

# ON THE VERGE



**WRITING  
+ SPOKEN WORD  
CONTEST  
2022**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA LIBRARIES  
& THE OFFICE OF EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS  
ACKNOWLEDGE AND RESPECT**

**THE LƏKʷƏŋƏN PEOPLES ON WHOSE TRADITIONAL TERRITORY THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA STANDS, AND THE SONGHEES, ESQUIMALT AND  
W̱SÁNEĆ PEOPLES WHOSE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LAND,  
AIR, AND WATERS CONTINUE TO THIS DAY.**

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# ABOUT OTV

*on the Verge* -- also known as OTV -- is a student writing and spoken word contest that showcases and celebrates emerging UVic student voices by inviting submissions based on an annual theme under the broad rubric of equity, diversity, and human rights. Open to all UVic students, the contest invites submissions in the categories of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and spoken word.

Co-sponsored by the University of Victoria Libraries and the Office of Equity and Human Rights, the contest would not be possible without the significant support of the Faculties of Business, Continuing Studies, Education, Engineering, Fine Arts, Humanities, Human and Social Development, Law, Science, and Social Sciences at the University of Victoria.

The theme for 2022's OTV contest was solidarity. In the call for submissions, we asked students to consider the following: The need for solidarity in the current global context is brought home to us with every news cycle. Crises ranging from climate change, to the pandemic, to human rights inequities and gender-based violence, are bringing a critical awareness to our responsibilities as individuals, both to our communities and the planet. With the rising tide of calls for social and environmental action, what are the possibilities for solidarity? How can creative expressions of solidarity unite and move us towards meaningful ways to address our interconnectivity and overcome these crises and injustices?

Our judge for 2022 was award-winning Victoria writer Robin Stevenson. Winners were evaluated and selected based on the following criteria: excellence and proficiency in writing and technique; engagement with the theme in a meaningful way; awareness of equity, diversity, and human rights; and adherence to the word limit.

**FICTION**

# 1st Prize

## Shannon Stewart

### *To The Witches' House*

**Judge's comments:**

**Writing from the point of view of a child is one of those things that is much harder than it appears—and the writer of this piece does it beautifully, telling this story with insight and humor. I was particularly impressed with the use of dialogue here. This story touches on how people sometimes fear difference and stigmatize the other, and on how genuine connections can overcome that. The children in this story have neighbours who are rumored to be “sisters, or worse,” and in the kids’ minds, this means witches. Nonetheless, the kids are open to friendship (despite their concerns about potions!), and this gentle story shows how their openness influences adults in the community to move past their own prejudices.**



Shannon Stewart is a second year student majoring in Anthropology and Art History. She also plays French Horn in the Uvic Wind Symphony. Shannon has been writing stories since she was a kid. She previously placed in a writing contest for the public library. This is her first submission at Uvic.

## ***To The Witches' House*** **by Shannon Stewart**

First to go over the fence was Kate's badminton birdie, then Daniel's brand new basketball. The final straw was my sister Amy's fluorescent green bouncy ball, which she won at a carnival. (I tried to convince her to trade for my winnings, a lousy plastic plant, but she refused.)

When Amy's bouncy ball flew over Daniel's fence, she cried for two days. A plan had to be made, and fast.

"I'll be the lookout," said Kate. She was still in her outfit from Sunday school, a lemon-coloured frilly thing that would not survive a covert mission.

"No, Amy is the lookout. You can... look out for the lookout," I said. Kate nodded, satisfied with this assignment. I was meant to look out for Amy, but Kate could fill the role this time. More pressing matters were at hand.

We stood in Daniel's yard, under his back porch away from prying eyes. His house was the best place to play. Daniel's mom was too busy with the babies to intercept any clandestine meetings.

"What should I do?" Asked Daniel. He flapped one hand up and down, as if bouncing the basketball we could barely see in the neighbour's grass.

"You're going to lift me over the fence," I said, "you're the muscle." There must be a leader in every operation. This time it was my cross to bear.

Daniel frowned. "I don't want to be the muscle. I want to be the lookout."

"We have two lookouts already. We don't need a third," I said.

