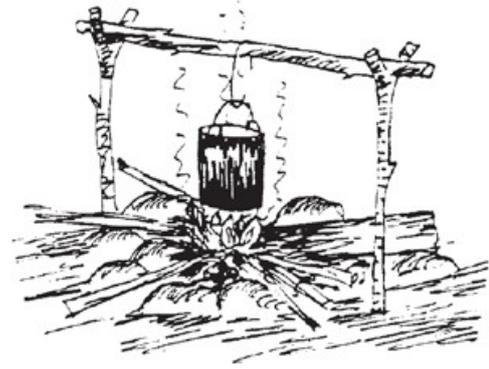


# THE BLACKENED BILLY



**32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Verse Writing Competition**

**Proudly Supported by Tamworth Trophy Supplies**

## COMMEMORATIVE BOOKLET

featuring

- Guidance from Australian Poetry Champions
- 30 Year Anniversary Poem - Neil Carroll
- An Exercise in Evaluation -  
Veronica Weal 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tribute
- 10 Year Anniversary Poem - David Campbell
- Details of 2022 Award Winners
- Highlights and Shared Learnings from 2022
- Adjudication Panel Comments
- Blackened Billy Award Winners

**This compilation is copyright Tamworth Poetry Reading Group**

## **'Billy' is proudly part of the rich tapestry of modern Australian bush poetry.**

Life provides plentiful opportunities and abundant stimulation for life observers and artists.

In August 2021, The Adam Lindsay Gordon Commemorative Committee Inc joined the chorus of support for the 'prestigious and long-standing Blackened Billy Verse Competition'.

President Russell Harrison signed off with the encouraging wish -

*"May the entrants in this year's event enjoy being part of this long tradition".*

Tamworth Poetry Reading Group strived to ensure they did, in truly modern fashion.

\*\*\*\*\*

**This compilation** strives to capture the magic of engaging with many of Australia's contemporary writers. Few are solely exceptional as 'poets'. Many extend their writing to support modern sharing of stories via poetry, magazines, anthologies, picture books, festivals and more. All who contribute to modern language and literary showcasing enhance modern Australian storytelling.

The modern Australian Bush Poetry writing community is alive with vigorous talented wordsmiths. 2022 provided many Blackened Billy Verse Competition entrants the opportunity to engage online. Some were encouraged to do so for their very first time. Poets were able to connect and converse and some of the stories that follow reveal the enjoyment experienced. The BB2022 Awards Ceremony was conducted in hybrid form - online and in person. Same will occur in 2023 with in-person attendance and hosting from Duntry League, Orange, NSW.

This modern Australian reader features genuine authentic voices sharing real stories. The focus of Tamworth Poetry Reading Group was, and always is, the Blackened Billy Verse Competition. The shared fabric is bush poetry and the broader encouragement of traditional bush poetry in written form. Hoping these works and records of conversation enhance and support your own interest and understanding of bush poetry. Please respect authors' rights. All copyright permissions are retained by the authors. All works are shared here with permission, in support and encouragement of all who love Australian bush poetry.

**Writers** - Audience - Supporters - All  
**interested** in the Australian Bush Poetry writing community are  
**invited** to be present and participate in plentiful poetry performances and conversations

### **The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition Awards Ceremony will be held at Duntry League, Orange NSW on Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023.**

All are invited to share celebrations as part of the Banjo Paterson Australian Poetry Festival.  
Please plan to participate in the delightful poetry gatherings from 17-26 February 2023.

Sincerely, Promoters and Supporters of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition

## Limericks

Limericks are a great poetic form with a long history. The best ones use “metrical perfection, verbal felicity and a quick turn of wit”, says W S Baring-Gould in his 1967 book *The Lure of the Limerick*. He describes a limerick as “an anecdote in verse”.

Limericks have a specific structure. The first two lines make a couplet, rhyming a a. The third and fourth lines form a shorter couplet (b b) and the fifth line, again with the a rhyme, reverts to the same length as the first two lines.

For those who are metrically minded, lines one, two and five are three-foot, while lines three and four are two foot, all of anapaestic rhythm. That is, two weak syllables followed by a strong syllable to give a ditty-*dum* sound. So a full limerick sounds like:

Ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*  
ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*  
          ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*  
          ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*  
ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*, ditty-*dum*.

Or to put it another way, I made up this limerick template:

It's a *one* two three *one* two three *one*  
then more *one* two three *one* two three *fun*  
          plus a *one* two three *four*  
          and a *one* two three *more*  
then a *one* two three *one* two three *done*.

Of course, there are some variations, mostly in the weak syllables at the beginning or end of lines but generally speaking, that's the limerick form.

Limericks are great fun to write once you get the hang of them. Try some yourself!

---

Reproduced with permission from Gregory North 's 'Limericks and Littlies'.  
Available via [www.gregorynorth.com.au](http://www.gregorynorth.com.au)

Thanks to Gregory North for easing us into the conversation of structured writing. Even in this small 5-line format, attention to metric feet - anapaestic or otherwise – is necessary to ensure we get our 'ditty done'. Rhyme and metre are important to manage for success in the Blackened Billy Verse Competition. **Rhyme must be accurate and metre consistent.**

Multiple modern writers are experimenting with the high-risk notion of metre disruption. It is asserted '*the deliberate application adds emphasis, and applied in pattern form shows mastery*'. The Billy has no comment to make on the matter. Works will continue to be assessed on the stated integral requirements of traditional bush poetry - accurate rhyme and consistent metre.

Longer forms of story writing, in structured format with rhyme and metre, are often called bush ballads. It was a joy to reconnect with Alec Raymer recently. He came to modern attention via Macca's 'Australia All Over' in August 2021, sharing his poetry with a million-plus ABC radio audience. Alec won the 15<sup>th</sup> Blackened Billy in 2005 and during a 2022 Billy Zoom gathering shared a lovely verse from his 2006 'Lines for Dusty Days' anthology "Homecoming". Alec's encouraging words to the poets present enhanced the occasion greatly. He has kindly forwarded some further valuable guidance in support.

## **HELPFUL HINTS FOR NARRATIVE WRITING** by Alec RAYMER

Writing a traditional narrative style of poem requires dealing with many different aspects of poetry writing. These include **RHYME, RHYTHM, GRAMMAR, PUNCTUATION, SPELLING, LANGUAGE** and **STORYLINE**.

To me it is like building a house and requires first a foundation and then the actual building. The **FOUNDATION** of the building is the planning : What is the poem going to be about? How am I going to write it?

The actual building (creation) of your poem is the writing. This is the **STRUCTURE**. The actual creation of the poem requires dealing with all the facets mentioned above.

The basic structure of the poem lies in three areas : **INTRODUCTION, BODY, ENDING**.

**INTRODUCTION** The first one or two stanzas introduces the reader to any of the following; the setting of the story (time and/or place), the characters, and/or perhaps a slight tease as to the story that follows, to pique the interest of the reader.

**BODY** This is the actual story. Will it be interesting or boring? This depends on how you handle all of the above aspects. There are ways to make your story readable.

**ENDING** The final one or two stanzas round out and complete the story, and give it a satisfactory conclusion.

### **Now to deal with the actual structure of the poem.**

**\*RHYME** You must choose the length of the stanza – four lines? Six lines? – and then decide what variety of rhythm you want to use. Will it be a four line stanza with rhyme scheme AABB (the first and second lines rhyme, then the third and fourth lines rhyme), ABBA (the first and fourth lines rhyme, and the second and third), or ABAB (the first and third lines rhyme, and the second and fourth)? Once you have established the rhyming pattern, this pattern is followed in all other stanzas of the poem.

**\*RHYTHM** This is the beat, also called **METRE**, and is referred to in terms of "metric feet". There are a certain number of metric feet in a line of poetry. Information on metric feet and their length in a line is readily available on the Internet.

**\*GRAMMAR** Now you are actually writing your poem. In competitions, grammar is of great importance. Nothing is worse than a poem with lots of grammatical errors.

**\*SPELLING** As with grammar, spelling is important. If unsure of the spelling of a word, check it in your dictionary or on the Internet before you use it. Don't just assume it is correct.

**\*PUNCTUATION** Don't be slapdash with your punctuation. It must be used correctly. Also, in this 'modern era' it is no longer necessary to start each line of poetry with a capital letter.

**\*LANGUAGE** This is a very important aspect of your poem. Poor, unimaginative language will only detract from the effect on your reader. To help overcome this, poets use lots of IMAGERY. However, many people rely too much on sight images (painting a picture for the reader to see), so don't ignore all the other types (sound, smell, taste, touch) in your writing. Also, make sure your language suits the characters and the topic.

To add to the effect of your words and images you are creating, the poet uses FIGURES OF SPEECH which can add enormously to the power of your descriptions. Some of these devices are ALLITERATION, SIMILE, METAPHOR and PERSONIFICATION. There are others, but these can easily be found in dictionaries and the Internet. Your work will be improved by it.

Also, the use of words which sound short and sharp are effective in creating a feeling of speed, while words with long, slow vowel sounds will do the opposite. So don't discount the sound of words in your writing.

**\*STORYLINE** All of the above are intrinsic to writing good narrative poetry (as well as other types) that people will enjoy reading. You must engage the reader and draw him/her into your story, and the above techniques will help in this. However, they will not be sufficient if the story you tell does not hold the reader's interest. Is it the same old story told a hundred times before?

Try to make your story unique – not something done before – or perhaps a twist on a known theme. The addition of a dash of lightness or humour can also be quite helpful.

© Alec Raymer, Eagleby, Jan 24, 2022

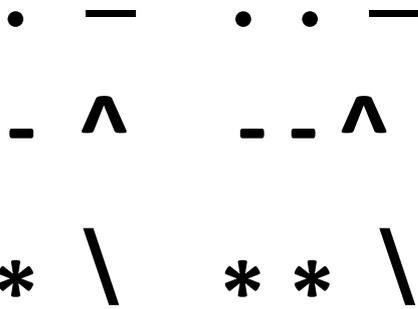
---

Alec recorded his first bush poetry CD in 1988, and has since received plentiful poetry and songwriting accolades, including National titles. His writings continue to resonate with many.

*"My ideas come from anything and everything – from characters I have met, from gems  
dropped in conversations that settle in the subconscious and surface  
days later as light bulb ideas or dreams,  
from life itself and things that impress or annoy me,  
and from the beauty and the terror of the natural world."*

*(Alec Raymer – as quoted in Member Profile within The Magazine of The Australian Songwriters  
Association Inc., Issue 90, November 2012, accessed online via [www.asai.org.au](http://www.asai.org.au))*

## Eye-AMB & Anna-PEST



### Dancing together to create rhythm.

Conversations during the Billy Zoom events revealed poets using a variety of terms to discuss syllable 'stress'. It is universally acknowledged that attention to this element differentiates 'a writer' as being 'a poet'. Playing with patterns of common word stress is essential to formal poetry in general.

Regional dialects add further variety and challenge to poetry. Even in the Zoom rooms, personal differences in word pronunciation were evident. It is always the rhythm that will guide the reader. 'Light & heavy' 'dot & dash', 'soft & hard'... however you call it or mark it on the page... **Metre matters.**

The late Ellis Campbell won hundreds of bush poetry writing awards including the 1996 and 2010 Blackened Billy competitions. Google 'Ellis Campbell bush poetry' to find his timeless guidance to writers which is enduringly rich with examples and clear direction.

### Tom McIlveen is one of modern Australia's most awarded written bush poets.

With hundreds of awards, including several State and Australian titles to his credit, we asked Tom for some guiding tips to help emerging bush poetry challengers.

## RHYTHM

The most popular metre used in traditional verse is **iAMBic**...written and pronounced with the stressed syllable as '**AM**'. This style of metre is very close to the way in which we speak in everyday language, and makes for a more conversational, natural sounding flow of verse.

Iambic metre is often used with an '**anaPESTic**' foot at the start of each line, to further enhance that natural sounding, conversational flow. Anapestic metre is once again, pronounced as it is used... with the stressed syllable on the '**PEST**'.

The following example from Henry Lawson commences with an anapestic leader followed by iambic feet ...

'when I **CAME** in **SEARCH** of **COPy** **TO** a **DARLing** **RIVer** **TOWN**.'

(Unstressed/unstressed/Stressed/ unstressed/stressed/ unstressed/stressed etc.)

## RHYME

Feminine and masculine rhyming patterns are also used in traditional verse. Most commonly used rhyming pattern is **MASCULINE RHYME**...e.g 'TOWN' and 'DOWN'.

Feminine rhyming is the use of an internal rhyme on the second last syllable...e.g, in 'Clancy of the Overflow'....LETter and BETter.

Getting a firm grasp on metre can be difficult at first but will come with practice and time.

