

Judges' Report

By David Evans, Lew Ford and David Atkins

This year's writing competition was the sixth in as many years for the Black Dog Institute. The topic was *Late Onset Depression: Finding Answers for Older People and their Carers* and was certainly a profound challenge for writers across Australia. Expressing oneself emotionally and physically on paper and conveying that message to a reader is extremely difficult to achieve; however the seventy-six entrants were of an exceptionally high quality and integrity. This made the prospect of judging the entries particularly hard but an enjoyable process.

The entries ranged from the profoundly personal and intense journeys of people who have endured late onset depression, to those perceptions of carers, friends and families. Some were beautifully written while others were passionately simple self-examinations of their conditional worlds. All of them were brave, insightful and resolute. It was a chance for us on the outside to open the door and gain an understanding of other people's lives and be astounded at their strength and resilience.

For these sensitive individual opinions the writing was at times thought provoking and acutely introspective. It made us, as judges, realise there were many different points of view and treatments. People wrote of their own strategies for dealing with late onset depression both publicly and privately. Some people sought help from health care professionals such as doctors, psychiatrists and counsellors, whilst medication, journals, exercise, diet and therapy played a major part in other people's lives.

Everybody spoke of the tyranny of isolation. That being engulfed by depression was heart wrenching and debilitating. However, one main theme emerged and that was the importance of remaining connected to your family, friends and community. They all spoke with one voice - there is hope; there is a way out and a place to heal. Late onset depression can become part of your life but it is not the end of your life, and for these extraordinary people finding that inner strength and help made a difference in their lives and gave them a future. It gave them their lives back.

Top Three [3] Winning Entries (see next page for Highly Commended)

1. Gillian Charlton (NSW): You'll Love it Once You're in

This is a beautifully written personal story of a mother from the perspective of her daughter who realises the issues of late onset depression and searches for answers.

2. Yvonne Saw (TAS): Going with the Flow

Poetic and insightful, it provides different reasons and different solutions for dealing with depression each day. A story full of hope and strength.

3. Wes Brierley (VIC): The Black Dog is Unluckier than Black Cats

A father and son battle to keep the black dog at bay and understand how it has changed their lives. The story based on first-hand experience observes and then suggests a way forward.

Top Seven [7] Highly Commended Entries (in alphabetical order)

1. Anonymous: Please Don't Pat the Dog

A story from the inside out and how invasive the black dog is and how it invades your life. A journey for a person dealing with depression.

2. Anonymous: There is the Human Soul

A very well written and insightful story about a depression, it is both deeply personal and emotionally intelligent. It talks about the healing process and allowing ourselves to overcome our past.

3. Norman Bennell: My Depression Emerged Suddenly

Recognising that depression can affect anyone in society irrespective of who they are and where they come from. It deals with depression after retirement.

4. Kerry Osborne: Bringing in the Light

"The most important lesson I've learnt is the power of love and the gift of being valued. As a family member, you can show your loved one that you still love them, despite everything. Nothing can take that away from you, or them."

5. Melita Smilovic: What is a Snow Flake

Looking beyond templates to understand the behaviours and experiences of individuals and their relationships is the core of this story.

6. Frances Toomeh : Reel the Line in

An exceptionally well-written story on how depression affects us physically and mentally. It encourages people to remain engaged with their community and family.

7. Jenny Towndrow: Late Onset Depression: Manifestations and Remedies

Three people meet over lunch to discuss their experiences with depression and how it has affected their lives and the methods they use to treat it.