"I'm not a lookout. I'm looking out for the lookout, remember?" Kate added helpfully. Amy just nodded. Her thumb was firmly in her mouth, though Mom told her not to do that anymore. The trauma of losing her bouncy ball brought it on, most likely. That would soon be remedied.

"C'mon guys, focus." My voice edged towards a whine. "This is important. Remember what we came here for."

"I don't know," Daniel said, "maybe we should just give up. I have some change in a piggy bank, we could buy Amy a new ball." Daniel shuffled his feet in the grass.

Of all my friends, Daniel was the last one I would expect to mutiny.

"Daniel, come on. Don't you want your basketball back?" I said.

Daniel shrugged. "Yeah. But the neighbours are scary. Remember what my mom said?" Daniel's voice dropped to a whisper. "She said that they're *sisters, or worse!*"

"What's worse than sisters?" Kate said, a haunted look in her eye. She shivered, as if remembering her sister's many transgressions.

"*Witches* are worse, Kate. They're clearly witches," Daniel said. He glanced side to side, then around again, his eyes wide. "That's probably why they never get invited to the neighbourhood dinners – they would poison everybody with their potions!"

"I don't know, Daniel," I said. "That seems..."

"Think about it," Daniel interrupted, "What does a witch want with a green bouncy ball?"

I frowned. "I don't think they want anything. They probably don't even know it's in their yard."

"Don't be stupid," Daniel scoffed. "Green is the perfect colour for witches. I should know, they live right next to me. Green toads and smoke and stuff. They're going to use Amy's ball for their nefarious deeds!"

"They are?" Cried Amy. Her thumb hovered just outside her quivering lip.

"No Amy, of course they won't. Because we're going to get your ball back, right guys?" I said. I gave my best 'do what I say' stare to Kate and Daniel. Daniel looked guilty, but Kate didn't notice. She was too busy spinning so her skirt would flare out.

I walked over to the fence and Daniel followed. Maybe Daniel was right about the witches; if witches had fences, they would have a fence like this one. The brown wood boards had holes and broken off bits. Each board seemed to lean into the others and sigh.

"Boost me up," I told Daniel. He wrapped both arms around my torso and heaved until I could reach the top of the fence. It took some maneuvering, but eventually I made it over the top of the fence. I dangled by my fingers before dropping into the grass.

The grass at the witches' house was tall, like the grass at school the day before the man came on the big riding mower. I wondered if the tall grass could be due to potions. Maybe witches really did like green and wanted their yards to reflect that.

"Do you see it?" Called Kate from the other side of the fence.

"I see your birdie," I said, pulling it out of the grass. It was a bit muddy but had no other evidence of magical tampering. "And Daniel's basketball, too." The bouncy ball, however, was nowhere to be found. I threw the basketball and birdie over the fence. I began to search on hands and knees for the ball.

"What are you looking for?" Asked a woman's voice. Not a woman, a witch! I leapt to my feet.

She didn't look like a witch. Her hair was long and blond, and she was round like moms are. She bent over slightly to be at eye level with me.



"I, um..." I said, "I'm looking for my sister's bouncy ball. It's green."

"Why don't I help you, then?" She said with a smile. "Your friends can come around the front if they want to help look." She didn't look like a witch, or at least not a dangerous one, so I agreed.

Me, Daniel, Kate, and Amy searched, side by side with the witch, until we found Amy's bouncy ball. Then the witch invited us inside, where the other woman ('part of her coven,' Daniel whispered) gave us cookies and lemonade. They said to call them Janet and Carol. These didn't seem like witch names to me, and I saw no cauldrons or eye of newt.

The next day, we went back to play in Janet and Carol's yard. The grass was the perfect length to play Jungle Explorers. Janet made for a pretty scary lion. Another day, we went back with our baseball gloves and three more friends from the neighbourhood. Carol didn't mind making extra cookies for all of us.

Almost a week after first meeting the pair, we were heading over to their yard from Daniel's house.

"Where are you four going?" Asked Daniel's mom. She had one of Daniel's siblings on her stomach and the other pushing a toy car around on the floor.

"We're going to the witches' house. You know, next door?" Said Daniel.

Daniel's mom made a strange twisting expression. "How long have you been going next door? Do they know you're playing there?"