Regards, Tom McIlveen [thepoetofoz@gmail.com](mailto:thepoetofoz@gmail.com)

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FABULOUS 5 WHO DOMINATED BILLY 2022

IRENE (QLD) PETER (WA) DAVID (VIC) BRENDA (QLD) KAY (QLD)

### **32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition Awards 2022**

1	<b>Elegy</b>	<b>Irene Dalgety Timpone</b>
2	The Silence of the Guns	Peter O'Shaughnessy
3	Where Desert Rivers Run	Peter O'Shaughnessy
HC	I am who they have been	David Judge
HC	Imitation Eagles	Brenda Joy
HC	Homecoming	Brenda Joy
HC	Soul Searching	David Judge
HC	Down the Track	Irene Dalgety Timpone
C	The Squib	Peter O'Shaughnessy
C	If Only	Irene Dalgety Timpone
C	Ghosts Within a Tempest	Kay Goring
C	The Station Owner's Wife	Irene Dalgety Timpone
C	Silo Art	David Judge

**Sincere thanks to Adjudicators – David Campbell, Catherine Lee, Carol Heuchan**

## **TROPHY RELAY**

Akin to a torch relay for a grand event, the journey of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Billy trophy to the winner involved many poet hands. Claycraft boast they could pack the Billy in such a fashion it could be punted 50 yards and arrive unbroken. At the time of writing, a Billy had not yet been posted to test the claim. This year, Irene's trophy travelled from Tamworth via several cars and an airplane. Sincere thanks for assistance to Dave Elson, Paul Wincen, David Howard and Ross Rolley. Ross is pictured here at handover to Irene Dalgety Timpone in Atherton, Far North Queensland. Irene's winning verse 'Elegy' follows.



Photo credit – Brendan McNamara Photography

**Elegy** © 2022 Irene Dalgety Timpone

In the golden glow of evening, just before the set of sun,  
when the hush of dusk is slowly settling in,  
I will often see, in memory, a distant cattle-run  
and will struggle not to let the tears begin.  
Though the set of sun is beautiful, it heralds death of day  
and the coming darkness through another night.  
This evokes an innate sense of loss that never goes away,  
and a loneliness of soul I dread; but know I cannot fight.

In reflective mood, I often think of folk I used to know,  
and relive the times we shared so far from here,  
recollect the many places where we often used to go,  
find contentment when recalling those once dear.  
The remembered scenes, like pixels, drift unbidden, leave the past,  
then reform upon the sight screen of my mind,  
and I gain such poignant pleasure, caused by memories that last,  
all the treasured ones, I realise, I cannot leave behind.

There is one such precious memory that haunts my mind of late,  
a beguiling, most precocious little boy  
with a thirst for knowledge proving quite impossible to sate –  
and a first-born son, his parents' pride and joy.  
As he grew, he learned to love the land, rejoice in Nature's gift:  
he revered the dawning day and setting sun.  
He would lie and watch the night sky, count the satellites adrift,  
and he'd dream of flying far and high when childhood days were done.

He had shown athletic talent, had an active, searching mind,  
and he hoped to travel right throughout the world:  
so he joined Australia's Air Force hoping he would surely find  
all the ways and means to see his dreams unfurled.  
With resolve, he left his roots behind: the time had come to part,  
his intention *not* to work his father's land.  
He felt grief and loss surround him, shared their pain within his heart,  
as he kissed his weeping mother, shook his father's work-worn hand.

Ten years' military service, then deployment, Middle East,  
made a man of him, of that, there was no doubt,  
and he thrived on active duty, felt a deep self-worth, at least,  
and gave not a moment's thought to 'getting out'.  
He enjoyed a life beyond his work, but that took second place  
to his designated role in uniform;  
but, on overseas assignments, he met danger, face to face,  
and then hidden scars and latent fear became the brutal norm.

In the early years, he studied, trained, was always 'on the go',  
and his dreams came true in many varied ways;  
but the tasks were grim, the impact harsh, and cracks began to show  
in the nightmares tensely haunting nights and days.  
Losing peace of mind, his closest friends and, finally, his wife,  
he no longer could deny the mental stress  
that pervaded all his working days, invaded his whole life,  
leaving him to struggle bravely, but alone, in his duress.

He remained an Aussie warrior for all his working years,  
with retirement the only prescribed choice.  
He refused to blot his record, showing weakness, shedding tears,  
or with frailty betrayed by trembling voice.  
His experience had shown him that his Service curtain-call  
would present no chance to argue or protest.  
There were *no* rewards for serving well, no empathy at all,  
and no kudos for Afghanistan, Iraq, and all the rest.

He had hoped he could remain enlisted – work had been his life:  
there was so much more, he knew, that he could share.  
He had served with dedication, had no children and no wife,  
and his lonely, empty future seemed unfair.  
He had bought a house in Sydney, such a long, long way from kin.  
Looking homeward seemed a loser's way to go,  
with the battles he would need to face, those problems deep within,  
and the ravages of his own war his loved ones need not know.

He had loved the military life he had so gladly shared  
with his mates who served beside him since the start.  
For a life alone, anonymous, he never felt prepared  
though his wife and he, for years, had lived apart.  
Then his house became a refuge, though it symbolised success,  
worth at least a million dollars, he'd been told;  
but the thought of moving somewhere else brought deep and dark distress –  
he saw nothing but traumatic loss and anguish if he sold.

On the day his Service ended, he left Base in mindless haste,  
with his paper-work unsigned and incomplete.  
He was shattered by the notion that his life was senseless waste:  
he had fears of struggling, homeless, on the street.  
In this state of paranoia, he soon lost the urge to cope  
with the severance procedures still not met;  
and his problems – insurmountable – caused him to give up hope  
of a life devoid of horrors that he wished he could forget.

Years of isolation followed till he lost the will to live,  
found he thought of self-destruction all the time;  
and he agonised because he knew his dad would not forgive,  
and would think his choosing death a mortal crime.  
He then studied 'method', day and night, and shuddered at the thought;  
but he finally decided, 'time to leave' –  
though he went against the purpose of all battles he had fought,  
and his mother would have nothing left to do, in life, but grieve...

*I admit the gloom of present times has made me feel depressed  
and afraid to think of what the future holds,  
for my way of life has altered, now, in ways I'd never guessed,  
and I watch with fear as each new change unfolds.  
There is comfort in my memories and, there, I often stray  
for reminders that my life was one of joy –  
not one plagued with darkest torment that can blight both night and day  
and the knowledge that my mental strength is useless to employ.*

*I remember, yet, that loving child who sat outside with me,  
on the back steps, facing Western hills and sky,  
as we viewed the glowing sunset, brilliant colours bursting free,  
then were saddened while we watched the daylight die...  
How I pray he sensed my presence at his chosen time to go,  
felt my hand in his before that final flight,  
and imagined sundown visions with a warm and golden glow  
from the heavens as he sought eternal darkness, endless Night.*

© 2022 Irene Dalgety Timpone

---

“Having married a girl from the bush and worked alongside the returned veterans of many conflicts, there was something absolutely compelling to me about the raw reality of this poem. Something almost as beautiful as it was brutal in a tale that I have come to know all too well for having existed in this space. The tragedy that too often becomes of those who return from war, only to fight battles darker and deadlier on home soil. This is such a heartfelt offering - a story told in words that stirred through my blood before cutting to the bone. In terms of the courage and honesty it must have taken to not only craft but share such a personal emotion, I can only hope that the process provided some kind of peace for the soul of its author... somehow. And to the man in whose honour it is penned, I say with genuine sincerity on behalf of my family, 'thank you for your service' ”

Rupert McCall OAM

[www.rupertmccall.com.au](http://www.rupertmccall.com.au)

## Comment from BB2022 Co-adjudicator David Campbell

“Elegy” is a well-crafted poem that tells a story which, unfortunately, is all-too-familiar, bringing pain to many families. In that sense it is timeless, for it is a tale of war and its aftermath, although here we are concerned with the modern-day conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan.

There is a frequently-discussed gulf between what those in uniform experience on overseas deployment and civilian life, a challenging dissonance which can make readjustment to the daily non-military routine exceedingly traumatic. And so it is with the central character of this poem, who we first meet as a “beguiling, most precocious little boy”.

The poet takes us on a journey through his life in words that reflect a parent’s love and grief, both coloured by a powerful sense of understanding and compassion. The lines not only demonstrate an excellent understanding of the basic requirement for good metre and rhyme, but provide some beautifully evocative imagery, taking us back (for example) as “...remembered scenes, like pixels, drift unbidden, leave the past,/then reform upon the sightscreen of my mind...”

**Inspired touches like that help a poem to stand out,  
causing the reader to pause and think for a moment...  
the famous “wow” factor.**

The narrative of a poem must draw the reader in, and this can create problems if the theme is a common one, as it is here. So it is a testament to the poet’s skill that a topic often dealt with in bush poetry competitions can be presented in a fresh and compelling fashion, providing a perspective that gives added insight into a scenario that haunts many families of those who have served in our armed forces.

Congratulations to the author for a fine piece of work, a deserving winner that continues the highly respected tradition of the Blackened Billy.

David Campbell

Member of the Adjudication Panel BB 2022

Winner of 4 Blackened Billys to date -

2007	Hero
2009	Desertion
2012	A Father’s Prayer
2019	My Father’s Voice

Winner of Inaugural Cloncurry Prize 2021 and abundant other quality writing competitions.

You can discover more of David’s writings at <http://www.campbellwriter.com>

## IRENE DALGETY TIMPONE – RESPONSE TO MY WONDERFUL SUCCESS IN THE BLACKENED BILLY VERSE COMPETITION 2022

My first response must be to the magnificent group of organisers who, once again, have made the Blackened Billy Verse Competition such a prestigious and popular event for Australian Bush Poetry writers. Congratulations and Thank You to you all.

I must also thank David Campbell for his wonderful presentation of “Elegy” at the end of the ZOOM program. I doubt if anyone else could have captured, so well, the very essence of that poem and all its implications. Thank you, David. You cannot imagine how great a gift that was to me. Your review of the poem has also shown me that you understood every word and nuance and had the level of empathy needed to assess every element of the poem.

I was extremely honoured and proud to be selected as the Blackened Billy winner in 2022. Because of the extremely open nature of requirements for entry into the competition and the history of outstanding poets who had won previously, I decided to submit several entries. I will be honest – I coveted the magnificent trophy. An additional lure was the fact that a team of three experienced judges would make the ultimate selections.

I had entered my poem, “Elegy” in the Blackened Billy in 2021. It was fresh from the press at the time, and I knew that improvements could be made. Encouraged by a Commended Award and a highly positive and supportive critique from one of the judges who had literally ‘seen into the heart of things’, I made some changes, very few to be exact, but necessary, and I was pleased with the improvement. I sent “Elegy’ back into the fray and was absobloodylutely delighted with the 2022 outcome.

---

## 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Blackened Billy has inspired, encouraged, rewarded and acknowledged poets for 32 years. 30 years ago, Neil Carroll won the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition with ‘Warrego Jack’s Galah’.

30 years on, Roweth Music helped us celebrate the anniversary. You can find their wonderful performance tribute online. Jason and Chloe Roweth’s joyous video that brought words to life as only performance can. Billy Zoom conversations included description of the Roweth Music presentation as ‘adding another dimension’. ‘It takes a two-dimensional page of words and transforms it’, ‘dramatised it’, ‘has a life of its own.’

Praising comments shared in celebration of Neil Carroll’s winning verse included it ‘showing the best of Aussie larrikinism’, with ‘lovely use of common and colloquial language’ and entertaining imagery and ‘ripper punchline that left me shaking my head and chuckling thinking about *that bird*’. ‘Warrego Jack’s Galah’ is up next. Enjoy!

## Warrego Jack's Galah

Copyright Neil Carroll 1992

*Winner of the 2nd Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition*

If you've ever travelled the Great Outback, where the western drovers are,  
you've no doubt heard of Warrego Jack and Pinky, his pet galah.  
I met them first at Toulby Gate they were droving a thousand head,  
and Warrego talked at his usual rate but the parrot left him for dead.

As I left he remarked "I wish she'd rain! I'm sick of this hot, dry spell!"  
but a fortnight later we met again in Brewarrina's Royal Hotel.  
The wagers were flying fast and thick in the hotel's public bar..  
The boys were betting with Silent Mick on Warrego Jack's galah..

For Mick had a large white cockatoo that he thought was hard to beat.  
He was reared by a shearer at Pockataroo on damper, and cold corned meat.  
The victor of many verbal wars he could go like a bullock driver.  
Mick said "I'll bet that he outtalks yours to the tune of an even fiver!"

