**Cathryn DeVries, winner of the 2023 Stuart and Hadow Short Story Prize with her short story *Poetry*, tells AMITY SMITH about the importance of fostering a community and offers advice to emerging writers.**

*I think writing is my calling. Now that I’ve discovered it, I can’t not do it anymore. It just gives me so much joy. I want to spend all my time writing — Cathryn deVries*

**What inspired you to write *Poetry*?**

*It was a masterwork scene study that I was doing as a part of a writing course. The way it turned out was so wonderful so I thought “How could I tweak it a little to make it a short story?”.*

**What creative writing program was it?**

*The Story Grid Masterwork Scene Analysis course.*

**How did you hear about this course?**

*At the beginning of this year I finished as much of my story as I could and thought now was the time to find and foster a community on social media. Before this I wasn’t very connected to other writers. I went searching for more information on writing courses and seminars, which led me down a rabbit hole. I found a marketing course in the UK that referenced a five-leaf clover of genre that Story Grid does. The course became available and it felt like it was the right time.*

**Are you doing any more masterclasses in the future?**

*Yes, definitely. I am working with a development editor now who doubles as a book coach. This feels like study in a lot of ways. We are working through the first book of my novel scene by scene, analysing it and making each scene better. It is helping me learn what to look for in my writing.*

**Congratulations on winning the Stuart and Hadow Short Story Prize. How does it feel to have won?**

*It felt amazing. I couldn’t believe it. Even though I had received emails saying I was in the top three, I couldn’t believe it, mostly because it was a speculative fiction piece. I am also so new to writing. I’ve only started submitting to competitions this year. I was amazed. My heart was beating so fast when they made the announcement. It was just an incredible feeling and so great to be able to join in on the announcement via Zoom so I want to thank FAWWA for that opportunity.*

**What’s the best thing to come out of winning the 2023 Stuart and Hadow short story prize?**

*Probably the confidence it gave me in my ability as a writer. At first, I suffered from imposter syndrome — but it was great being able to share this on socials and have an online community to celebrate with. The promotion and being able to put this prize next to my name has also been great.*

**How did you hear about the Stuart and Hadow Short Story Prize and what made you decide to enter?**

*I heard about the competition through the Queensland Writers Centre, and Pen and Pixel newsletter. Pen and Pixel advertise various competitions throughout the country. I had* Poetry *pretty much ready to go at that point, as I had been working on it through my course with Story Grid. It also fitted the word count.*

**When you first started writing *Poetry* did you anticipate it to turn out how it has?**

*For Story Grid, the exercise we were given was to take a masterwork pattern scene and analyse the tropes in it, then use those tropes to create our original work with original characters and setting. Because we were working off a masterwork pattern scene we knew the tropes would work. So we knew the scene would work because it had worked in a masterwork. I knew how it would progress, but I was still surprised. My characters operated differently from how the characters in the original masterwork setting did. There was still a lot of individual creativity I could control.*

*I chose a section of my world, from the novel I am working on, but focused on a setting less explored in this work. I don’t mention the desert much in my novel, so I thought it would be interesting to choose this less-used setting and explore world-building ideas that I hadn’t flushed out to get excited for the trilogy that is coming.*

**It is so exciting to know we will see more writing from you. Do you have any dates for your book?**

*Nothing is set, but I will be pitching in 2024. If not, I will self-publish.*

**Is writing a career path you want to follow?**

*I think writing is my calling. Now that I’ve discovered it, I can’t not do it anymore. It just gives me so much joy. I want to spend all my time writing. What I do day-to-day is home-school my children, so this keeps me busy. Outside of this, writing feels like my calling.*

***Poetry* has such descriptive imagery and world-building. What tips can you give to aspiring writers to help them achieve the same success?**

*I started by over-describing things. Once I put the writing down and read it over it jumped out at me that it was too much.*

*I am inspired by Tolstoy. When I read* Anna Karenina*, I was interested in how he could create this amazing world inside of my mind with so few words, and I just thought to myself “I want to do that”. I want to choose these pithy words that just make that image come quickly to mind. I’ve also devoured fantasy all my life, so this imaginative world is one I am used to living in.*

**Can you provide any tips for writers wanting to enter competitions?**

*Go for it! Also, have your work peer-reviewed before you submit it. Other people can see what you can’t. My daughter is a great peer reviewer, but I also have other writer friends who also peer review my writing. I think you give yourself a better chance if you open yourself up for feedback. Also, once you have written something, sit on it for a few days —don’t look at it, and then come back to it with fresh eyes. Reading aloud to myself also helps. I like to write in a musical style so reading aloud helps me get the rhythm right. Along with emphases and musicality in writing.*

**Lastly, what has been the highlight for you in writing *Poetry* and getting it out to an audience?**

*I enjoyed the writing process. Getting feedback from others. The recognition that I have done it and that I did it right.*

**Thankyou, Cathryn! congratulations on your success, and we look forward to seeing what you write next.**