"Yeah Mom, obviously they know." Daniel huffed. "They even make us cookies."

Daniel's mom didn't move for a moment. She just frowned at the floor. "Let me come with you this time." She rose off the couch, holding the baby against her chest. Daniel's other sibling held his hand as we all walked over, despite Daniel's grumbling.

When we got to the neighbour's house, we went into the yard, but Daniel's mom stayed inside. She held Daniel's siblings close to her and declined any drinks. On my way out the door, I glanced back to see all three adults frowning. She came back with us the next day, though I didn't understand why she would visit just to scowl at them.

Something big, however, must have happened over the next few days. One day when a game of tag got too intense, we decided to head home. Inside, Janet held Daniel's sibling while Carol and Daniel's mom had tea. They were laughing.

That week's neighbourhood dinner was hosted by Daniel's mom. Me, Amy, Daniel, and Kate sat at the kid's table, rolling Amy's bouncy ball between us. The witches came for the first time and Daniel's mom sat them directly beside her. Some other neighbours

exchanged looks, obviously concerned about the magic-users in their presence. But Daniel's mom glared whenever anyone tried to ask the witches anything. She must have known that Janet and Carol would never poison anyone.

# 2nd Prize

## Joey Mauro

### *In Normal Times*

Judge's comments:

During the pandemic, a student finds herself in Tent City—a homeless encampment—in search of her missing father. Looking at the signs protesting poverty, colonialism, and violence, she realizes these messages reflect “an unspoken truth about this city, something always present, simmering under the surface.” Struggling to understand why her father would be here, she finds herself thinking about her grandparent’s difficult lives, which raises the issue of intergenerational trauma as she wonders what horrors her father may have grown up imagining. I appreciated how imagination and empathy seem to be creating a pathway that leads to more possibilities for action and solidarity. This is a quietly moving and thoughtful story that asks questions rather than answering them.



Joey Mauro is a settler on the unceded territory of the WSÁNEĆ and Lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking peoples. His academic interests include settler-colonial history, Diasporic and Indigenous literatures, and postcolonial theory. His favourite candy includes White Rabbits. He aspires to be a better writer and community organizer one day. He has much to learn.

***In Normal Times***  
**by Joey Mauro**

1.

Maya stared down at the sink, thinking. The light above her shone down bright and brutal. Everything was all out of focus. An ambient hum was coming from the bathroom fan and, occasionally, a drip of water fell from the faucet and splattered on the white ceramic basin. Ceramic or porcelain?

For everyone else, Julio's disappearance wasn't noteworthy. His absences were regular enough, so nobody spoke about this one. He was gone again, and that was that. But Maya hadn't stopped thinking about it. As she stared into the ceramic/porcelain basin, she pressed her toothbrush hard against her gritty, morning teeth and thought about how people go about their day-to-day lives, la-di-da, as if someone disappearing is completely normal. Maya hung her head. Toothpaste foam sizzled and dripped from her mouth. *Plop... plop... plop...*

She picked up her phone and tried calling him again. Nothing. Straight to his voicemail for the tenth time: "Hello! Julio is ignoring your call right now. Please leave a quick voicemail with the name of the restaurant you want to treat him to, and he'll get back to you right away."

There was a time when Julio was incapable of absence. Wherever the people were, there too was Julio. Functions, fundraisers, and dinner events felt incomplete until he made his appearance. His presence stimulated the conversation, even more than the politics of the moment or the quality of the catering or the state of the weather. He never filled a room physically—he wasn't a large man by any means—but the force that came from within him was as expansive as it was excessive and, seemingly, constant. How can any community go on with a gap that significant?

2.

Maya paused in front of the bus stop across the street from Tent City. If her father was in there, he wouldn't be hard to spot. He always wore a sporty teal windbreaker from the '90s. He typically wore light denim Levis with white runners, clunky and well-worn. Often, he had on a dark blue ball cap, his salt-and-pepper ringlets curling out from underneath.