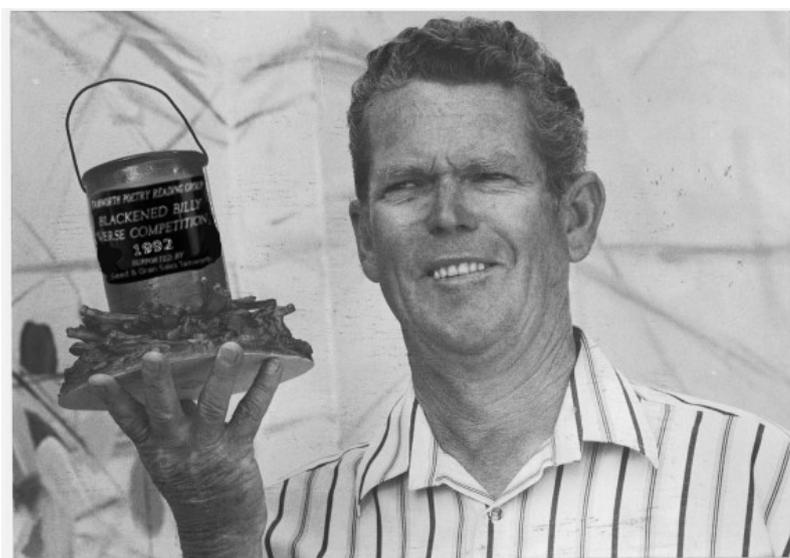
So the bets were laid, and they placed the birds in a square... two feet by two.  
Mick's bloke let go with a string of words. but Pinky didn't say boo.  
He just sat there with the cunning look of an untrained, raw beginner.  
You should have heard Warrego Jack go crook when they called Mick's bird the winner.

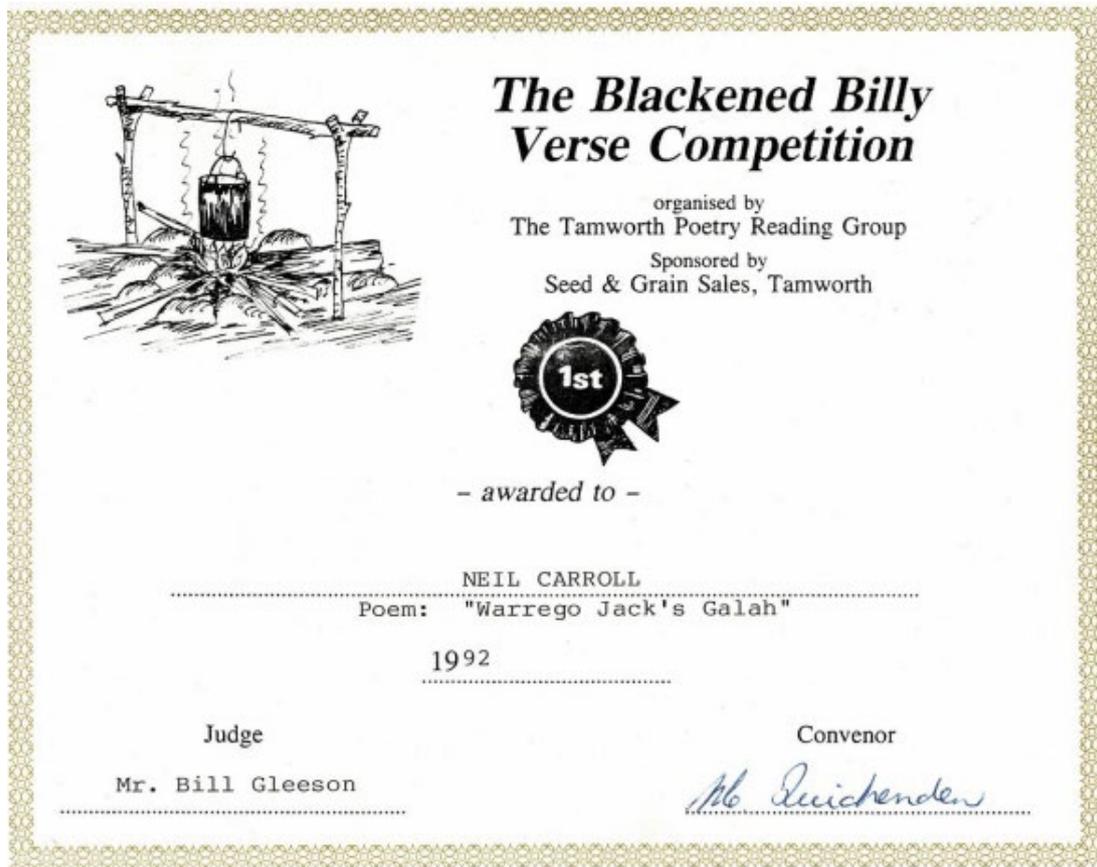
But he paid his debts, with a poker face then he said "You've let us down!  
Your smart little act was a real disgrace, we're the laughing stock of the town!"  
Then Pinky spoke "Now listen you guys! Relax... and forget your sorrow!  
Just use your scone, and you'll realise we'll get ten to one tomorrow!"

---

Neil's son Justin provided an image of Neil holding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy.

The Billy plaque had been improvised, perhaps because it was hard to read in the photo. It has been modified again for the purpose of this print. The label is not nearly as important as the pose. This winning shot of Neil with his Billy is an epic treasure from the early days.





Neil’s son Justin and daughter Lucy are delighted we are keeping their dad’s memory alive by way of poetry. Lucy described poetry as Neil’s one true love, and added ‘(Perhaps more than Mum and all his kids).’

The year before winning the Billy, Neil’s poem ‘A Letter from an Only Son’ won a national title - and bragging rights from a competition pool of 3000 entries. The Queensland Life newspaper wrote of his achievement on February 21, 1991. The headline read “Dubbo man triumphs to win national poetry competition”. With respect and acknowledgement to the original publisher, excerpts from the article are reproduced here for both informational and educational purposes.

“It had a story. The metre and rhythm were good and consistent and the sentiment, not sentimentality, of the poem is something everyone could relate to,” Mr Munro said.

“It managed to bring together many of the concerns of people today and also linked the bush with the city.”

Neil’s winning poem, “A Letter to an Only Son” — for which he will receive \$1000 and a certificate — was chosen from almost 3000 individual poems entered nationally for the contest.

National finalist’s judge Colin Munro, federal head of ABC rural radio (who, incidentally, used to sit in Banjo Paterson’s old school desk), said the winner was “streets ahead of the rest”.

It is written through a woman’s eyes, and tells of the two sides of rural life during the good times and the bad times experienced over the past forty odd years.

Promoter Comment – Billy prize pool would definitely increase dramatically with 3000 entries at \$10 each.

A LETTER TO AN ONLY SON      Copyright 1991 Neil Carroll

I was very downcast when the Matron came past,  
and remarked "There's some mail for you Grace!"  
but I must say I find that they're ever so kind  
in this lovely retirement place.

As I went through the mail, just a *Grace Bros* sale  
and a note that my licence was due,  
one fell to the ground, as I turned it I found  
what I longed for...a letter from you.

When I saw the handwriting, I found I was fighting  
the tears that I'd fought for a week.

As I read a few lines I was back at *The Pines*  
on the bank of the Marthaguy Creek.

But I know it's no fun on a property Son,  
with a young wife and two little kids,  
when the water runs out after two years of drought,  
and the wool prices go on the skids.

When the interest is due, and the shire rates too,  
and you've just had to fence off the tank.

When you sit there alone and won't answer the phone,  
in case it's the bloke from the bank.

Yes! We know all about it, and Son don't you doubt it,  
we've been through the hard times before,  
and I still can't condone how we made it alone,  
with your father a prisoner of war.

How we worked to survive forty three, four and five  
I was cooking for men on the stations,  
and you'd pick up dead wool every day after school,  
then you went in to stay with relations.

And then came the news for the Germans and Jews,  
and the Jap...it was peace for all men.

How we laughed and we cried, as you prayed by my side  
that your Dad would be with us again.

When he came from that hell he was only a shell  
but they found him a job in the mines.

With our backs to the wall, his deferred pay and all  
a deposit was paid on *The Pines*.

Then down came the rain and good seasons again,  
and the wool prices went through the roof.

We were knee deep in mud in the 'fifty one flood,  
as we mustered to shear every hoof.

How he'd laugh and he'd rouse as we built the new house,  
and I'd want some new-fangled appliance,  
and we thanked the Good Lord that you now could afford  
to do Agricultural Science.

And when you'd return at the end of each term  
with your classmates...vivacious and bright,  
we'd play tennis all day and the neighbours would stay,  
and we'd dance in the woolshed at night.

And then came the letter to say that you'd met her...  
a Vet, from Killara, North Shore,  
and we knew right or wrong that before very long,  
we'd have a new daughter-in-law.  
And Son she was there when your thoroughbred mare  
Blue Velvet produced her first foal,  
but you were so sad when you saw your old Dad,  
for those war years had taken their toll.

And the young Doctor said, "*I can get him a bed  
down at Concord...with lots of his mates!*",  
but we knew in our minds that the drive from *The Pines*  
was his last through the boundary gates.  
And he asked you to come and look after your Mum...  
take over the reins so to speak,  
and Jan your new wife came to love the bush life,  
and our home on the Marthaguy Creek.

And life was a song as the kids came along..  
young Katie and curly haired Ben,  
but the days remained dry, not a cloud in the sky  
and the dust storms were starting again.  
We were feeding the rams, and the young crossbred lambs  
and each sale day the prices came down,  
and the vealers we'd bred on the old watershed  
were hardly worth trucking to town.

Then *The Libs* got the axe, with fringe benefit tax  
and interest rates making things harder,  
we sat 'round at night and we talked of our plight,  
and how to replenish the larder.  
So to lessen the tension I went on the pension,  
we'd found this *Rest Home* on the coast,  
and the tearful good-byes under hot cloudy skies  
was the part that I hated the most.

Yes! I realise dear that it's over a year,  
and I'm pleased that you're getting the rain.  
I can tell by your letter that things are much better,  
the wild flowers are blooming again.  
There's the photos from Jan and the notes to *Dear Gran*,  
and my world's full of heartache and sorrow,  
but my face is a mess when I read your P.S.....  
you're coming to get me tomorrow.

Copyright 1991 Neil Carroll



The National Library of Australia features several fabulous conversations with Neil. This one is well worth a listen, including delightful verse such as 'Roundabouts and Roses' and Neil's poetic liaisons with his local council. Neil was aged 88 at the time of recording in 2017.

<https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-555986673/listen>

## 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

In 2002, Veronica Weal won the 12<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition with 'The Spirits of the Outback'.

In February 2022, Veronica shared this recollection as we celebrated her winning verse -

*"The poem was written as a result of personal experience. In 2001 my husband and I made a round-the-world trip to America and England to see relatives and were in London when the events of September 11th occurred.*

*It was a tragedy that shook the world and like most travellers, our one thought was to try to return home safely and then stay there. During long hours of waiting in airport terminals we met and spoke to other Aussie travellers. Several had been overseas on more than one occasion but had seen little of their own country and this is what prompted me to write the poem.*

*It seems ironic that after an interval of 20 years overseas travel has again been curtailed, but for a very different reason. Even without that coincidence I feel the underlying message in the poem is still valid. By all means go and see the world when you can - but see some of our wonderful country first!"*

Inspired by Banjo's review of Barcroft Henry Boake's work and Toastmasters International standard practice, enquiry was made regards 'evaluation'. The poet was apprehensive though agreeable, voicing curiosity as to what modern poets would think of 'something written 20 years ago'.

In hindsight, Veronica wrote – 'knowing well-known poets were being invited to evaluate a poem I wrote 20 years ago my first feeling was one of apprehension. I needn't have worried. My fellow poets were generous with their praise and very restrained with constructive remarks and I felt humbled by some of their comments'.

Anonymity is part of this package as most of the evaluators actively support poetry events and competitions. In particular, those who adjudicate competitions deserve a level of mystery/privacy regarding their poetry preferences.

Overall, this evaluation experience provided marvellous engagement opportunity. We are fortunate to live in a technological era. Online meetings help refresh old bonds, and create new relationships, despite vast physical distances between.

Regarding the evaluation, poets were encouraged to identify at least one point of improvement. This challenge in itself proved fascinating. Veronica's winning verse commences below and the Exercise in Evaluation follows.

Sincere thanks to the following contributors to this conversation – Veronica Weal, Noel Stallard, Bob Magor, Bill Kearns, Shelley Hansen, Tom McIlveen, Kay Goring. Thanks also to popular performer Trevor Stewart who contributed enthusiastically to the celebration as part of the Awards Ceremony. There is much to be admired in this treasure from 2002, including a mention of 'the blackened billy'.

