



# imprint

2011

**Writing Award Winners**

**‘5’**

# FIRST PRIZE

## **5 HOURS IN NO-MAN'S-LAND** by **Martin Smith**

British trench line, Artois, France, December 1915

11.30am

The assault from the German trenches is over. They only sent about thirty or so troops over the top; in broad daylight too. It took us about thirty seconds to end it. I think I killed three of them but I can't be sure. As a result, there is a good atmosphere in our trench. We are soon given a measure of whisky each and we all sit in silence, cigarettes in hand, with the taste of whisky still happy in our mouths. This is a rare moment.

We hear a voice from no-mans-land, a German voice. We panic for the briefest of moments, before getting back into position. Our lookout tells us there is no movement, and we all stick our heads above the trench-top to see for ourselves. We hear the voice again. It's definitely German, but there's still no movement.

Word quickly spreads that there is a German still alive, trapped in the rolls of barbed wire. All that's moving is his arm, which he tries to raise, but he can't raise it above his head. He's a bloody mess. There's no hope of the Germans saving him before darkness falls: and that's five hours away, poor bastard.

I ask if we should shoot him dead but the order is to let him die, no bullets are to be wasted.

Nothing comes from the German trenches: no voices, no shots. We are free to stand and watch; a sad and sorrowful excuse for sport, enlightened only a little with merciless gallows humour.

2.00pm

He has stopped moving, but is still alive. We hear a barely discernable German cry of 'mutter' . We hear it a few times. We know this means 'mother' and we no longer smile. Not one of us.

Some of us are unsettled and it's all I can do to stop myself standing up and shooting him dead. I fear the anger from the others, calls of cowardice, but I can't bear this much longer.

4.30pm

He has been out there for five hours now and I wonder if anyone else, like me, is on the brink of breakdown. It seems like no-one has spoken for hours, although in truth it is probably only minutes, and we can hear every groan, utterance and sob from the German soldier, dying less than a hundred yards from us. I pray to Christ he would shut up, but we are both forsaken. When I cover my ears I can hear him. When I close my eyes I can see him. There is no escape.

All care and self-consciousness leaves me as I climb up the trench wall and fire 5 rounds into him. He is now dead; and free. Tears stream from my eyes, and I wipe them away before climbing back down to silence and palpable relief. The German's voice still rings in my ears.

*Biography:*

*Besides cooking and cinema, I love reading books but have never written anything before. Ever. I thought it would be easy but writing 500 words was harder than I expected. My favourite books are Wuthering Heights, Treasure Island, Sunset Song and Captain Corelli's Mandolin.*

# RUNNER-UP

## BEING FLORA

by Linda Brown

Flora was George. She galloped through the machair down to the beach, long hair streaming behind her like copper ribbons in the brisk Atlantic westerly.

“Come on, Julian...Dick! Hurry up, Anne!” she yelled over her shoulder.

Reaching the pristine white sands, she halted, stooping to lovingly stroke the air by her right leg. “Good boy, Timmy.” A glint on the horizon dazzled her. “Ah-ha!” Flora made binoculars with her hands and squinted across the cobalt sea, focusing on a faraway fishing boat. “It’s the smugglers ship! Quick, to Demon’s Rocks...we’ll hunt for the hidden treasure!” She took off across the sand, wellington boots chaffing her bare calves, checked pinafore ballooning in the wind. Her invisible friends raced behind her. “Being George” was Flora’s favourite game.

Generous Auntie-Morag-with-the-good-job-in-Glasgow posted the ‘Famous Five’ books to the island. The monthly arrival of brown paper parcels, weather and MacBrayne’s ferries permitting, was Flora’s salvation. Over long, dark winter nights, while relentless wind and rain battered the croft, Flora curled up beside the crimson glow of the peat fire, book in hand, spellbound. Transported to the Five’s world, captivated by their daring escapades, she yearned to be George, the gang’s feisty, headstrong tomboy.

Flora clambered over kelp covered rocks, wading through rock pools searching for gold coins and finding shells.