As Maya ducked her head about looking for a match, she noticed that there were signs hanging off the fence that surrounded the tents. "Stop the war on the poor" stamped in capital letters on plywood. "Justice, not charity" sprayed in orange on three pieces of cardboard, duct-taped together. "IT AIN'T PRETTY, ITS TENT CITY" written in black on a teal tarp. "No More Stolen Sisters" painted in white on a red dress that hung from the top of the fence and moved back and forth in the wind.

Maya knew, or at least had a notion, of what these signs meant. Unequal distribution of wealth, gentrification of public space, settler colonialism, missing and murdered Indigenous women—if she didn't totally know the histories or the ideas behind each sign, she knew morally that they reflected an unspoken truth about this city, something always present, simmering under the surface. Maya briefly wondered if her father might have made one of these signs, but this idea, she knew, didn't totally add up. After all, there was no war waged on Julio.

Still, she imagined it wouldn't require much for Julio to understand what it means to be at war. His parents' lives were difficult, so he probably had practice imagining such horrors. They spent their youth in a continual state of exile, always crossing borders in search of safe refuge. When they settled here, they were too busy with normal stuff—going to church or watering the tomatoes—to talk about painful histories.

Most people, Maya decided, live with histories of horrible violence, and do so with both great pain and great ease. She stared up at the dress as it swayed in the breeze. They cope in order to live life as normally as possible. How else might things go on?

3.

Maya crossed the street to get a closer look at the signs hanging from the fence. As she approached, she got distracted by a young woman facing a man dressed in a militant uniform. Maya could see the words “Peace Officer” written on his shoulder patch. The confrontation was happening directly in front of the entrance to Tent City. The woman had on a blue medical mask and the officer did not. She had big hair, sunglasses, and black hightops, and he had a gun on his waist. The woman looked brave with her brows furrowed, standing her ground like that. The officer looked agitated. His red cheeks were puffed up, and his arms were crossed in front of his chest. When she noticed his arms like that, folded and thick, Maya was shocked: his arms were the arms of a man, but his face was that of a boy.

The woman’s arm was raised to the halfway point between the officer’s face and her own, and there her finger danced around like a bee. Maya couldn’t hear what was happening from where she stood, but suddenly the exchange ended. The officer handed the woman a slip of paper and returned to his vehicle. The woman held the paper in one hand and used her free hand to pull her mask down. Her reading face was just as combative as her arguing face. Yet, when she finished reading, she folded the piece of paper into her pocket, exhaled a long-held breath and rested her hands on her skinny thighs, and, as her body relaxed, she softened.

4.

As Maya entered, she didn’t know what to expect. Whenever she walked past Tent City, there were always people—residents with their carts and backpacks, business people in suits, city

councillors, administrators, maintenance people, old people, young people—going about their lives outside of the fence. In some places, where there weren't posters or tarps hanging, you could see through the fence to the inside. Yet, when she closed her eyes, the only image she could conjure was of a blue fence panel, with its long rectangular cutouts, and an amorphous blob of colours behind it. The inside was a blur.

Standing in the real Tent City, she was stuck by how overwhelmingly normal it was. There were tents layed out in three rows and tents lining the perimeter. Some tents had bikes outfront, and, in front of one, there was a pile of green tinted bags full of recycling. It wasn't nearly as congested as it was on the outside. It was somehow quieter too. People sat on lawn chairs in front of their tents, eating or talking or playing cards or doing whatever.

Maya broke from her trance when her phone buzzed. Her mother had texted her: "home for dinner?" followed by a string of emojis depicting assorted fruits. As Maya stepped to the side, she noticed the woman with the big hair standing with a group of people. As their eyes met, Maya realized she knew the woman: it was Raven, a graduate student in the sociology department, the same department that Maya studied in. *Of course Raven was here*, Maya thought. She was so involved and active.

"Hey, Maya! You lost?"

"Raven!" Maya felt her face getting warm. She stuffed her phone in her pocket and tried to relax. "Hey, no! Not lost. I, uh, I just came to check out the tents. This is pretty wild, hey? What are you doing here?" The conversation stretched only 15 seconds, but it felt like hours to Maya. Her phone buzzed again.

“Uh, yeah, pretty wild. I’m working here. We’re trying to install a waterline and warm showers for the residents. It’s a really cool project with a really cool group. We’re just getting started and funding is a bit tricky, but I think it’s gonna happen!”