## Exercise in Evaluation

**OCCASION** – 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Veronica Weal winning the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition with ‘The Spirits of the Outback’.

18 January 2022 Outward enquiry – “Seeking to celebrate and draw attention to the abundance of embellishments and techniques of quality rhymed and metered Australian Bush Poetry displayed in your verse”.

Permission was granted by poet to invite evaluation.

### **THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK**

When those aircraft started falling in an outrage so appalling  
That the world was changed forever on a clear September day,  
Did you shed some tears of pity for the pain of New York City?  
Did you grieve for senseless slaughter in a country far away?

Do you feel a fear of flying, and of shattered aircraft lying  
In the piles of smoking rubble in some city overseas?  
Have the sites of foreign action lost a lot of their attraction?  
Do you think of coming holidays with feelings of unease?

At a time of narrowed choices, clear your mind and hear the voices  
Of the Spirits of the Outback, as they praise their ancient land.  
Hear their whispered words come stealing as they softly start appealing  
For a nation to appreciate the wonders close at hand.

You’re an Aussie, so you reckon. Follow where the Spirits beckon!  
Go and see the wide horizons as the dusty tracks unwind!  
Take your car and dare to travel over western dust and gravel.  
Feel the sense of isolation when the city’s far behind!

See the kangaroos go bounding. Hear the thump of tails resounding!  
See the wily snakes and lizards in their careful camouflage.  
See the bright green budgies winging, with a thousand of them singing!  
See a string of camels striding through a distant blue mirage.

Go and see the sunset glowing where the coolibahs are growing  
Near Kynuna, where the legends of the past can touch your soul.  
See, in wild imagination, as the icon of a nation  
Meets his fate in muddy waters at the Combo waterhole!

See the headstones sadly angled, in the weeds and grass entangled,  
Where the dead men lie forever now their lonely lives are spent.  
Sense their selfless sacrifices as they paid the loser’s prices  
In a game of dice with danger, in a stark environment.

Go and watch as riders battle with the speedy bush-bred cattle.  
Hear the stockwhips crack and rattle when the muster has begun!  
Stand and feel an eerie shiver as the ghosts of Snowy River  
Gallop silent through the snow gums on an alpine mountain run!

See the purple storm clouds banking when the mill has ceased its clanking,  
And the lives of stock depend upon the rain about to fall!  
Go and see the grasses growing where the rivers have been flowing,  
And the way the wildflowers carpet all the country, wall to wall!

See the distant mountains shimmer in the hazy mid-day simmer.  
See the wide blue vaulted heavens where the wedge-tailed eagles fly.  
Go and see the rivers shining where the ghost gums are entwining.  
See a windmill silhouetted up against a sunset sky.

When the blackened billy's boiling and the campfire smoke is coiling,  
See the sparks that dance like fireflies as they float into the night!  
Go to sleep, when day has ended, 'neath the Southern Cross, suspended  
Like a precious jewel above you, with its pure and lustrous light!

View the paintings, dotted, mystic, of an ancient race, artistic  
And simplistic in their spirit. Go and see and understand  
Why they love their Keeping Places in these endless open spaces.  
Go and sense their total bonding with their Rainbow Serpent land!

Go and see the West's aorta – source of life, artesian water!  
See the lilies splashing colour on the creeks of Kakadu!  
Heed the Spirits! Go and do it, or forever you will rue it!  
Flash resorts and frantic cities are the same the whole world through.

Do not sit at home stagnating when Australia is waiting!  
Go and see the opal colours of the country "further out"!  
Meet the people unassuming! See the golden wattle blooming!  
Go and see the "vision splendid" that "The Banjo" wrote about!

Leave your comfort zone behind you! Let the inland core remind you  
Of the courage of our pioneers, who played a vital part  
In the gradual formation of our image as a nation.  
Let the Spirits of the Outback live forever in your heart!

© Veronica Weal, Mount Isa, 2001

---

<sup>1</sup> This verse reflects an element of the current ethos of the Blackened Billy Verse Competition – contemporaneous comment. Rupert McCall was inspired to write by the same occurrence and will be travelling to an anniversary event in New York in September 2022. Rupert's verse provided a clear and widely-resonating message of support and empathy, encouraging a resilience-building effect on his audience. Here's to storytellers who focus their craft on rhymed and metered verse that is both inspired by - and able to provide fresh perspective to help others make sense of events that impact our lives in our times. You never know where it will take you - Lux.

## Notable quotes from Evaluators in response to invitation –

‘I am probably a bit out of my comfort zone doing comments on esteemed winning poems but I had a go.’

‘As a fellow bush poet I would never convey my thoughts out loud of the merits of a decision by a judge or critique another poets work. The bottom line is does the audience like this poem and do other poets have it in their repertoire. That makes it popular and that to me is what writing bush verse is all about.’

‘Thankyou Veronica for a modern day masterpiece.’

‘This is a very well-constructed poem, extremely and unashamedly evocative, leaving the reader in no doubt as to the poet’s feelings for this country

‘This poem is in my opinion a veritable masterpiece’

‘Here is an author that budding poets would do well to emulate.’

26 January 2022 Response from poet after receiving some of the evaluations. 5 had been forwarded to date -

*‘Thanks for sending the evaluations on my poem. I found them very interesting and appreciated the words of praise for a poem which was personal to me and took a great deal of time and effort to write. I also appreciated the constructive criticism.’*

# 1 THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK by Veronica Weal

This is a very well-constructed poem, extremely and unashamedly evocative, leaving the reader in no doubt as to the poet’s feelings for this country.

The use of both the iambus and the Anapaest in its four-line stanzas, as well as the unstressed syllable at the end of lines one and three of each stanza, give the poem variety of metre and are very effectively handled, and the metre is consistent throughout the whole poem. As well, the use of four-line stanzas gives the poet great scope in introducing many examples to back up her argument.

As rhyme is aural and relies on sound rather than on the spelling of a word, this allows a poet some wriggle room when creating his/her rhymes. In this poem, the use of internal as well as end rhymes brings variety to the poem and helps to maintain the reader’s interest.

This poet has a mastery of the English language, and uses it to great effect. Her wide vocabulary ensures that descriptions are vivid and highly evocative. This allows her to speed up and to slow down the tempo of the lines with short, sharp words for speed and fervour, slowing to long, slow and flowing words where necessary. She uses this to great effect, adding to the impact and the power of her words. The use of imagery abounds, especially sight and sound, and is used to great effect.

This is a poem that has been beautifully and competently crafted, and I congratulate the poet. It is very emotional and its message is as clear as a bright blue Australian sky. Excellent.

## 2 Comment on “The Spirit of the Outback”.

The opening of this poem is an attention grabber with its questioning of our reactions to a very recent tragedy that would have been in the forefront of most people’s minds at the time. Having gained our attention, the author abruptly switches our attention from something horrible overseas to something beautiful here at home. I feel this is quite clever as it emphasizes the contrast between the two worlds.

This poem is a call to the reader to come and experience what this land has to offer. The repetition of the word “see” is used to great effect in this regard especially when it is teamed with words like, “go”, “feel”, “sense”, “view”. It is a repetitive call to the reader to get involved.

One aspect of this poem that impressed me is the subtle use of phrases that almost quote parts of other well-known poems that touched my memory as I read it through such as “where the dead men lie” and the reference to the Combo waterhole from waltzing Matilda. There is also a reference to the poetry competition itself where the blackened billy gets a mention.

I did, however, find the ongoing description after description of the outback a bit hard to wade through even though they were varied and well written. To me there seemed to be a certain sameness about it. Perhaps this aspect could be tightened up a bit without losing the overall impact of the poem. I tried reading the poem and leaving out two complete verses and I don’t think it detracted from the poem.

The winning aspect of this poem for me is the overall flow of the poem. I asked myself if I could still enjoy the poem as much if I heard it recited instead of reading and analyzing it and my answer was definitely **yes**. With the internal rhyme in every second line, the addition of the occasional treble rhyme such as battle, cattle and rattle or the almost treble rhyme such as sacrifices, prices and dice, I found myself being carried along with the rhythm without any hitches in meter to destroy the atmosphere.

The author set herself a daunting task by setting a tight rhyming pattern but she has been consistent throughout the poem and has produced a work worthy of being considered most highly.

## 3 My evaluation of Veronica’s poem.

It is an outstanding poem, both technically and descriptively.

Some might comment on the capitalisation of every line. It should be remembered that this poem is 20 years old, and that was the fashion at the time – so it can’t be considered a point for improvement. I note that in her later poems, Veronica has adopted the modern approach of not capitalising every line.

## 4 THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK by Veronica Weal

As the iconic Blackened Billy Bush Verse Award commemorates another successful year, it is my pleasure to consider *The Spirits of the Outback*, Veronica Weal's winning entry 20 years ago.

This poem was written in the aftermath of 9/11 – at a time when Aussies thought twice about overseas travel in view of the risks involved. Ironically, here we are 20 years on, still risk-averse about crossing our borders, for entirely different reasons.

Veronica's poem extols the virtues of holidaying at home, and it has to be said, the lure of Australia's diversity is eternal. I love this poem for the following reasons –

- Its metaphors and vivid word pictures – for example, the apt comparison of the great artesian basin to the heart's aorta, and the vivid depiction of “a string of camels striding through a distant blue mirage”.
- Its **accurate rhyme and metre – two of the non-negotiable tenets of Australian bush verse**. Novice writers would do well to read and to learn from this masterful example of our craft.
- Its skillful use of internal rhyme – not easy to achieve, but one of the most lyrical and evocative of all rhyming formats, and a personal favourite of mine.
- Its topical theme cleverly interwoven with its detailed descriptions of the Australian outback, along with its motivational message – a fine example of how modern issues truly do belong in bush poetry.

When technical excellence combines with “wow” factor, you know you are looking at a winner. Veronica's poem ticks every box and remains just as fresh today as it was when it won the Blackened Billy Award in 2002.

## 5

In reply to your invitation to comment on Veronica's poem, I am a bush poet who writes in his own style to pursue his passion for the craft. My work may differ from others. That doesn't make any of us wrong. We're just doing our own thing.

I have won a few competitions having been judged by someone who has their own ideas about what they consider important in written verse. Had I had another judge I may not have won because I didn't please that particular judge. That doesn't make the judge right or wrong.

It's not like a game of sport where you score more goals so it's obvious who wins. It's just an individual's opinion.

I have judged a number of competitions around the country over the years. A lot of entries are lacking polish in rhyme and don't scan well. In a written competition these points are vital.

As a judge, you end up with a pile of poems that are well written. Then it's down to content. Then it becomes personal. I probably then get criticised in some circles because of my selection. That doesn't make me wrong or right. While I may have strong views on poems that I read, they are just that. My personal views.

I read some winners and think 'what a great choice'. Others I consider dull and boring - no matter how well written they are. As a fellow bush poet, I would never convey my thoughts out loud of the merits of a decision by a judge or critique another poet's work.

The bottom line is does the audience like this poem and do other poets have it in their repertoire. That makes it popular and that to me is what writing bush verse is all about.

## 6

### THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK by Veronica Weal

When I was first approached to do an evaluation of a poem in conjunction with the Blackened Billy, I had no idea what that poem would be. When it arrived in my inbox my anxiety jumped. The poem was called THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK by Veronica Weal. Not only that, it was a winner, having previously won the Blackened Billy in 2002. Where was I in 2002? I was working fulltime with two teenage daughters and facing a mountain of debt. Poetry was not even registering on my radar. Fast forward to a time somewhere around 2013. I am fumbling around with my first attempts at writing Bush Poetry when I happened to hear a poem being performed on stage. I became so completely lost in its beautiful story, I forgot where I was. Such was its power. At the time, I didn't know the name of the poet but I knew that this was the type of poetry I wanted to write. Whether I fully realized it or not, my course had just been set. That poet was Veronica Weal.

Now, here we are, in 2022 and there's been a lot of water under the bridge. To be asked to do this evaluation is, in itself, a measure of my achievements and I am both proud and humbled by that acknowledgement. I have learnt so much and yet I feel I have only just begun to explore the endless possibilities that rhyme and metre can offer.

But how on earth could I evaluate a proven winner, let alone a poet I admire so much? Turns out, I needn't have worried at all. I was always in safe hands.

### EVALUATION

**Form and Content:** I read the poem through twice, first to myself and then out loud. It is a relatively long poem topping out at sixty lines but the storyline held tight and the language flowed beautifully from start to finish. The poem starts out by reminding the reader of the loss and tragedy surrounding the falling of the twin towers in New York city. From there the poem, through the use of beautiful imagery, takes the reader on a journey through the outback. By using this clever contrast, the poem creates and intensifies a sense of deep appreciation for what we have right here in Australia. It finishes strongly with a passionate invitation to get out and see these wonders for yourself.