“To the Mysterious Castle, everyone! We’ll find treasure there...!” she bellowed, running to the remains of a long abandoned blackhouse, crumbling beyond the dunes. In Flora’s fertile imagination this was a ruined castle or mansion, whilst the machair was the moors the Five hiked and camped and a rotting, beached dinghy was a shipwreck the Five explored.

Flora and her imaginary companions scoured the dry-stone ruins and long grasses. But no secret hoard... or kidnapped child... or sinister spy was unearthed. She flopped onto a tumbledown wall and stared out to sea.

Enid Blyton's death had been reported in the Herald days after Flora finished her last book. The 'Famous Five' would adventure no more. Flora missed them.

The tide had turned; ivory crested waves receded from wet sand. Flora's stomach growled. It had to be well past noon... time for dinner. "Home for ham sandwiches and lashings of ginger beer!" she cried.

Being Flora, she was late.

"At last! Your soup's out..." Flora's mother stood waiting at the croft door, wiping her hands on her wraparound apron. "Oh...and Postie's been! *Another* parcel from Auntie Morag! My, how she spoils you..."

The package sat on the kitchen table alongside her bowl of broth. Her hands trembled as she ripped its paper open. Please could it be one final, long lost 'Famous Five'?

A girl with copper coloured hair, not unlike Flora's, adorned the dust-jacket. Eager eyes devoured the title. 'The Secret of the Old Clock' ...hmmm."

Intrigued, she opened the book, flicking to chapter one. "Interesting..." she murmured.

And so, Flora MacLeod was introduced to Nancy Drew, Girl Detective...and a new era dawned.

### Biography:

*I'm a busy mum of three who enjoys reading, genealogy and writing in my free time and I am a member of the Irvine Valley Writers Group. Like Flora, in my story, my passion for books began many years ago with 'The Famous Five' and hasn't waned yet.*

# RUNNER-UP

## FIRST DAY

by Frances Smith

Peter had made an enemy. It was his first day at school. He was squashed into one half of a double desk and his neighbour was a small blond boy with clear blue eyes. Mrs McAllister, the teacher, had them stand up and say their names, so he knew his neighbour was called Douglas. In front of him, Mary had a long brown pigtail hanging halfway down her back. There were so many children in the class Peter was sure he'd never get to know them all. The teacher had slotted cards into a wooden board, explaining that it said: Wednesday, 17th August, 1955. They had been told to open their desks and take out crayons. As Peter carefully lowered the lid Douglas leaned over and slammed it shut. Peter's right hand had still been inside and the lid hit his wrist with a crack. He howled. Mrs McAllister came over and Peter sobbed out what had happened. Douglas, eyes wide, said "That's a big fib." Mrs McAllister told Peter to hush and get on with his drawing.

At playtime Peter hovered on the periphery of a group of boys. Douglas emerged from the crowd like a bullock from a holding pen, grabbed Peter by his blazer lapels and pulled him close. "Y'er a tell-tale specky four-eyes. Clype on me again, and I'll hit you hard," he said, loosening his grip so suddenly that Peter fell over.

Back in class Peter didn't look at Douglas and concentrated on threading his needle with twine. Douglas stretched across Peter's desk and yanked Mary's pigtail. Mary squealed and turned, glaring at Peter. Mrs McAllister came bustling over and Peter spent the next half hour standing in a corner. He tried hard not to cry. It was all so different from the day before which had been his fifth birthday. They'd had balloons and cake and his Granny had been there. He'd opened his big present from Mum and Dad, thrilled to see a train set. They'd sung "Happy Birthday" and Mum had talked about how he was a big boy of five and nearly a schoolboy. She'd told him he'd love school and make lots of friends. Remembering this made him weep. Tears dripped from his glasses and trickled down his plump red cheeks. Exasperated, Mrs McAllister let him return to his seat to suffer Mary's hostile glances and Douglas's smirk.

Peter's mother waited for him at the gate. She was worried. His Dad had said she'd babied him too much. She hoped he'd settled and made friends. The bell rang and a crowd of little people burst out of the main doorway. Trailing at the end was Peter, mouth down-turned, shirt tail hanging out, socks stretched to bursting point round his calves. She grasped his hand, smiling.

"Did you have a good day, Sweetheart?"

