”

“With economy of words, careful attention to the smallest of details, and vivid descriptive passages, this writer effectively captures the hopes and dreams of a pregnant 19-year-old who looks forward to escaping to something better after spending her life on a float home moored to a small island off the West Coast. The writer seamlessly weaves into the story a compelling portrayal of the lingering tension between the 19-year-old and the flaky mother who abandoned her as a child.” [www.pattiedgar.ca](http://www.pattiedgar.ca)

**2016 Second Place: Lila Z. Rose for *Shooting Under the Influence***

“This author showed a willingness and capacity to play with the elements of fiction, providing a fresh and hilarious look at pop-culture through a non-traditional narrator. The story read like a cross between a reality TV show and magic realism - a refreshing read!”

“A pill-addicted Cupid goes to Malibu on Valentine's Day to crash a wedding and spread love all round. A clever, amusing, energetically written and highly imaginative merging of classical mythology with contemporary pop culture.” [www.lilazrose.com](http://www.lilazrose.com)

**2016 Third Place: Barry Thorson for *Helden’s Cascade***

“While stories about religion and life in the priesthood often fall into cliché, this author showed a willingness to delve into perhaps uncomfortable subjects in fresh, unapologetic, and novel ways. The Catholic Church’s views on sexual dreams, aggression, vices, money, and astronomy are all interesting fodder for a novel, especially one, like this in which the writing is strong. Certainly, this excerpt left me, the reader, wanting more.”

“The forbidden pleasures of the monastic life – self-gratification and material possessions – are explored with empathy and avoidance of moral judgments in this engaging piece about the residents of a Franciscan retreat centre. A rare look into the life of a sheltered community that remains inaccessible to most of us.”

**2016 Honourable Mention: Rosemary Bussi for *Bleets***

“This excerpt showed the writer’s potential to experiment with structure, form, language, and character. The author shows an awareness of the basic concepts of creative writing and both a willingness and a capacity to subvert them for the story’s purpose.”

“With a few deft strokes, the writer brings us an eclectic and impressionistic collection of memories from childhood, adulthood and old age with a psychologist's insight and a poet's command of language.”

**2015 First Place: Douglas McCormick for *Gift of Mercy***

“This excerpt is very polished in terms of language and is the work of a writer who is aware of the power of specific detail – there is definitely a sense of craft and meticulousness in this work. The writer’s skill is further reflected in the story’s pacing which draws the reader in immediately. As a judge I was particularly impressed by this writer’s ability to subtly and sensitively portray a foreign setting and culture without relying on excessive explanation. This writing has terrific potential.

This was an engaging story that demonstrates how this author can play with language and experiment with other elements of fiction, such as time and structure. The language was polished and the setting detail was rich. The story started with immediate drama and tension and engaged me as a reader; the tension was then drawn out, compelling me to read more. I look forward to reading more from this author!”

[www.dougmccormick.ca](http://www.dougmccormick.ca)

**2015 Second Place: Heidi Grogan for *The Shape of a Boy***

“This excerpt does a very fine job of marrying form and content in a way that is unusual, unpredictable, and refreshing.”

“The unusual, experimental use of "hunger" as the narrator drew me in and allowed for an interesting angle on a difficult, but societally relevant subject matter that needs more attention - anorexia in males and the impact of an eating disorder on families.”

**2015 Third Place: Erin Butler for *The Half-Life of Desire***

“The characters in this novel excerpt are sharply rendered as they grapple with their various situations, and the setting is compelling and immediate.”

“The tension and urgency of the story drew me in, as did the interesting relationship dynamics between the narrator and her two male friends, along with the narrator and her complex family situation.”

**2015 Third Place: Jacqueline Bell for *Small Measures of Mercy***

“This work experiments with chronology and form in a way that is distinctive and engrossing. Flitting back and forth between memory and present day was an interesting choice that drew out the tension as to what really happened to the narrator, letting the reader discover details along with her. The author told the story with rich details about the church setting and its characters.”

**2014 Jennifer Myer for *Girl Farm***

“It was clear that the author is aware of the different ways to push the boundaries in fiction and creatively explored genre, subject matter, and point of view (employing both first and third points of view for different characters within the same novel). The willingness to take risks is a good sign in terms of this writer's potential. Both primary characters were round and interesting, and I wanted to know how they would intersect. This piece used vivid sensory details, such as the rotting smell of decaying produce, the bloodied sheets, the infant with her arm "poked forward, then up in a furious salute," the skin sticky with birth fluid. The tension was well maintained through switching point of view just as Homer steals the infant.”

**2013 Kat Main for “Odin’s Girls” and “Hocus Pocus” from a novel in progress titled *The Hanged Man***

“The rich characterization, authentic dialogue, interwoven humour and pain, and sensory details revealed a great deal of potential from this author. The two excerpts complimented each other well, and the narrator's unique point of view and brutal honesty made her both relatable and human. I look forward to reading more from this author.”

**2012 Rea Tarvydas for *21:23***

“This story plunges the reader into a wholly unusual and surprising barroom world of midnight confessions and scrap currency. The story is both risky and darkly humorous. It is unquestionably original. It is both topsy and turvy. Conversational and confident. Yes, these qualities make for an unconventional story, but it is a memorable one. And that is why I look forward to reading the rest of this tale, in its entirety, in book form. Congratulations to the author, that blank face at the end of the bar, whoever you are, and thank you for sending it to this contest. [www.reatarvydas.com](http://www.reatarvydas.com)

***Published in the story collection, “How to Pick up a Maid in Statue Square,” Thistledown Press***

**2011 Maria (Marika) Smythe for *Little Mother Goose***

“A wonderfully subtle and yet energetic story that unfolds the off-balance world of children and their parents. The writing is fresh and evocative with a restrained pitch that is nevertheless replete with suggestion and ominous surmise. This is a remarkably incisive writer who knows the lineaments of language and dialogue, character and its disposition.”