**Rhyme and Metre:** The poem has an elegant mid-rhyme and end rhyme structure alternating from soft to hard syllables. The metre is established in the all-important first verse and its pattern is maintained consistently. In this poem, the poet clearly demonstrates a thorough, competent and confident understanding of the many nuances of metre.

**Summary:** This is a beautifully crafted poem where every possible aspect has been carefully chosen to work in unison. It is easy to see how it won the Blackened Billy. It did, quite literally, make me sit back and say “WOW” for the sheer level of skill shown.

## 7

'THE SPIRITS OF THE OUTBACK'...(winner of Blackened Billy 2002.)

This poem is in my opinion a veritable masterpiece and an indisputable worthy Blackened Billy winner for 2002, and indeed for any Blackened Billy competition previously or since. In fact, in my opinion, it would require something rather extraordinary to be placed above it. It has been written with flawless meter and rhyme in the style of the old masters, and does justice to the legacy they left us. It was obviously extremely topical back in 2001, in the immediate aftermath of America's 9/11 attack.

The meter is perfectly heptametrical, iambic throughout with each line starting with an anapestic foot. The internal female rhyming is the most difficult of all rhyming patterns to maintain. It is very challenging to maintain perfect context of vocabulary when restricted to double internal female rhymes, with male rhymes required at the end of second and fourth lines. This is why I believe that perfecting traditional rhyming verse is the most challenging genre of all, and the most difficult for any writer to aspire to.

I would challenge any free verse poet to attempt to write at this calibre in perfect rhyme and meter. Only the very best writers can do it. Trying to express oneself in perfect rhyme and meter at this level is extremely challenging and equates to trying to run with hobbles on.

The poem very cleverly takes you from the carnage of America's 9/11 to the wonders and beauty of our very own paradise, far removed from the horrors of New York City, and reminds us with emotive and evocative word imagery, what it is to be proudly and gratefully Australian. Thankyou Veronica for a modern day masterpiece.

## 8

The Spirits of the Outback

The author of *The Spirits of the Outback*, throws out a challenge to us to go out from our cities and discover the various Spirits that exist in the Outback. This theme is made clear at the beginning, developed forcefully throughout the poem and brought to a fitting conclusion in the final stanza.

This challenge has been embedded in the consistent metre and accurate rhyme that the genre of Bush Poetry requires. When an author uses this consistent metre and accurate rhyme the ideas, action and emotions being expressed flow smoothly for the reader. Of themselves metre and rhyme do not make a successful poem but it can not be a success without them. Success will also depend on the forcefulness of the imagery the author uses and with this poem this author has consistently used forceful figures of speech relevant to the various Spirits being described.

With the use of personification, the author wants the reader to have a personal connection with the various Spirits of the Outback,

*Of the Spirits of the Outback, as they praise their ancient land.  
Hear their whispered words come stealing as they softly start appealing  
For a nation to appreciate the wonders close at hand*

So often this author will create emphasis through repetition. This indicates the importance of what is being described and the passion the writer has for the reader to share that passion.

*See the kangaroos go bounding. Hear the thump of tails resounding!  
See the wily snakes and lizards in their careful camouflage.  
See the bright green budgies winging, with a thousand of them singing!  
See a string of camels striding through a distant blue mirage.*

On seven different occasions the author has used, “Go and See” ; so the reader is in no doubt as to what he or she is being encouraged to do.

Imagery is essential to poetry and vivid descriptions can be captured in similes and metaphors as well as relevant adjectives and adverbs. This author uses very successfully all of the above.

*Go to sleep, when day has ended, 'neath the Southern Cross, suspended  
Like a precious jewel above you, with its pure and lustrous light  
View the paintings, dotted, mystic, of an ancient race, artistic See, in wild  
imagination, as the icon of a nation  
Go and see the West's aorta – source of life, artesian water! See the sparks that  
dance like fireflies*

This poem would score highly in any Bush Poetry written competition for the reasons I have expressed above. Here is an author that budding poets would do well to emulate.

## **Pre Billy Chinwag**

STAGE – Zoom online platform, 10 February 2022.

ON – Veronica Weal, Noel Stallard, Robyn Sykes, Tom McIlveen, Shelley Hansen, Kay Gorrington

The Evaluation Exercise prompted occasion afterward to engage some of the participants online. Self-admitted ‘Technophobe’ Veronica Zoomed in for her first time thanks to daughter Sarah’s support. Another had experienced *unstable internet* at home so fled a rainstorm and ventured into town for better signal. This was a relatable experience for many. Veronica herself reported needing at times ‘to go out in the rain with the iPad and up a hill to get good signal’.

Doors were closed to keep mower and neighbour noise down and poets Zoomed from homes, a library and a car. Some 'met' for the first time, familiar with names they had seen or read works of in modern poetry and writing competitions. All delighted in seeing Veronica's joy and contributed valuable elements to conversation of modern and past bush poetry practices.

*"This is very exciting." "It's been so long since we've seen each other."*

The lively conversation included lovely language and stories as acknowledgment of several first time 'meetings' unfolded. All seemed familiar with names and works of others and praise was plentiful and sincere. Other conversation was about the subject verse and use of 'juxtaposition – contrast - the clever use of the changing of mood'. Comments were also shared about Veronica's other verse including 'Chasing your Dreams' declared as "Inspirational!" and further evidence of the emotive power of Veronica's writing.

A snippet of one conversation -

*Noel – Another poem of yours that you would remember well. When we were both at Winton and I did that poem of yours 'A Waltz without Matilda'.*

*Ron - Yes, yes I remember that one.*

*NS - It's a beautiful poem and I remember Johnny Major. Johnny Major cursed me because I had performed that one on stage. When I walked off stage he was the next one on and he was bawling his eyes out. "Buggar" he said, "I've gotta go on and perform now".*

*You've got that skill. A relevant emotion.*

Special thanks to Noel Stallard also for sharing stories of Ellis Campbell's inspiring remarks, though 'Stick to selling CD's' seems a backhanded compliment about bookworthy merit of one's writing. Noel spoke of Ellis's honesty in feedback being appreciated as a challenge to strive as a writer and focus on the technical requirements of the bush poetry genre.

'Sonnets' were introduced to the conversation, then proceeded with - assuming we all knew sonnets necessarily require 14 lines.

*"It's like Sonnets."*

*"You wouldn't put a 13 line poem into a Sonnet competition. That's not a Sonnet."*

The concluding comment –

**"If we don't do the same with bush poetry, if we don't maintain the standard, we may no longer have bush poetry."**

Monitoring of recent years evaluations and adjudicator reports prompted conversation about accurate rhyme. This included confirmation 'a word or end word sound cannot rhyme with itself'. This standard is widely evident in numerous statements and publications about Australian bush poetry from many esteemed poets. Examples, of 'irrigate' and 'Wilson's gate' and 'seen' 'scene' were stated as other than accurate rhyme attempts.

In line with current and past conversations, the 2023 Billy competition guidelines regarding accurate rhyme have been updated to include clarification. A range of online bush poetry instructions are available. Emerging writers may find benefit in perusing examples, though should keep in mind that assonance, sight rhyme and other variants would not satisfy the criteria of accurate rhyme required for success in the Billy.

**Line Limits were discussed and discarded as conversation.** Blackened Billy Verse Competition will continue to leave the matter in the hands of entrants. This element continues to find air due to resonating with earlier calls and long ago historic praise for succinct poetic form. During the Billy Zoom events, words such as ‘essence’ and ‘flavour’ of verse were heard. Within these very pages, praise for ‘felicity’ and ‘atmosphere’ of verse support the same call.

In 1984, Veronica Weal’s ‘The Dark and the Fair’ was Runner Up in the Bronze Swagman. The ‘Bushed Bush Ballad Judge’ Ted Barraclough wrote then of finding the entered poems a joy to read for having ‘a vigour he had not expected’, while some felt ‘marred because they were too long’. He pondered how rhyming temptation could lead to repetition and redundancy and cautioned of the resulting statement being considerably diluted.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Performance competitions for Australian bush poetry are commonly 6 to 8 minutes, including preamble. The Original verse Open Competition in Orange in February 2023 has a time limit of 5 minutes. Writers seeking for their words to be shared by recitation or performance in these spaces would do well to keep these timeframes in mind.

*“Everybody is used to the immediacy of Google. You tap something in and there it is. You don’t have to wait for anything, or a punchline or read to the end. Everything’s sort of short and snappy. So maybe particularly these days, shorter poems – a little bit shorter - would be more acceptable to today’s audience”*

Veronica Weal ‘pre Billy chinwag’ Zoom 10 February 2022

Final words on timing draw upon praise of C J Dennis with regards to his succinct manner of bush poetry, as reported more than a century ago. In response to publication of “Sentimental Bloke”, a press notice from The Scottish Australian declared ‘Mr Dennis is a master in the art of compressed suggestion.... See how much there is in every line!’ (Source – page 7, Catalogue of books published by Angus & Robertson Ltd, September 1916 as reproduced in ‘The Moods of Ginger Mick’ C J Dennis 1916 )

## 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

David Campbell reigns as the most awarded winner of the Blackened Billy Verse Competition. His 4 wins of the Billy have not yet been equalled. Many contemporary writers have been inspired and guided by David’s richly crafted compelling works.

The 2012 Billy was David’s 3<sup>rd</sup> win. ‘A Father’s Prayer’ resonates on a human level beyond Australian borders. A timed recording of David’s ‘compressed suggestion’ came in at a succinct 3 minutes.

Attendees of the BB2022 Awards Ceremony were rewarded with David’s live presentation. His preamble mentioned sharing this verse at his daughter’s wedding. Praising words were plentiful as we celebrated with David Campbell.

'David Campbell sees poetry as an excellent means of communication, particularly with regards to personal and emotional issues. The challenge in writing verse is to find words that concisely convey an image or idea to the reader as vividly as possible. Poetry can be a still, small voice in a complex world, with the writer providing insight into the very heart of an emotion or experience in ways that make us pause and think.'

Comment alongside David Campbell's 3<sup>rd</sup> Blackened Billy winner 'A Father's Prayer', in 'Blackened Billy Turns Silver – A tribute to the first 25 winners of the iconic Blackened Billy', 2015, p. 60'

David Campbell's writing and publications include guiding support for organisers of writing competitions and promotion of rhyming as a valuable tool in early education. Many of David's poems feature online with various poetry and writing competition websites and news articles about his comprehensive writing accolades and achievements. You can read and listen to more of David's work, make contact for performance permission and discover current books for purchase at <http://www.campbellwriter.com>

## A Father's Prayer

© 2012 David Campbell

Winner of the 22nd Blackened Billy Verse Competition

I would wish the blue of morning, dawning,  
for the colour of your eyes,  
and bright sunlight on the water, daughter,  
for a smile to mesmerise  
the darkest soul that you might find  
through all those childhood days  
that time can grant a youthful mind  
in happy, carefree ways.

I would wish the fire of learning, burning  
in a passion to succeed,  
and the joy that comes with living, giving  
of yourself in word and deed,  
no matter what the future seems,  
so you can still achieve  
the best of all your hopes and dreams,  
the courage to believe.

I would wish the thrill of riding, guiding,  
a new pony through the glade,  
and the toil of ringers shearing, clearing  
out the fleece that leaves the blade  
like snow upon the highest peak  
above the valley where  
we'll go out camping by the creek,  
and do some fishing there.

I would wish the art of feeling, healing,  
that your mother knows so well,  
and a love that lasts forever, never  
hesitating once to dwell  
on anything that might have been  
if she had not met me...  
a nature that's so calm, serene,  
and yet so wild and free.

I would wish the turn of seasons, reasons  
for accommodating change,  
and adapting to new thinking, linking  
fresh ideas across a range  
of challenges that you will face  
as progress marches on  
at mankind's unrelenting pace,  
for my ways will have gone.

I would wish a kindness forming, warming  
anyone who might come near,  
so that they can gain some pleasure, treasure  
all the things that you hold dear  
in laying out a path through life,  
exemplars that proclaim,  
as daughter, lover, mother, wife,  
you've honoured our good name.

I would wish you understanding, handing  
down the wisdom I have learned,  
that the truth can't be forsaken, taken  
very lightly...trust is earned,  
and honesty will bring respect  
in all you do and say,  
while pride, if left to roam unchecked,  
will just lead you astray.

And I wish these things while holding, folding  
your sweet mother's hand in mine,  
with the midwife standing ready, steady,  
as she watches for the sign  
that you will soon be with us here  
to see this wondrous dawn...  
a daughter cherished and held dear,  
this day that you are born.