“Oh, that’s amazing, Raven. Good for you,” Maya said. She stuffed her clammy hands into her jean pockets and silenced the ever vibrating phone.

“Oh hey, our group is hosting a little fundraiser for the project this afternoon. An outdoor concert and “rootbeer” garden! Do you want to come work at the ticket booth with me? I’ll buy you a rootbeer.”

Maya didn’t know what to say. She was standing in the middle of Tent City, during a global pandemic, looking for her missing father, ignoring her mother, all while she was being asked to have a rootbeer with a cool and smart and gorgeous woman. It was a lot.

“Okay.”

“Well don’t sound so excited!” Raven laughed a little and raised an eyebrow at Maya.

“Oh, uhhh, I mean, yes! I would love to join you!” Maya was blushing.

“I’ll just grab my bag and then we can head over to the venue.”

Maya watched Raven walk away, her big hair bouncing down the lane toward her group of fellow humanitarians. She looked much smaller at that moment than she did standing next to that officer earlier.

Suddenly, Maya remembered her phone. She pulled it out of her pocket and hit the power button: 3x missed call(s) from “Dad”.



**NON-FICTION**

# 1st Prize

## Lisa Basson

### *Night out in Mexico*

Judge's comments:

**This such a compelling and tightly written piece—I couldn't tear myself away. The breathless rush of the narrator's voice conveys a teenage mix of wide-eyed wonder, excitement and fear so beautifully and so vividly. I loved seeing this "ragtag group of party bus people" come together in an unexpected act of solidarity to make sure a vulnerable young woman would get home safely in a world where, as the narrator says, women are all too often "taught little drunk girls deserved to get hurt if they decided to be little or drunk or a girl in a dark hallway."**



Lisa Basson (she/they) is a first-year writing major at the University of Victoria. She adores interactive art and stories of every kind. In high school she worked on the student publication Radius Productions and is currently an intern at The Warren Undergraduate Review.

## ***Night Out in Mexico*** **by Lisa Basson**

Sometimes you find yourself in a situation you don't really understand.

Like when you're 17 and the girls you just met on a party bus are doing coke off of a cell phone in the back bathroom of a Mexican nightclub while you stand in a church skirt and possibly a fanny pack staring on slightly panicked cause you've never seen cocaine before except in movies and wow they're really using a dollar bill and wow you went to horse camp and wow isn't this illegal?

So you leave the bathroom cause you don't want to be complicit and when you do you find your friends on the dancefloor of this almost empty club because it's way too early in the night and there's these weird "alpha male" type guys trying to dance real close, too close, to your buddy and not getting the hint that they're being creepy and this place is comically vacant and you can't for the life of you understand why people do stuff like this and then someone gives you a shot and you're onto the next place

And the next place is equally deserted but at least now you're getting to know people and some guy, non-alpha-male guy, is hitting on you and your friend and you only realize he's hitting on you because your friend tells him to stop because you're a minor in a church skirt and he's 26 you're like wait what he was hitting on me? And you find this upsetting for a number of reasons and you're now rethinking all of your interactions but before you can think too hard about it someone gives you a shot and you're onto the next place

And the next place is three stories tall has a giant statue of a monkey and is overflowing with people and it's here where you really start to *feel it* cause you're 17 and a lightweight and your friend is still talking to that guy and the coke girls are still going hard and you shake hands with a blacked out republican who just took a shot out of someone's ass and you didn't even

know that was a thing and you're still not entirely sure it is a thing and you maybe go somewhere after this but it's not important because it's much more of the same and what matters is the bus ride back to your hotel

Where you all sit drained and dazed and when you try to talk your voice lilts but you can hear someone crying and it's one of the coke girls and the guy she's taking home is trying to calm her down but she's really not having it and she's starting to sound more and more upset and when the bus stops for the next sign she runs off the bus and onto the road and tries to kill herself on oncoming traffic as you watch in slow motion out the back window terrified she's going to succeed before your 17 year old eyes but someone grabs her and hauls her back onto the bus and everyone's freaking out but mainly in that tensely quiet did that just fucking happen way apart from the leader of the trip who's really yelling at her before joining the rest of you guys in silence