"No."

"Oh, surely you had some fun?"

"How long do I have to go to school for?"

"Until you're fifteen – like John next door."

Peter lowered his head and wept again.

#### Biography:

*For as long as I can remember literature has been an essential element in my life. In my teens I dabbled in writing poetry but stopped when further education and work took over my life. I joined a writers' club in 2000 and this has encouraged me to write.*

# RUNNER-UP

## CHERRY STONES

by Maggie Bolton

Georgia sat on the swing-seat in her sister's garden and listened to the sounds around her; the soothing mumbling of bees and the caw-cawing of rooks in the high branches. She lay back, swinging gently and felt the tension ease just a little. Fran was so lucky; poor as a church mouse but quite happy. Ironic really.

The canopy above her was faded and frayed and the seat cushions had that faint, musty smell that comes from spending too many winters in the garden shed. Her husband James would wrinkle his aristocratic nose in distaste. *Their* garden furniture was replaced as soon as the slightest signs of wear were detected. James would have binned this old but comfortable seat years ago. Georgia found she was gritting her teeth. Relax, she told herself.

'Hey, Lazy-bones!' said her sister Fran cheerfully, 'See what I've been doing while you were snoozing. Not many left, I'm afraid; the birds and squirrels ate most of them.'

The small basket she held out contained cherries, plump, ruby-red and juicily tempting.

Georgia stared at them unspeaking.

'What's up? I thought you liked cherries; you always used to,' Fran said, flopping down beside her and popping a large cherry into her mouth. 'We used to count the stones, remember? Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, begger-man, thief. You always got *rich man* and I somehow ended up with *begger-man*, though I can't think how. We may not have had much, but Mam was always scrupulously fair about sharing stuff out. Maybe I pinched one of yours.'

'No you didn't,' said Georgia, 'I'd sometimes give you some of mine.'

She looked a little shame-faced. 'You thought I was being kind,' she said, 'But I wasn't really.'

'Sorry, you've lost me,' Fran said.

'When Mam shared them out, it would generally work out to about six each. But *five*, you see, was the magic number. Five was *rich* man! I thought being poor was just the worst thing... seeing Mam and Dad scrimping and saving, only just managing to get by. None of that for me, I thought...oh no! Marry a *rich* man; that was the plan - tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, *rich* man. So I gave you my extra cherries.'

'Thanks very much,' said Fran, 'Actually, my mind is just having a bit of a boggle here. I can't believe you would set such store by a stupid kid's game.'

'Ah, but the cherry stones got it right didn't they?' Georgia said, 'I certainly got my rich man. Unfortunately he turned out to be a total shit - the cherry stones didn't tell me that bit - and you, well...'

'Excuse me!' said Fran indignantly, 'We may be going through a rough patch, but we haven't quite resorted to begging yet..... unless you count pleading with the bank-manager to give us a bit of lee-way on the loan.' She paused. 'I suppose that comes pretty close.'

Georgia nodded sagely.

'Oh, eat your cherries!' Fran said.'

### Biography:

*Originally from Lancashire, I have lived in Kilmaurs with my husband John and a succession of assorted animals (now down to one much-loved dog) for the past eighteen years. Interests include writing (member of Ayr Writers' Club) art, (exhibit locally from time to time), and grubbing about in the garden.*

# RUNNER-UP

## **A WALK WITH MY FATHER** **by Alexander Frew**

I never said Goodbye to my father.

Oh I said 'cheerio' when I left the hospital the way you do when you expect to be visiting next day. He lay there, white and wan, weakened by the pneumonia that had brought him in there. He managed a little smile. He even waggled the fingers of his right hand at me.

He was rallying, I thought. Then the hospital called me at seven in the morning, a time when you don't really expect to get a call.

"Is that Mr Ryan?" They told me that he had slipped away during the night. I hadn't been there to say: "David's here, dad, I love you, goodbye."

As time went on a terrible condition crept over me.

Insomnia.

For five nights the process was always the same. I would go to bed and wait for sleep to come. But instead of falling over naturally thoughts of father whirled around my head, my mind went over our last parting, and how I would never see him again. But on the fifth night I so exhausted I had to sleep.