**2010 Marika Deliyannides for *Scar Tissue***

“Replete with keenly observed details and a gentle narrative thrust, this is a skillfully told story about an adult daughter coming home to help her parents move into a seniors’ lodge. Long-buried skeletons topple out of the closet as the woman recalls some of the often painful and guilty memories of her childhood with a younger sister from whom she is now estranged, and an old-country father with a heavy accent who used to make her feel embarrassed when she was among friends. The specificity of details in this piece draw the reader in to a warm and quirky world that is full of surprises.”

[www.marikadeliyannides.com](http://www.marikadeliyannides.com)

***Published as Bitter Lake, Porcupine’s Quill Press, 2014***

**2009 Rita Sirignano for *RATS***

“With clever and imaginative digressions, and deft touches of humour, the author takes the reader on a daydreamy nostalgia ride back and forth from the atmosphere of mild exasperation and sense of isolation that define the narrator's current domestic life to a time when her life in the big city was enriched by art, music, highly-charged emotions, and the quest for lasting love. Particularly amusing are the author's images of an Inuit fisherman composing an essay about the blues roots of the Rolling Stones, and the narrator's future husband presuming to correct the grammar in a Dylan song title. At the end of the chapter, the reader wants to find out more about the lover she lost and the reasons she settled for a self-absorbed pedant.”

**2008 Athene Evans for *Saturday Dinners***

“This story presents a handful of vivid and interesting characters negotiating alliances across the dinner table. The author individuates the numerous voices well, presenting the characters chiefly through dialogue with understated skill. When the Playgirl loving grandmother squares off against her husband for loving National Geographic the result is witty exasperating, and, ultimately, credible.”

**2007 Elaine Morin for *Castration Lessons* short story**

“The final selection was ultimately chosen because of the varied and dynamic writing style, layered storyline and immersive detail. The author demonstrated a strong command of both language and narrative. Rich landscapes, both geographical and emotional, interweave in rare honesty and quiet, but potent beauty. The characters and the story's vivid, authentic details of place linger. This is a writer of genuine promise who

creates a rich and disconcerting tension between belonging and dislocation, and who handles rural and urban details with equal skill. The work shows someone with already significant mastery of her craft.”

**2006 Christopher Ratcliffe for *Kvas* excerpt from a novel in progress**

“This year’s winning story excelled by plunging the judges into its ruined, semi-urban landscape where defamiliarized detail yielded tragic lovable characters slipping into their idiosyncratic fantasies in an attempt to usurp the grip of monotony on their lives. This entry captured the convoluted nature of desperation and the minimalism of hope with humour and sophistication. While there were other strong entries, and while no entry was without its shortcomings, this story’s emotional impact was unmatched. We ultimately felt that this story encapsulated the spirit of the Late Bloomer’s Award.”

**2005 Jane Chamberlin Grove for her submission *Tramontane***

*Tramontane* offers a complex and rich character who wryly makes her way through a narrative filled with unusual and intriguing situations. The Judges were impressed by the compelling voice this writer presents and the strong love of language demonstrated in these sections.

**2004 Kari Strutt for *Birdied***

*Birdied* showcases a skillfully crafted comic voice that treats the grave subject of infertility with characterization while juxtaposing the game of golf with the difficulties of the body produces a fiction that is as fresh and disarming as a hole-in-one.

**2003 Lucille Gnanasihamany for *Nothing Personal***

“*Nothing Personal* is a wonderful short story encompassing the unraveling complications of family dynamics. The story skillfully yet subtly uncovers how one’s own frustrations and prejudices erode a family unit, and ostracize the holder of such feelings from those central to his life. The strength of the story lies in the fact that the author resolves these intricacies neither easily nor neatly, thus drawing the reader into unnerving complicity.”

**2002 Fran Kimmel**

“The quirky and the domestic collide in this year’s Late Bloomer’s fiction winner. Rather than succumbing to the neatness of closure, Fran Kimmel defies predictability, celebrating the unexpected, the unusual, the murkiness of the everyday. Her writing cuts through the mundane, invites a complicity with betrayal. Her characters struggle in shallow waters, all the while urging readers to plunge head-first into the deep end.”

[www.frankimmel.ca](http://www.frankimmel.ca)

*Published The Shore Girl, NeWest Press*

**2001 Rona Altrows**

“Rona Altrows writes about women with uncommon grace and honesty. In the tradition of Grace Paley, Altrows’ stories capture deep philosophical issues within everyday physical details and events, often with a wry astuteness that made me want to laugh and cry and sit down with these people for a talk. No matter what her circumstance in life, each character in these stories shines with the dignity and beauty that come with compassionate observation. In a style that is at once spare and elegant, oral and physically palpable, Altrows pens stories that resonate far beyond the page.” Roberta Rees

*Published A Run on Hose, Key In Lock, The River Throws a Tantrum, a children’s picture chapbook, illustrated by Sarah-Joy Goode, Shy, an anthology of essays and poetry, edited with Naomi K. Lewis.* [www.ronaaltrows.com](http://www.ronaaltrows.com)