And when you get back to the hotel you and this ragtag group of party bus people walk with coke girl to her room to make sure she's ok and it's a good thing you do cause the guy she brought home still wants some alone time with her even though she's extremely out of it and suicidal and he's a stranger and you're not entirely sure you've ever met a group of people who unanimously wanted to beat someone up more and after a screaming match the guy finally leaves and coke girl is safe with her family who are getting filled in on what happened and you really hope she gets help and the bus group awkwardly splits up semi hoping you never run into each other again at the resort and can all just forget this happened and your friend wishes you goodnight and goes off with the 26 year old

And you stumble back to your place alone and bang on the door because you don't have a key and you're sharing a room with your older sister and she can't hear you because she has IBS and is shitting her brains out as you stand in the hallway trying

not to cry because tonight was a lot and you're 17 and you're scared of dark hallways because you were taught little drunk girls deserved to get hurt if they decided to be little or drunk or a girl in a dark hallway and you had had enough of that sort of thing for one night and just as you're really starting to get frantic your sister opens the door and takes your small frame into steady arms and holds you without judgment as you cry your tipsy tears in the dim light of your hotel room

And this is a situation you still don't really understand but what you do get is the fact that tonight strangers helped get a girl home alive and safe, your sister was there for you, and if anyone asks tomorrow, your friend was with you last night.

# 2nd Prize

## Meghan Romano

### *Hoinar Dirt*

#### Judge's comments:

**In this moving personal essay, the writer shows a young person and a grandparent reaching across generational, cultural and geographical divides. The grandfather's act of sharing his writing with the narrator becomes a way of sharing his history and his heritage, and writing itself becomes an act of solidarity: "When you were twenty, you chucked your no-name journals into harvest yellow fields. I am picking them all back," writes the narrator. I also loved some of the language in this piece- the vivid descriptions and sensory details.**



Meghan Romano is an artist of Romanian descent studying Religions & Cultures and Creative Writing at the University of Victoria, situated on the unceded territories of the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ nations. Her poetry has been published in Work in Progress Mag and VOICES/VOIX Poetry Journal, and her litzine Chess Game was shortlisted for Broken Pencil's Canzine Awards 2021.

## ***Hoinar Dirt*** **by Meghan Romano**

My friendship with my grandfather began the night before his kidney surgery. A blue robe & knife waited for him in the morning. He gave me the password to his computer. He showed me where he keeps his third book, half-written. He says, *one day you will finish it*. He doesn't say, *is your Romanian good enough for that?* At my grade five level, imagine me, nearly twenty, huddled over my grandfather's laptop in my middle-school pink leggings and heart-printed tops.

The week before, he had me writing poems, haikus, to submit to a Romanian website where everyone is marked on how closely they replicate what it feels like to run your hand through the sheaves of wheat in August & to feed your chickens in the yard while your mother is still alive. Point-blank, I was the youngest. I had never chopped wood. I had never sold berries beside mountain gondolas. I never had my field of corn raked till there was not enough crumbs to feed my chickens. I've never killed my chickens. I've never cried in front of my son. Point-blank, my dear grandfather, I saw your farmhouse in 2019. The door is halfway in the dirt. It all sits in a slant. The wood smells like one, big mushroom. And you posed so proud on your porch. I took a photo on my iPhone. We flew Lufthansa, aisle-seat, the orange sky painted lines on my face. Circle the proper answer: exile or escape.

I see you hunched over your laptop, in the room with your childhood-yellow map on the wall. Writing haikus. Rejected. Rewriting. Punching your fingers down as you count syllables. I ask, *is it worth it to write if you are forced to change it?* You say, *anything is worth it if...*

If what? Your green eyes rolling these words up the mountain: anything is worth it. I summon all my syllables to write you an email, repeat a joke, tell you how the wind blew on the ferry ride home. When you were twenty, you chucked your no-name journals into harvest-yellow fields. I am picking them all back.