Then it was dreamtime.

What dreams I'd had since losing dad seemed to involve falling, choking, or being trapped in a place I could not get out of while experiencing a sense of mounting panic.

This one was different.

Dad was there, looking as he always did in that green body-warmer and those brown corduroy trousers and stout walking shoes. He was smiling at me and Midge our old dog was at his side and gave me a welcome bark. As we walked the long trail over the fields towards the local woods we did not talk much father and me. It was what seemed like a beautiful spring morning. I asked him how he was, an absurd thing to say.

“I’m fine,” he told me.

Then we reached the edge of the woods. I could hear the birds chirping and smell the sharp freshness of the pine needles. Dad turned to me, and just as he would have in real life, because he was not a demonstrative man, he took and shook my hand, his own rough from a lifetime of hard work.

“Goodbye David,” he said, “I’m proud of you son.”

“I love you dad, goodbye,” I whispered, and watched until his stocky form was lost amid the shadows of the trees.

When I woke up my pillow was damp with tears of sadness and happiness mixed together. From that moment on my insomnia lessened until it was wholly gone and I could sleep normally again.

Now when I think of my dad I remember all our good times together, our chats, cycles and walks and how we consoled each other when we lost mum such a long time ago. Then I remember our dream parting and realise that somehow, in a place where time and space do not exist, as we know them, we found a way to say our last goodbyes.

#### Biography:

*I am a care worker in South Ayrshire. I play music but I also write songs and poems. In addition I attend Poems and Pints in Glasgow at Sammy Dows where I perform my latest works. With Andrew Fleming an album was produced called ‘Songs from the West Coast’ and we are currently working on another.*

## **THE KEY**

**by Zoë Strachan**

Let me tell you about a key. Let's go back to the thirtieth of April, nineteen hundred and one. It's a Tuesday, two thirty in the afternoon, a clear day but snell. Hundreds of people line Elmbank. A photographer captures the scene. We don't know his name, nor that of the small boy in the foreground whose stare skips a century to meet our eyes. The boy ignores the babble of voices behind him, the anticipation, the laughter and the frowns. It's the first time he's seen a camera, and he'd quite like to know more about the contraption. Meanwhile, in a leather box lined with blue velvet and silk, the key is nestling. Made by John Cameron and Son, jewellers of King Street, where it was inscribed for its new owner. Ornate, fashioned from brass, solid and satisfying to the touch. Mrs Dick will use it to open this impressive building, while her husband receives the freedom of the burgh. James Dick is rich and although it's threescore and ten since he scabbled in the dirt in Soulis Street he wants to leave a legacy to the town where he was born. His eyes are twinkling and he wears a pansy in his lapel. Provost Mackay returns his smile. This has taken years of coaxing, persuading. Art and literature uplift the soul, Mackay thinks, and surely it's a duty that the wealthy aid the poor. Not everyone agrees. A few grumbles are heard. Although the Public Library Act was extended to Scotland in eighteen fifty three there are still those that believe some doors should remain firmly closed. The more educated the working classes become, the harder they'll be to control. That's true, of course. This ornate brass key unlocks more than a door. That wee boy will discover that, when he crosses the threshold. He'll see engines and exotic insects and model ships and the fossils of dinosaurs. He'll walk between the jawbones of a whale. He'll follow the words on a page with his finger, mouthing along as he traverses oceans, battles pirates, unearths treasures. This key belongs to him as well. You have a copy too. It's in your hand right now. Invisible, yes, but close your eyes and concentrate and maybe you'll feel it, cool and weighty. It's there as you walk between the monkey puzzle trees, up the stone steps, across the mosaic floor and into the lending library. Run your fingers along the shelves, flick through the card file, burl the carousels of paperbacks. Slide a volume from a shelf, part the covers, breathe in. Turn the pages. Everything is here, waiting. Familiar things jostling alongside things you never knew. Whatever you want, you'll find it here. A journey to outer space, a voyage back in time? Imagination is the realm of possibility. Our entire culture is here. All between the pages of a book. This is yours. Your library, your words, your ideas. The key is in your hand. Open the door.