



The Rotary Club of Richmond

presents

The Slade Literary Award

Sponsored by Mark Slade, Managing Director
Slade Knitwear (Australia) Pty Ltd
in memory of his uncle, Rotarian Henry Slade

Winning Entries 2009

Winning Entry: **“My Fantastic Day”**
by Carmen Wiseman, Northcote High School

Runner-up: **“Quest for Freedom”**
by Sam Dimopoulos, Balwyn High School

ESL Winner: **“The Tale of Chang of Siam”**
by Phakhwan Rangsikachi,
Melbourne Girls’ College



Winning Entry

My Fantastic Day Carmen Wiseman

Year 9, Northcote High School

I was sitting outside Flinders St Station. The same as I did every Friday.

I liked that spot in particular partly because the building was so beautiful it was just nice to sit near it but mostly the people were always so interesting to watch. What they wore, how they walked, were they alone or accompanied, did they look happy or sad? Each person was very different, plus I liked trying to remember people for next week, I felt like I knew some of them by now.



Each of them felt like they were in a different universe to me though, and they acted like it. They each walked past pointedly staring at the ground. I knew they could see me but they hoped I wouldn't see them. It made them feel less guilty that way.

"Morning mam." I said to a friendly looking girl, she immediately stiffened, nodded and walked briskly away.

"Morning sir." I said, almost through gritted teeth to an elderly gentleman, he had an identical reaction. I faced this pretty much 50 times a day and I really didn't mind that much. I just hated how people acted like I wasn't a person, but something for them to feel guilty about. Even if someone takes pity on me and buys a magazine that's all it is, pity. They're never interested in anything but their conscience.

"Morning sir," I repeated to a man in a cheap looking suit. He had the reaction I get most, and I hate most also. He frowned, wrinkled his nose as if he'd just noticed an unfortunate smell and walked off.

There's something about selling the Big Issue magazine that makes everyone think I'm dirty and horrible. I wish they understood, but they don't try...

A woman walked past. She was in the kind of immaculate clothes most of the snobby rich people in the area wore. I said my now obligatory, "Morning mam." Expecting her to narrow her eyes and walk quickly

away. Instead she stopped and smiled. "Morning," she said, and peered at my pile of magazines. She mouthed one of the by-lines, "Oh looks like a good issue," and dropped the \$5 into my box, took a magazine with real interest on her face and walked away.

It was turning into quite a good day.

* * *

I got off my train, running late as I typically did. I practically sprinted off the platform until tripping on one of my expensive shoes and thought it better to walk at a more civilised pace. My boss didn't usually get into work until around 9:30 anyway so I wasn't quite sure why I bothered to rush each morning, I decided to take it slower, just enjoy walking through the station. It was more beautiful than I usually gave it credit for.



I smiled as I walked past people but they only returned glares or the kind of look one would give a crazy person. They seemed to do it every day, the same faceless expressionless people. I didn't get why people had stopped smiling when they went places, what could they all possibly have to look so sad about.

I walked past a man selling the Big Issue magazine; I was contemplating buying one but decided I didn't have the time.

"Morning mam," he said as passed him, I couldn't help but stop. Ironic I felt that the only person to be polite to me today was this person who as I stood there got greasy looks from nearly every passing person, simply for existing. I checked out his magazine, it actually seemed quite interesting.

"Oh looks like a good issue," I said conversationally, he gave me a big smile so I felt around in my bag for some change, dropped this \$5 into his box, took a magazine, and began to read on my slow way to work.

Sadly my boss had decided that was the day he should arrive to work on time and yelled at me for about a half an hour for being late, but I didn't really care. I was having too good a day.

Runner Up

Quest for Freedom by Sam Dimopoulos

Balwyn High School

One man's dream can turn the world upside down
Overcome with power, the need to lead,
The promise of freedom gave him the crown
Later did we realise, he'd made us bleed
He invaded our country, homes and lives
Took many away, never to return
Murdered our loved ones with guns, bombs and knives
To leave survivors, a city to burn
Stricken with anguish, the pain of our loss
We stand together, united as one
Brought together by grief, we look across
To our nation's flag, swaying in the sun
From that day on, we reside by our choice
That all those remaining, possess one voice.



ESL Winner

The Tale of Chang of Siam by Phakhwan Rangsikachi

Year 10 Melbourne Girls' College

I don't understand...

But, I know...

I don't have a choice...

But I will choose...

I look through the window. There's only the lamp along the sidewalk shedding some light in the dark. The color of the sky is dark grey covered with a light layer of clouds in a "blanched almond" or pale sienna color. I cannot see much beyond this. Although it's just past midnight the sky is not dark as it should be at home, Siam...

At home the sky is darker than here in Australia, even though at home the atmosphere is polluted from cars and the lights from traffic. There is nothing that looks the same or even resembles anything between Australia and Thailand.

"Yes, Thailand is the place that I can truly call home, where I was born and where I wish my body to be buried on the same land with my ancestors", I say to myself on this dark, cold night. But I know too well that there is no way I can take a step on to the land of smiles, where I used to live, ever again. The journey from Thailand to Australia took so long, as does that between Australia and Thailand, actually 4547 miles.

My journey was long and hard. But soon after I arrived at my new home, just could not believe my eyes. Everything in my new cage looks so wonderful. There is even a little waterfall that gives me the essence of forest. I met the zoo officer who I had met before in Thailand. They had been sent to train with the mahouts at "The Elephant Village" for almost 2 years. Maybe what people had told me is true.

"Your life in Australia will be better than staying with us here" said the mahout, who had looked after me since I was little, with tears on his face. Maybe he is right.

When I first came to Australia I missed everything in Thailand terribly. I missed sugar canes and Thai bananas which I used to eat. Aussie bananas

and Thai ones are so different. Aussie ones are bigger, longer, harder and not as sweet as Thai bananas. I missed my family and friends. Although I have another seven friends coming with me and the mahout came with us and the zoo officers are those whom I used to know before I came here. I still miss what is left behind. I miss Nanny, who I call mum although she is a human. I miss my village, "The Elephant Village". I miss the tropical weather in Thailand. I miss the rain and even the monsoons or the dry. I miss the traffic where I was walked along the street in the city even though I used to be afraid of it. I miss the lights which show the city's night life. Even now my homesickness is getting better, I still miss everything to do with Thailand.

It's not that life in Australia is bad. The truth is that my quality of life in Australia is even better than that of my friends in Thailand. In Australia my friends and I have place to live and play, plenty of food to eat even veterinary staff who will look after us when we are sick. We don't have to worry about being hit by a truck or trapped in wire netting. The zoo officers are really kind. Sometimes Nanny comes from Thailand to visit us. People who come to the zoo look really happy and cheerful, especially the children. In Thailand there is a song about elephants for children. The song name is "Chang". It is about how we look and asks whether they have ever seen an elephant before.

I look away from the sky and look at my baby. He is sleeping peacefully. Without him noticing, I gently stroke his head with my trunk. "He seems happy here", I think to myself. I have never understood why I have been sent here far away from home. Maybe it's something to do with politics. I don't have a choice. But I will choose what is best for my baby. I'll tell him about the connection between elephants and Thai people. I'll sing him the song they used to sing for babies. And I'll tell him about the land his mother called home, where his ancestors have been living before we can remember. I'll tell him the tale of Chang of Siam and how we fought side by side with Thai people during the war. I peer outside the window staring at the rising sun, the sign of a new day and smile...

