



Embargoed until 3am, 22 July 2011

Talented teen wins national poetry award

Talented teenager Eden Tautali has won the National Schools Poetry Award for 2011 with a personal account of grief.



The Year 13 student at Auckland's St Cuthbert's College, has won the award with her poem *Nan*, addressing the death of her Nan and the experience of speaking at her funeral.

Eden, who is of Māori and Samoan descent, was one of 10 finalists in the poetry competition for Year 12 and 13 secondary school students, organised by New Zealand's oldest and most prestigious creative writing programme, the International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML) at Victoria University.

Judge and current New Zealand Poet Laureate, Cilla McQueen says while the poem (printed below) confronts loss and regret, it also has the comfort of warm memories.

"*Nan* is a difficult, honest admission of grief, written in restrained, effective language," says McQueen.

"I looked for imagination, a glimpse of a world beyond the poem, some engagement with contemporary life, and especially for that original spark at the heart of the finished work. Eden's poem was a standout, with its haunting image of grief whispering 'to a bent microphone'."

Eden is also a talented singer and songwriter who in May won the inaugural Matariki songwriting competition for Auckland secondary school students.

Entries for the poetry competition came from senior secondary students all over New Zealand. McQueen says their words gave her insights into a whole generation—"their feelings, relationships with people and with language, the ways they see the world—as only poetry can".

Eden and the nine other finalists will attend a one day poetry masterclass at the International Institute of Modern Letters. In addition, Eden will receive \$500 cash, as well as \$500 for her school library. She will also have her poem displayed on posters in towns and cities throughout New Zealand.

The poetry masterclass is led by some of New Zealand's most distinguished writers: the coordinator is current Victoria University Teaching Fellow, Bernadette Hall, with well-known poets Jenny Bornholdt and James Brown as workshop guests.

The National Schools Poetry Award has been providing a forum for young writers since 2003. Creative New Zealand has provided major support for the Award for 2011, along with The

New Zealand Book Council, the New Zealand Society of Authors, the Bolton Hotel, Unity Books (Wellington), and the literary journals *Landfall* and *Sport*.

Friday 22 July is National Poetry Day.

A dedicated website for all the shortlisted poets has been built by the communication and design agency Neogine. All the shortlisted poems and the judge's report can be read at <http://schoolspoetryaward.co.nz/> (this will not be available until Friday morning).

For further information, contact Bill Manhire on (04) 463 6808, mobile 027 501 8019 or email bill.manhire@vuw.ac.nz.

Nan

*At the funeral
we sang beneath
high-beamed ceilings
in yellow light filtered
through a stained glass jesus.
I whispered to a bent microphone
of fish bones and sick days
of hot cocoa rice and
early morning mutterings of prayer
and of you.
But when I stood above you
eyes cast down
fixed on your cold cheek
I couldn't bring myself to
touch you.*