**POETRY**



# 1st Prize

## Juliette Blake Jacob

### *This is How We Treat Our Women*

**Judge's comments:**

**"Watch our gentle check-in eye contact. Watch our good morning texts. Watch our midnight mascara-river McDonald's runs. Watch us in our javelin-tip eyeliner. Watch us form a rebellion government in the bathroom..." This poem overflows with love and joy and strength, and with appreciation for the many ways, large and small, that women can hold each other up, build community, and stand together in solidarity. Beautifully written, evocative and resonant, and full of images and words that stayed with me long after I read (and re-read) these words.**



Juliette Blake Jacob (she/her) is a queer, disabled, multi-award-winning poet and creative writing educator. She has appeared in over 100 national and international performances, been welcomed as an artist-in-residence and ensemble member of many beautiful collectives, and mentors writing and performance students across the country.

*This Is How We Treat Our Women*  
by Juliette Blake Jacob

How do I say, *women are my life*.  
How do I say, *women are in my blood*,  
like, *IN it*, like, *I don't want to live without*  
*my women*? How do I say, *Watch*. See

*what our women can do*. Watch our gentle  
check-in eye contact. Watch our *good morning*  
texts. Watch our midnight mascara-river  
McDonald's runs. Watch us in our javelin-tip

eyeliner. Watch us form a rebellion government  
in the bathroom. Watch us laugh so loud at  
the swimming pool: watch our joy echo in turquoise.  
Watch us take up sonic space. Watch us sleep in

each other's t-shirts. Watch us mend each other's  
hems. Watch us thrift-store carry each other's  
overflowing baskets. Watch us create a small town  
in this big city. Watch us make each other into saints.

Watch us rope-ladder pull each other out of the closet.  
Watch us talk medicine on the mountain and philosophy  
the pier. Watch us hide gifts in the glove compartment.  
Watch us with our community Chapstick. Watch us take

each other vibrator shopping. Watch us slide scissors around newspaper articles and slip them under each other's doors. Watch us bake banana bread and wake each other up from a nap to a house full of butter. Watch us cross-stitch friendship-

anniversary cards. Watch us help each other redecorate our homes and lives with our all-girl moving days: all matchstick quickfire get -it-done muscle whiskey-on-the-nightstand at the end of the day. \Watch us start our new lives over and over but keep each other.

Watch us keep each other like heirloom, like inheritance. Watch us lionesses: watch us in our pride. Watch us rabblrouse. Watch us unapologetic. Watch us big and loud and beautiful: like waterfall, like mountain, like thunder, watch us intrinsic to this Earth. Watch us *be here* again and again. Big and loud and beautiful. Watch. Watch.

# 2nd Prize

## Melissa Cistaro

### *Not Enough*

#### Judge's comments:

**"The border between us is as thin as a strand of hair..." This poem speaks to the connectedness of all people, and the need for humanity to stand together. It evokes the often painful thoughts and emotions that go with this work—the recognition that in the face of great injustices, our good intentions, our efforts to learn, our compassion, our tears, and our protests will never be enough. Finally, this poem is a call to solidarity, and to action. I love the way it concludes with the repetition of the word action, as if to suggest that this call is one we must respond to again and again and again—even when we know it is not enough.**



Melissa Cistaro is a graduate student in the Department of Writing with an emphasis in creative nonfiction. She is the author of the bestselling memoir *WITHOUT MY MOTHER* published by HarperCollins Canada. The theme of solidarity challenged her to reflect on her responsibilities as a writer during these turbulent times. She currently resides in Victoria with her family.

***Not Enough***  
**by Melissa Cistaro**

When I left the U.S.  
I thought I was escaping  
the rampant racism

Thought I was fleeing  
from the wildfires  
from the floods

Do I even need to say corruption?

But everywhere I go  
there I am  
again  
Knowing  
that I must stop  
standing still

Stop  
Acting as if  
good intentions  
matter

Discomfort  
is not enough  
To say I care  
is not enough  
To say I've wept for you  
is not enough

I sit with my son  
and watch documentaries  
Just Mercy, The 13th  
I Am Not Your Negro  
I try to answer his questions  
It is not enough

I bring him  
graphic novels  
about the residential schools and we cry  
It is not enough

I apply paint to cardboard signs and march for  
George Floyd as if this is enough  
It is not enough

I collect more books  
The Fire This Time  
The Fire Next Time  
an attempt  
is not enough

The border between us  
is as thin as a strand of hair our humanity at stake

When  
do we rise up  
to hold each other's hands?