© 2012 David Campbell

## **Awards for modern Australian bush poets are plentiful in opportunity.**

It has been common in recent years, between entries closing and awards announcement, for organisers to be advised of entries awarded 1<sup>st</sup> place in another writing competition. In these cases, the entry is no longer eligible for the current Blackened Billy Verse Competition. It is noted part of the cause may be Billy's adjudication timeframe far exceeding David Campbell's recommended measure. The other contributing factor is likely the diligent attention required in other competitions that encourage traditional bush poetry. Adherence to accurate rhyme and consistent metre has often led to success beyond the Billy.

Congratulations to Robyn Sykes for 'Memo From the Hills' winning the Robyn Mathison Poetry Prize, run by the Society of Women Writers Tasmania'. Robyn's pleasure was evident in an email to Lux soon after –

*"winners... have just been announced, and my poem, 'Memo From the Hills', has taken out first prize. I am surprised and delighted that a rhyming poem has won an open competition like this one!"*

*Robyn Sykes - Performance poet, writer and farmer - [robynsykes.com](http://robynsykes.com)*

Congratulations also to 'Proud Australian. Proud Aussie Poet. Proud Republican' Mike Gilmour. His entry 'The Life Blood of our Dry Land' was awarded first prize in the Novice section of the Kembla Flame competition.

Peter O'Shaughnessy's 'Kadaitcha' was Highly Commended in the 2021 Blackened Billy and went on 6 months later to win a State title. This stunning poem won the Open Serious Verse section of the 2021 Golden Wattle Bush Poetry Awards. Peter was further announced 2021 Queensland Champion and received the Graham Fredriksen Trophy as part of the inaugural competition organised by the North Pine Bush Poets Inc.

Festival and competition organisers who strive for flexible participation, as North Pine did, deserve praise. Serious, humorous, open, novice and junior competitions provide wonderful opportunities and invite broader involvement.

'I Am Who They Have Been' by David Judge was Highly Commended in this year's Blackened Billy Competition. This verse has since been awarded the top prize for Contemporary Poetry as part of the 2022 Banjo Paterson Writing Awards. It is noted there was no requirement for bush poetry technique in that competition, yet similar to the Spirit of the Outback competitions, rhymed and metered verse has been acknowledged in a broader competition for modern poetry writers. The Banjo Paterson Writing Awards share Billy's mission to encourage Australian writing. Their competitions include both poetry and story writing, with a number of age-based competitions for youngsters.

Organisers welcome C J Dennis Society leading by example with their engaging award presentation online. These-Toolangi based Awards were a joy to observe with a variety of writing styles encouraged, and participants of various age and skill sets. For writers less keen to adhere to bush poetry metre, short stories may prove a more suitable endeavour. Visit [cjdennissociety.com](http://cjdennissociety.com) to explore. The Society also hosts competitions to encourage poetry writing for children – including one competition judged by adults and another judged by children. Delightful event to share in.

## **Boake - and what Banjo thought**

Reference was made earlier to Banjo Paterson's summation of Barcroft Henry Boake's works.

Further to publication of Boake's 'Where the Dead Men Lie, and other Poems', The Bulletin also commented –

"Boake's work is often praised for its local colour, but it has something better than that. It has atmosphere – Australian atmosphere, that makes you feel the air of the place – breathe the breath of the life". (Source – page 11, Catalogue of books published by Angus & Robertson Ltd, September 1916 as reproduced in 'The Moods of Ginger Mick' C J Dennis 1916 )

Having sparked this year's 'Evaluation Exercise', Banjo's review is commended to all as fascinating reading. The language in address of modern matters is strikingly relevant today and filled with praise too of Boake. Paterson wrote 'he gives the following beautiful pen pictures' and 'wrote the romance of that "mysterious country" in lines that simply startle the reader with their vivid word painting and depth of feeling'.

Banjo commented in varying manner, including - 'purely imaginative verse' 'failed to convey any excitement or emotion in such verses' 'some really spirited lines occur' 'his work is so uneven that reading over the various pieces, it would be difficult to believe that they are all one man's work' 'some beautiful lines' 'in very few of the narrative pieces do any thrilling or dashing lines occur' 'in his best pieces the spirit of the bush took hold of him, and he spoke as one possessed' 'embodies it in words of marvellous beauty and power'.

(Source - "Where the Dead Men Lie, and Other Poems" by Barcroft Henry Boake  
A Review by A B Paterson 'The Review of Reviews' 15 September 1897)

The Blackened Billy Verse Competition is proud to be part of the 2023 Banjo Paterson Australian Poetry Festival. Sharing these words from Banjo to inspire authors of future Billy contenders.

\*\*\*\*\*

**The quality of entries in the Billy is high.** Those worthy of mention will confidently exceed available Awards for time to come. This year, amongst prior Blackened Billy winners, other poets whose verse was ranked on merit were –

Helen Harvey, Mal Beveridge, Robyn Sykes, Jim Kent,  
Tom McIlveen, Kevin Pye, John Roberts and Daan Spiijer.

Kay Gorrington mentioned in a 2022 Billy Zoom meet that 'being acknowledged in a Top 30 was rather encouraging'. Similar is the intent here.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Competition judges share common experience with others who review plentiful quality entries. It is exciting when a verse catches attention and prompts share of a personal encouraging word. Several entries in this year's Billy caught the judge's eye, though were not awarded in 2022 .

The adjudicators shared their delight - and despair - with the organisers and encouraging words were able to be passed on to the talented poet. Each author welcomed advice of their work being applauded and supportively permitted the sharing of their works -and learnings - to assist others. The evaluations provide awareness of key elements poetry writers may find value in considering.

The first verse that sparked an excellent response from one of the adjudicators is not being shared here, through promotor discretion. Keen for first public awareness to be in competition – Billy or elsewhere. It is a fabulous fun verse filled with characters and colloquial crazy good charms. Even the (edited) evaluation is uplifting and exciting to read...

## **2022 BLACKENED BILLY VERSE COMPETITION – CRITIQUE FOR THE POET POEM: *TITLE CONCEALED***

Although no critique has been requested, I would respectfully like to offer my thoughts on this poem regardless. This is because seldom have I come across a more enjoyable work than this impressively original and hilarious yarn about poor (character) and the (character) in the (noun)!

So undeniably Australian in its narrative, the tale immediately grabs attention from the very first stanza and holds it throughout, taking us on a journey of sheer escapism and delight.

The rhyme is accurate and unforced, the punctuation and spelling good, and with four-line stanzas of consistently fourteen syllables throughout, the metric pattern ensures a smooth and easy read.

Original, droll lines such as: ‘XXX’...and: ‘XXX,’ – not to mention: ‘XXX, and: ‘XXX’ have the reader in stitches at the vivid images of these (characters) and a (character) in (location). Finally, the ending is a happy and satisfying one, and the (concluding action) is a brilliant touch.

There is just one thing I feel I should point out, which is that the otherwise faultless syllable count of 14 is suddenly interrupted in the third stanza by two lines of 15 syllables due to the choice of two four-syllable words (*‘inspiration/consecration’*). I would therefore really encourage this poet to consider making a couple of slight changes in order to bring it back to the 14 counts established. This should hopefully be relatively easily achieved with the help of the Thesaurus, and/or altering a couple of words in the middle of each line.

With the utmost respect, I just felt compelled to point this out to the poet in order to try to assist him/her with any other competition entry that is technically strict on such issues, because I would love to see this poem shared and rewarded as it so well deserves.

When I first read this wonderful entry to the *2022 Blackened Billy*, I was ‘unsuspectingly’ sitting quietly on my balcony, and it quite literally made me spit out my coffee and laugh out loud! It kept me laughing the whole way through, and I wanted the author to know this because in my opinion, it is a masterpiece of clever humour written by a truly gifted poet.

Sincere best wishes

Blackened Billy 2022 Co-adjudicator (as at Aug 2022, they still don’t know who the poet is)  
NAME CONCEALED AT THIS TIME

Author response – ‘Well, hooedathort? Some very nice words from the judge’ ‘The poem is actually a shortened version of a sequel to another poem I wrote previously. Who knows? I may have to write a series!’ Promoter response - Quite sure that would be an entertaining read.

Another adjudicator found enchantment with the whimsy and wit of this next verse – describing it as ‘clever, quirky and entertaining’. Enjoy this further highlight of 2022’s annual and ‘always interesting’ Billy harvest...

## **BANJO TUNES**      © 2022 Stephen D’Arcy

“Now my heart is always weary since I’d like to swap with Cleary  
And ride with the overlanders cracking stockwhips overhead  
While he sat here quite distracted as he added and subtracted.  
I don’t think he’d like the ledgers ,...Cleary of the Watershed.”

There, that’s done; it’s not so tricky for a reader who’s not picky.  
If you duff ideas from others then this writing game’s not hard.  
I’ll ignore the folk all-knowing who’ll scream “Clancy Overflowing”  
At the verses of yours truly - now Australia’s newest bard.

No, I need make no excuses. Talent steals but genius uses.  
Predecessors are quite lucky that on them I deigned to look.  
They’d feel joy and never sorrow if they knew that I would borrow  
Minor touches from their writings – fellow poet not a crook.

A ghostly A.B. Paterson would ask me “What’s the matter, son ?  
Just to lift a poem’s subject doesn’t constitute a crime.  
Ever since I was a stripling I stole odds and ends from Kipling  
And he did the same to others. That’s the way we work in rhyme.”

Still my critics sneer and nigger; some will even laugh and giggle.  
So I’ll cease to copy Banjo “with a thumb-nail dipped in tar”.  
Why, I’ll do the feats and dangers of the Kelly Gang bushrangers:  
How in metal Ned showed mettle as he plundered near and far.

Ned first showed he was a goer with a bank raid at Euroa.  
This was after larks turned tragic – three police shot at a creek.  
Then the Premier made proscription with each of the Gang’s description;  
Sympathisers and supporters were all jailed within a week.

Next the bushrangers made merry in the town of Jerildérie  
Where they held up both policemen and one’s wife, Mrs Devine.  
It was then that Ned thrilled her re brave exploits at Jerildérie;  
(Now the stress is in the right place while the rhyme, though forced, is mine.)

At the bush inn of Glenrowan, Gang and captives danced not knowing  
That police crept to get closer and the tavern to invest.  
Then the troopers upped the ante when they set fire to the shanty  
And fired at the four bushrangers - three dead and just one arrest.

Said the judge: “Your hopes I’ll flatten with a lot of learned Latin  
For I’m Anglo-Irish gentry not a cocky such as you.  
“Ipso facto”, “prima facie” – it’s impressive if not racy.  
Now you’ll get your retribution from the class that’s well-to-do.

I detest the tribe of Kelly: you’re all dirty, poor, and smelly.  
Back in Ireland you’re the sort that landlords harry and evict.  
All of you live in a hovel but are disinclined to grovel;  
But we’ll see about your flashness when I move on to convict.”

“What Your Honour just asserted has a trial’s rules subverted.  
First the jury’s stated verdict; then the judge’s turn to speak.”  
“I’ll make it still expliciter for counsel and solicitor:  
I am here to pot your client so his outlook’s fairly bleak.

First they’ll hang you, Kelly, Edward, then they’ll cut you down like deadwood.”  
“We all go to a higher court; and I’m sure to meet you there.  
From now you’ll always be abhorred; for me, ‘a widow’s son outlawed’,  
I’ll live in ballad and in tale – that’s a fame you’ll never share.”

For me Ned’s no barbarian – a socialist (agrarian).  
While we cannot be bushrangers even if we must wear masks,  
Let’s be egalitarian not narrow or sectarian,  
Dogmatic or contrarian. That is all your poet asks.

© 2022 Stephen D’Arcy

---

Thank you Stephen D’Arcy for sharing the delight of your clever work. Parody, in part or whole, are high risk in a competition that encourages fresh original material. Brave, bold and sassily put together. Entertaining to read.

Re ‘expliciter’, it should be noted that Billy has history with this element of poetic licence. Heads up for next year - there is a ‘crocogitter’ in the anniversaries.

The final entrant verse shared here comes from the pen of Helen Harvey. Often awarded, Helen’s reputation as a fine writer of bush poetry is well established.

All three of the highlight entries – unrewarded this year in Billy – show marvellous works are continuing to emerge on the Australian writing landscape, making competitions a fierce forum. The future of modern Australian Bush poetry is exciting when such rich offerings abound.

Jan Morris, so long a driving force of the Billy competition, and source of enduring support is not surprised. Informed of a 40% uplift in Blackened Billy Verse Competition entries, Jan responded – almost all in the one breath with – ‘Marvellous’ and ...

*'It's amazing the Blackened Billy is continuing. No. It's not.  
It's not amazing. It was always a good idea.'*

Jan Morris 2022

Sharing this entry of another highlight. Applause to the poet for welcoming opportunity for others to learn more about the intricate challenges of a technically demanding bush poetry competition.

