

2024 My Brother Jack Awards

Open Short Story Award

It was once again wonderful to be immersed in local stories as the open category judge for the My Brother Jack Awards in 2024.

There was a great range of scenarios and characters, meanings, and moods. Some writers this year were looking outward, to other countries and even magical lands, but many were introspective, with narrators contemplating the events of a life and choices made, and the people (or lack thereof) with whom they were surrounded. Consciousnesses sometimes extended to animals, trees, and buildings. One of the main themes, that arose more than in previous years, was AI: there were stories from all angles – warnings, challenges, and some on being open to possibilities. The authors of the winning and commended stories showed generosity: in what they were sharing with the world, and the time taken to create and shape such narratives.

***Sphagnum* – First Place**

A gorgeous, sensory story that brings to life two mythical creatures in contemporary times, dealing with their climate change-addled environments and technological advancements. It's lucky they have each other. The description, dialogue, rhythms, and narrative surprises are all excellent. This story would also make a beautiful short play.

***Mid-life / Route 44* – Second Place**

Which is about the impossibility of taking a 'couple's break' without thinking about the kids! The story has great movement from the scene to scene, inviting us into the mum's experience.

***Hope, A Needle Pulling Thread* – Third Place**

A contemplation of immigration and hope, of the things that happen *to* us vs the choices we can sometimes make. The story is told through vivid remembering and imagining of family members and their experiences.

***Different* – Highly Commended**

A beautiful story of the narrator's brother, who is 'different but not so different'.

***The War I Understand* – Highly Commended**

A personal narrative about how a true understanding of war is shaped.

***Without an Anchor* – Highly Commended**

A heartbreaking story of grieving while undergoing chemo.