I cannot run  
I cannot hide  
Until a word merges  
into another word  
becomes a sentence  
becomes a call  
a shout  
a drumbeat  
a song

of action

action

action

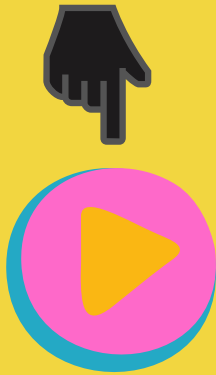
**SPOKEN WORD**

# 1st Prize

## Zinhle Dewa

### *Solidarity and Integrity Rhyme for a Reason*

Listen here



**Judge's comments:**

**In this piece, the speaker challenges the listener, opening with a critique of the “surface level solidarity” of social media posts and pushing for something more authentic: Can we count on you to get uncomfortable, the artist asks. I appreciated both the content of this piece—the thoughtful exploration of what solidarity is and is not, the recognition that real work for change is often messy—and the form of it—the carefully created rhyme and rhythm of the words.**



Zin Dewa is a South African-Zimbabwean and Canadian artist who explores mediums such as photography, video, dance, music, and various genres of creative writing. She is in her final year of undergrad studying Psychology at UVic and hopes to have completed her debut album by graduation.



## 2nd Prize

# Shayan de Luna-Bueno

## *Solidarity*

### Judge's comments:

**I found this piece moving to listen to—the speaker conveying emotion through in their words and voice in a way that it feels very raw and genuine. Solidarity doesn't mean anything to me, the artist begins, talking about how violence and trauma are diminished when they are reduced to Facebook posts: Your tears--they show up in the form of emoji... How is that solidarity? The piece builds in intensity and strength, rhythm and rhyme, and concludes simply, with a recognition that while the listener may never fully understand, they can choose to listen—which is a starting point towards a more authentic solidarity.**



Shayan is a 2nd generation Indigenous Igorota (Filipino) migrant currently occupying Lekwungen Territories and a fourth year Political Science student. Shayan considers decolonization and advocates for intersectionality as a crucial part of everything in the work that she does. If she is not working, she is often found with her dog, Nikki the Sheltie, walking near the beach or painting with watercolours.

***Solidarity***  
**by Shayan de Luna-Bueno**

doesn't mean anything to me  
when everything that has happened to us  
is turned down on the news  
and when it does it's debated like a facebook recipe of disaster parts  
of death and parts of violence  
re post, re tweet, like  
your tears shows up in the forms of emoji  
how is that solidarity  
when your thoughts erase the bodies and many voices that you see  
what's ur pov  
when people that don't look like me  
trying to silence  
we  
we, the people  
the critiquing movements of edis and diversity call  
but the real action happens when white supremacist structures fall  
take us to the streets  
land back, liberation, mutual reciprocity we repeat  
I cannot no longer sit by and be stricken with grief, defeat  
bring back our stories, our voices, our people  
we are taking all that we came for  
this time you can no longer ignore  
the work is being done in your city  
I don't expect you to fully understand but if you really want to help  
genuinely listen when we bipoc talk about what is solidarity and how it's held into account

# 2022 Celebrity Judge

## ROBIN STEVENSON

Robin Stevenson is the author of 29 books for young readers, ranging from picture books to young adult novels and non-fiction. She was the winner of the 2020 Sheila A. Egoff Children's Literature Prize for her book *MY BODY MY CHOICE*, and her book *PRIDE* won a 2017 Stonewall Honor. Her books have been finalists for many other awards, including the Governor General's Literary Awards, the Lambda Literary Awards, and numerous reader's choice awards, and have been translated into a number of languages. Robin launched three new books this year: a picture book called *PRIDE PUPPY* (Orca), a middle-grade non-fiction book called *KID INNOVATORS* (Quirk), and a young adult novel called *WHEN YOU GET THE CHANCE* (Running Press Kids). Robin is a former social worker and crisis counsellor, and has also taught creative writing and worked as a free lance editor. She lives on Vancouver Island with her family.



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RY MORAN

ROBIN STEVENSON

JENNIFER WELLS



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