Introducing this verse by Helen Harvey with an adjudicator quote – 'a beautiful and moving poem about brumbies which would easily have ranked higher if not for the slight change in count in stanza seven. It broke my heart!'

### **The hands holding the reins** Copyright 2022 Helen Harvey

The night fades with first light to make way for daylight  
as equines are stirring with stretches and yawns.  
Soft nickers are spreading as brumbies start treading  
on land where the spinifex presides and spawns.  
As morning light greets them a waking land meets them  
with promise of bountiful plains now to roam.  
Past seasons were not kind but they know they will find  
abundance of feed on these plains that are home.

He guards, ever gazing past mares that are grazing  
to survey the distance which blends with the skies.  
The early light catches the bronze coat that matches  
the steely resolve and fierce glint of his eyes.  
His title was hard won in duels 'neath a cruel sun  
but victory goes to the strongest of will.  
His watch has no ending; he's ever-defending  
from rivals or man who both capture or kill.

His ears start to quiver which sends a shy shiver  
through muscles grown taut by the rigors he bears.  
The breeze that he breathes in conveys as he sees in  
the distance, the danger and threat for his mares.  
He pauses for longer until scent is stronger,  
then rears with a roar and wild toss of his head.  
His actions are pressing; he gallops while stressing.  
A race for survival now looms up ahead.

He's squealing, inciting, by nipping and biting  
the rumps of his mares 'til they all run as one.  
From plains where they're grazing, he's guiding and hazing  
to rugged stone ridges close to a mile's run.  
The race to reach cover before men discover  
the track they have taken where sanctuary lies.  
As hoof-falls are grounding they echo, rebounding  
off earth as they gallop 'neath wakening skies.

The earth is now shaking; its shudders and quaking  
will sound like a thousand hooves blended in one.  
The hardy wild horses run dry creek bed courses  
as brumbies will do and they always have done.  
Fine dust clouds are rising with leaders revising  
the tracks they will travel, well-worn through the years.  
Or race for the river with nerves all a-quiver,  
confusing pursuers whilst quelling their fears.

And oh, it is madness! The end will be sadness!  
The silence is crying with echoes of pain.  
Wild horses are stressing for time is now pressing.  
The Alpha mare leading must take them again  
above the cliff faces to leave little traces,  
or hoofprints to follow to where they will hide.  
The effort is wearing; the strain on limbs tearing  
at equines who clamber a stone mountain side.

Curse the insanity of man's mentality!  
The horses are fleeing while resolve prevails.  
Their world turned to madness; end cost could be sadness.  
Left only would be the wild wind as it wails.  
Foam flecked flanks are heaving while dark sweat is weaving  
its way down the sides of each spent brumby mare.  
What lies now ahead for the equines who fled?  
Does loss of their freedom await them down there?

They have little choices, for faint human voices  
now spiral up high where the brumby mares hide  
upon the stone ledges or high cliff face edges,  
where pathways are only a horse's length wide.  
The riders assemble while mares with foals tremble.  
They know they are lacking the strength left to flee.  
He roars out a warning which echoes back, scorning  
of those who'd deny them their right to run free.

The breeze brings a whining as though it's resigning  
the brumbies to fate as they shelter up there.  
It skims 'round steep ledges and high cliff face edges  
and columns of stone that the winds have scoured bare.  
The breeze is abating as horsemen pause, waiting.  
Their zest for the muster seems withered, then wanes.  
Young riders are turning as fresh hope is burning.  
For, kind are the hands that are holding the reins.

Copyright 2022 Helen Harvey

**2022 BLACKENED BILLY VERSE COMPETITION – CRITIQUE FOR THE POET**  
**POEM: THE HANDS HOLDING THE REINS**

Although no critique has been requested, I would respectfully like to offer my thoughts on this most moving and topical poem.

Interest is captured from the very first stanza and held throughout the work thanks to lovely images and the use of all our senses. You can clearly picture the scene in the early morning light, see the horses stirring, and hear their soft nickers as they awake to a new day. Taking this further, the poet then focusses on the leader of the mob as he watches and listens for danger: *'to survey the distance which blends with the skies'* whilst describing his *'bronze coat that matches the steely resolve and fierce glint of his eyes'*.

From this peaceful scene, we are then suddenly taken on a fast paced, terrified chase as he urgently incites his mares to flee from their human pursuers. You can see the terrain, feel the panic, and hear hooves echoing and rebounding all around. The noise increases in the mind, along with the sense of the shuddering earth and images such as the *'flecked flanks heaving while dark sweat is weaving...'*. The fear of the brumbies is palpable as they seek their known tracks to confuse their pursuers, which they hope will lead to a safe place to hide. Finally, you can feel their gradual exhaustion and hear the Alpha male's roar of defiance.

The reader's emotions are stirred in several ways with awareness of the brumbies' plight. There is the calmness and beauty of the mob waking peacefully, the sheer terror as they flee, sudden rage at man's cruelty, and finally, an unexpected and delightfully positive last line bringing hope: *'For kind are the hands that are holding the reins'*. The rhyme is accurate and unforced throughout this poem, and the internal rhymes on alternating lines give the whole work a smooth, musical flow of words which is extremely effective.

There are just a couple of points I would like to bring to the writer's attention regarding the seventh stanza, where firstly, the otherwise faultless metre is suddenly interrupted by a change in stress falling on the first word (*'Curse'*) when on all other lines it falls on the second. Whilst the actual count of syllables on this line is somehow not affected (there are still 12), the change does tend to cause a slight 'break' in the mind of the reader insofar as the rhythmic flow is concerned.

Secondly, the last two lines of this same stanza each have just 11 syllables whereas all the other stanzas hold the regular pattern of 12/11 on alternate lines, so this too brings a change in metre and count.

I would therefore encourage the author to read the poem aloud whilst focussing on this stanza in particular and considering a few slight changes. This should be relatively easily achieved by removing or adding some syllables and/or using a Thesaurus to find words with the same meaning but different stress or syllable counts, to maintain the consistent 12/11 pattern.

With the utmost respect, I just felt compelled to make these suggestions to try to assist this obviously experienced and talented poet, because in my opinion this is truly a stirring and deserving work.

Sincere best wishes  
Blackened Billy 2022 Judge,  
Catherine Lee

## **Billy is in for a good season when adjudicators are heartbroken about special verses discovered along the way. Keep serving them up.**

Poems that have been performed or displayed elsewhere are not necessarily excluded from entering the 2023 Blackened Billy Verse Competition. Currently, poets can send a revised verse, either within or over subsequent years of a competition. Their fresh iteration would be a new attempt to craft a poem in line with the strict bush poetry guidelines of the Competition. In the same manner, poems that have been performed, recorded, published or shared online, may be modified and submitted for entry. The new iteration is a new work. Billy 2023 will exclude poems that have won any Open Written Poetry Competition, regardless of the rework. Poems awarded a monetary prize in the Blackened Billy Competition are also ineligible for entry in later years.

The comments in this year's judge's reports broadly repeated prior year calls for greater attention to rhyme. The ranked entries display nothing other than accurate rhyme. Current year judge's reports are below. They advise of examples and matters that rapidly separate some entries from the mix. Those talented wordsmiths who dominate modern writing awards do not need to be reminded. Those who seek to challenge them should note. When half the entries appear in need of rhyme guidance, the judges naturally are inclined to use their judges' reports to help. Mastery of metre continues to be evident in the uppermost half of overall entries.

When the stories and language are fabulous, and verse exhibits mindfulness and care with metre, a 'rhyme' - that doesn't - prompts a swift slide of the poem to the discard pile. The Competition Guidelines, based on accepted technical standards of bush poetry, underpin that action. I appreciate the support, care and attention to detail that these 3 Billy-Award winning adjudicators provided. To David Campbell, Catherine Lee and Carol Heuchan – sincere thank you for your support and your helpful written advice to guide Billy contenders of the future.

Up first, the highly respected David Campbell, 4 time Billy winner to date...

---

## **2022 Blackened Billy Report**

Once again it was pleasing to see the overall technical quality of the entries presented for the Blackened Billy. As with last year, a majority of the authors had paid careful attention to the fundamental requirements of consistent metre and accurate rhyme, both of which are essential in a competition like this. There were a range of topics covered, many of them historical and/or dealing with some aspect of life on the land (particularly from a nostalgic viewpoint), and my only disappointment was the comparative lack of poems dealing with current issues such as climate change and the coronavirus.

Traditional rhyming verse can be a very powerful instrument for exploring contemporary events, so we should not shy away from using it, and those few writers who ventured into this territory generally did so effectively.

Usually in bush poetry competitions it's considerably fewer than half of the entries that come into serious contention, therefore it is a testament to the ongoing reputation of the Blackened Billy that so many well-written, carefully structured poems were submitted, and it was thus a considerable challenge to produce a longlist, let alone a shortlist. Final decisions regularly came down to fairly minor slips such as a careless spelling error, punctuation that wasn't quite right, or a stress in the wrong place. I can't emphasise enough the importance of reading your work out loud (or getting someone else to do it) so you can see if what you have written flows smoothly and follows the punctuation you have chosen. Remember that a judge comes to your poem cold and needs to be able to quickly find its rhythm and read it as you've intended. If that is hard to do then the poem suffers.

With that in mind, as I did last year, I'd like to spend a little time with some suggestions arising from specific problems that emerged in entries. As usual, a number of poems failed in their attention to metre. The simplest rule is to establish a pattern in the first stanza, and then stick to it. Whatever structure you use, and there are many, it's important to show that you are in complete control of what you are doing. This is a test of skill, and should not be taken lightly.

With metre, it's a good idea to check the syllable count as you go, ensuring that the stresses are consistent within the structure you've chosen. For example, one poem used the word "conjured", but the metre only worked if the stress was placed on the second syllable...which is wrong. Then there is the need for consistency of line-endings. Another entry used masculine line-endings (where the stress is on the final syllable) throughout, except for two lines that rhymed "deserted" with "subverted". The rhyme itself is fine, but it creates two feminine line-endings. You can get away with mixing things up like this in a performance competition, but on paper in black and white such variations suggest carelessness if they're not part of an obvious pattern. As I said before, control is essential in a written competition.

Likewise, **near-enough rhymes will not pass muster**. To take just a few examples of rhymes that don't work from this year's entries: "pure" and "Tours", "herd" and "prepared", "mud" and "stood", "home" and "alone", "endure" and "explore", "earned" and "spurn", "slum" and "run", "spun" and "young", "want" and "earnt", "refused" and "noose", "gone" and "done", "favour" and "labor", and "stream" and "scene". In a hard-fought competition like this, such errors will probably mean a waste of the entry fee.

As will basic mistakes with spelling. For example, "planes" instead of "plains", "loose" instead of "lose", "doe" instead of "dough" (as in "he pocketed the doe"...I'd like to see it!), and "assent" instead of "ascent". If spelling isn't your strength, ask someone else to check your work.

Commas are also a problem, with the "toss them around like confetti" approach quite common. **A comma indicates a brief pause, so should only be used for that reason**. Too often an unnecessary comma was placed at the end of a line, where it interrupted the flow of reading. Or in the middle of a line, where it did the same. For example: "Where the splendour of our country, will swell your heart with pride". There is no need for the comma after "country" as there is no pause. Reading aloud what you have written can help sort out this problem. Then there are apostrophes, which can't simply be left out.

For example, if you're going to write "our neighbours way", how many neighbours are involved? If it's one then there should be an apostrophe before the "s", if it's more than one then the apostrophe goes after.

And it's not enough to get the rhymes right and ensure the metre is consistent, for, as I said before, good bush poetry needs to flow smoothly, without obviously forced rhymes or lines where the grammar has been strangled in order to fit the metre. If, **in reading the poem aloud it doesn't sound natural, then change it till it does.** This requires a lot of hard work and careful attention to detail. Anybody can put a few bouncy lines together with some "rhymes" here and there...the rappers do it all the time...but that's not competition-standard bush poetry. There are no short cuts to success.

Then, of course, there's the story. When up against dozens of other entries, many of which will focus on common themes such as war or drought, it can be an advantage to write about something out of the ordinary, or take an unusual approach to an old idea. The guidelines refer to the importance of "evocative impact"...or the "wow" factor. This can include anything from an innovative structure or rhyme scheme through to an imaginative use of language.

In conclusion, **congratulations to the prize winners...you've really earned it!** And those who haven't made it would do well to read the winning poems to see what sort of standard is required to meet the highest levels of a written competition like this. Learn from them, develop your skills...and try again next time!

Blackened Billy 2022 Judge David Campbell

---

David is not the only past Billy winner rendered ineligible for the competition recently due to an adjudication role with the competition. Catherine Lee was similarly engaged and her encouraging feedback to entrants follows. Catherine's writing accolades include 3 Blackened Billy Awards to date – in 2011 for 'A Bushman's Last Farewell', 2018 for 'And Did Those Hooves' and 2020 with 'The Wanderers'.

### **2022 BLACKENED BILLY VERSE COMPETITION JUDGE'S REPORT**

It was an honour to be included on the adjudication panel this year for the *2022 Blackened Billy Verse Competition*, and I sincerely thank the seemingly tireless organisers who offered me this wonderful opportunity. This task is a difficult yet immensely rewarding one as the standard of poetry, originality and skill of the talented poets out there is truly outstanding.

There were 105 entries, and once again they did not disappoint in their diverse range of topics, from detailed, impressively researched historical accounts of people and events to thoughts on war, drought and flood. There were comments on the environment and other topical issues, some moving animal and family-related narratives, intriguing ghostly tales, highly amusing yarns, and of course, reflections on the uniquely splendid scenery of the Great Southern Land.

In short, it was a **stimulating mixture of absorbing stories to stir every possible emotion** in a reader, from the touchingly heartfelt, to the sinister, the educational, the nostalgic, and those that brought 'laugh-out-loud' moments. I can assure you they were all read many times over with the careful attention they so deserved.

When it comes to technical excellence, competitions such as the *Blackened Billy* focus predominantly on accurate rhyme, flawless spelling and punctuation, and an uninterrupted metric flow to the words. Any slight change to this metre, or even an easily overlooked wrongly spelt word or imperfect rhyme, can make all the difference when two poems at first appear of equal distinction and impact.

I therefore urge every poet, no matter how experienced or new to the craft, to read completed poems aloud as a vital part of the final revision, as this will assist greatly in picking up small discrepancies such as this, along with any repeated words, slight inversions, or stresses on minor words that might not necessarily be emphasised in the same manner in normal speech.

The imagery in so many of these works was once again astounding. To have the ability to take readers on a journey into different scenes and times by using thoughtfully selected words and evoking all five senses is a gift to be treasured and nurtured. The time and effort that goes into producing such poetry is tremendous, and every one of the entrants has my deep respect and warm congratulations.

The *Blackened Billy* remains one of the most challenging and significant competitions on the poet's calendar, presenting as it does an inspiring opportunity to develop the craft about which we are all so passionate. Long may this continue so that the flame of traditional rhyming poetry is constantly kept burning.

My warmest wishes to you all,

Blackened Billy 2022 Judge, Catherine Lee

---

Final adjudicator comment comes from one of the most travelled and experienced performers of modern Australian Bush Poetry. Before jetting off to the Cowboy Poetry gatherings in the USA, Carol made time to support the 2022 Billy by running her appraising eyes over the entries. Quite sure she found more vigour in the words than she bargained for. Carol won the 2006 Billy with her winning verse 'Why?'. It is a stunning poem and certainly worthy reading, though Carol tends not to share it as a performance piece. Carol presents bush poetry to the masses at festivals and shows – both domestically and internationally. Her on-stage examples show Carol leading from the stage. For Carol, above and beyond the writing technicalities required, the art of bush poetry is encouraged to be 'entertaining'.

### **BB2022 Judge's Report**

It was my honour and privilege to judge the 2022 Blackened Billy Bush Poetry Competition. There were over a hundred entries with many of an exceptionally high standard.

I anguished over story, literary merit, impact, grammatical correctness, adherence to criteria and technical compliance of every single poem – no mean feat in a contest of such tradition and standing!

I would have liked to have taken the unprecedented step of giving a separate, special award to one poem, 'Banjo Tunes,' a poem that, while some questionable technical aspects may preclude it from being successful in this eminent competition, has that factor that has eluded many competition winning poems – entertainment! I found 'Banjo Tunes' to be different, quirky, memorable, and very, very clever. Even the title is ingenious!

This in no way demeans the quality of the winning poem and indeed those in the top five. My eventual choice was 'Imitation Eagles,' a poignant poem which deals with today's pertinent topic of the disappearance of the values and interests of the past. This is a beautiful piece of writing and displays the finest qualities of our craft with innovative structure, creativity, touching sentiment and attention to detail. It was very closely followed by the poem entitled 'Elegy' (which went on to be the overall winner).

Congratulations to all writers whose work featured in the 2022 results.

While several poems had inspiration, many were undermined by poor technical aspects. Consistent meter proves to be the major problem. Great performers are not necessarily great writers and competitors would do well to seek the help of proven writers to hone their skills. Punctuation and grammar are also essential to convey the true meaning and tell the reader how you want the poem said. Attention to detail is a necessary writing tool – there were even errors in the titles of some poems.

However important these literary points are, we must not lose sight of the fact that our art form is meant to be *entertaining* and as judges, we must encourage not just an absence of faults, but innovation, inspiration, and the pursuit of excellence.

Many thanks to the organiser for keeping this very prestigious competition at the forefront of Australian Bush Poetry.

Blackened Billy 2022 Judge, Carol Heuchan

---

## Educators never Retire.

*Second last word comes from the 'absolutely' delighted 2022 winner who 'coveted' the Billy.* Former school teacher Irene Dalgety Timpone reveals the focus and care she invested in winning the 32<sup>nd</sup> Billy.

*What changes did I make? In the belief that my answer to that question might provide a little help to other poets, I have compared the original and final texts of the poem, and my observations follow.*

- I had thought deeply about my *choice of title* before I began to write the stanzas. I had considered a few others – all in the same vein – before deciding that “Elegy”, a lament for the dead, was exactly what the poem needed. With the use of that word which, incidentally, did not appear anywhere within the poem, I attempted to establish a mood of loss and regret which was maintained to the last line of the poem. I always choose my title as the first point of action when planning a new poem. All other considerations within the poem must support the choice of title.
- I conducted a *rhyme check*, looking for rhymes that might possibly be considered as ‘contrived’ or ‘forced’. I had used alternate rhyme, more difficult to maintain than couplets, especially in a long poem. My check showed no need for changes. Most rhyming pairs were single syllable words, or double syllable words with the emphasis on the final syllable. In poems with a serious theme, I contend that rhyme should not stand out in any way. Unless I am writing humorous verse, I aim for unobtrusive line endings that scarcely draw attention and lend well to the use of enjambment<sup>2</sup>. These considerations all impact positively upon effective flow of rhythm.

---

<sup>2</sup> Editor Note - 2 time Billy winner Ron Stevens was a master of seamless flow over lines over verse.

- *Consistency of rhythm and a smooth flow of lines* are essential in written Bush Poetry. To this end, the writer and the person judging the poem need to be of the same mind with respect to the syllable count of individual words. The phonetic pronunciation checks in a standard Australian dictionary are invaluable, and should be consulted where queries occur. Please do not use Media pronunciation as Gospel, for example, ‘Australia’ has three syllables, not four<sup>3</sup>. Never assume that three and four-letter words have only one spoken syllable. The most constantly mispronounced word in English is ‘our’ which has two clear syllables, closely followed by ‘fire’ and ‘tire’ which also have two. Be especially careful with words that have more than one acceptable word count, for example, ‘history’ and ‘family’. I avoid the troublesome words where possible. The best advice? Never assume that you are always correct with your own word count. Check your dictionary.

Some judges are pedantic about *stresses that fall on prepositions* (seen as inconsequential words) *and on the word, ‘and’*. An over-use of such stresses will result in stilted and broken rhythm; but there are times when, due to the particular context, the stress is meaningful and should be permitted. I made no changes in this regard.

- *Awkward sentence construction* is often a natural consequence of focus on Rhyme and Metre. Even though they were grammatically correct, six of my one hundred-and-four lines were emended to overcome awkwardness of syntax that adversely affected the smooth flow of words. All this usually requires is the reversing of a couple of words, the omission of contractions, or a change in punctuation.
- *Punctuation should be the last of the poetic techniques to be checked*. When all other elements have been perfected, it is time to check punctuation. I find that poetry often requires more punctuation than does prose. I make good use of the colon and the dash with respect to the flow of lines. I believe that Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson would have approved our modern tendency not to put capital letters at the beginning of each line unless the capital is necessary for some other reason.
- Above all, Bush Poetry is noted for *the narrative and character elements* so long associated with the works of the great writers of the genre. Successful poems are usually found to demonstrate a highly original and engaging narrative and well-drawn, credible and memorable characters. Because my poem was based on a true story and real characters, these elements were well established in my mind before I even began to write the first line. I was happy with the outcome in both cases.

It took no more than an hour to make the changes I felt were necessary – an hour very well-spent.

Good Luck to all my fellow writers in future competitions. Cheers, Irene.

Last word inspired by Ray Essery - **Encouragement.**

**Ray is renowned** for providing abundant enthusiastic encouragement to modern bush poets and less so for success in writing competitions. He entered one once with ‘Patchwork Quilt’. According to him it ‘came nowhere’ and ‘got no mention’ in the Bundaberg written poetry competition. When asked about it recently, he replied ‘the metre was probably out to buggery’. His effort though was not without good result. John O’Dea approached him for permission to perform it as a song. On they went, as a winning combination. Songwriter Awards, Gidgee 2016. Onya Ray!

**Be like Ray. Write a good ‘pome’. Put it out there. Opportunities happen.**

<sup>3</sup> Pronunciation can be a contentious matter. ‘Strail ya’ with 2 syllables is common-speak for some. Like the usual 2 syllable ‘poem’ and Ray Essery’s 1 syllable ‘pome’, metre can guide the reader on how to say it.

**Huge cheers to Robyn Sykes, Pat Drummond and Geoffrey W Graham for their valuable contributions to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blackened Billy Verse Competition Awards Ceremony.**

Their vivacious nature, fascinating facts and IT-savvy helped make the event go ‘reasonably well’ as one poet politely and graciously responded soon after. Technical glitches aside, we managed to honour this year’s winners, as well as those who had succeeded previously. So too, we expressed regret at awareness of the passing of Billy winners Ron Stevens and Dean Trevaskis in the recent year. Ron won the Billy in ’94 with ‘Tourist Guide’ and in ’95 with ‘Identity’. He left us with the legacy of fancy wool knit cardigans as stage wardrobe, and from beyond, conveyed his clear view that stanzas should be presented intact on a page. Dean’s impact on community was significant and enduring. His 2008 Billy winner ‘The Power of Kokoda’ remains a worthy read. It is relevant again this year with 2022 marking the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the campaign that inspired the family trek that inspired his winning poem. Dean’s quote in the Billy 25 year tribute book mentions a love of bush poetry fostered by his grandfather and of his writing being guided by good friend and mentor Milton Taylor. Dean, taken far too soon, hoped to come back as a kookaburra. That is why you should keep an eye out and never hesitate to say G’day when you see one.

**Blackened Billy Winners Timeline (Updated 17/2/2022)**

Year	Competition	Poet	Poem Title
1991	1st	Bob Miller	The Aussie
1992	2nd	Neil Carroll	Warrego Jack's Galah
1993	3rd	Charlee Marshall	The Mosquito Trap
1994	4th	Ron Stevens	Tourist Guide
1995	5th	Ron Stevens	Identity
1996	6th	Ellis Campbell	Remember Chubby?
1997	7th	Carmel Randle	Just an Isolated Case
1998	8th	Carmel Randle	One
1999	9th	Col Hadwell	Our Youth Our Future
2000	10th	Neil McArthur	The Colt from Old Regret
2001	11th	Glenny Palmer	Shades of Grey
2002	12th	Veronica Weal	The Spirits of the Outback
2003	13th	Joyce Gaul (prev. Alchin)	The Aussie Spirit
2004	14th	Milton Taylor	The Saga of Cecil
2005	15th	Alec Raymer	The Guardians
2006	16th	Carol Heuchan	Why?
2007	17th	David Campbell	Hero
2008	18th	Dean Trevaskis	The Power of Kokoda
2009	19th	David Campbell	Desertion
2010	20th	Ellis Campbell	The Arsonist
2011	21st	Catherine Lee	A Bushman's Last Farewell
2012	22nd	David Campbell	A Father's Prayer
2013	23rd	Milton Taylor	The Passing of a Legend
2014	24th	Milton Taylor	Remember?
2015	25th	Brenda Joy	Where Poppies Bloom
2016	26th	Brenda Joy	Bond of Love
2017	27th	Trevor Shaw	Dentures to the Rescue
2018	28th	Catherine Lee	And did those Hooves
2019	29th	David Campbell	My Father's Voice
2020	30th	Catherine Lee	The Wanderers
2021	31st	Shelley Hansen	Bittersweet Harvest
2022	32 <sup>nd</sup>	Irene Dalgety Timpone	Elegy