

Interview with Elleni Harpa - Silver award winner, 2017, with her poem GAP

Q1: Can you tell us a little about your experience as a writer to date?

In summer 2017 I graduated from Lancaster University with a First Class BA(Hons) in English Literature with Creative Writing. This involved submitting creative work every week for peer workshopping and feedback from tutors. During the three years of my degree, I discovered that my strengths as a writer lie in poetry – after dabbling in short fiction in my first year, I spent the latter two years of my degree focused on developing my poetry. Although I submitted to several magazines etc. during this time, CFLA is the first time my poetry has been published (thank you!). However, throughout my degree I regularly read my poems at various open mic events. I am currently studying for an MA but continue to perform at open mics etc. and have set myself the goal of writing a poem every week this year, with a view to forming a chapbook for submission to Button Poetry's annual competition which opens near the end of the year.

Q2: You were a Silver Poetry prize winner in our 2017 competition for your beautiful poem, Gap. Can you remember what encouraged you to enter the competition?

Honestly, I'm reasonably sure I only entered because it was the only reputable competition I could find to which entry was free. I also loved that it explicitly aimed to uplift under-represented voices; as an activist this is a value I really appreciate. I'd actually forgotten I'd entered at all when the results were announced!

Q3: How has winning the award impacted on your writing?

Although my writing hasn't directly changed as a result of winning, it has certainly given me the confidence to prioritise it in a way that I wouldn't have done otherwise after finishing my degree, and I now feel that the pipe-dream of a published collection is not so unrealistic after all!

Q4: What would you say to someone who is considering entering the competition, but is unsure whether they have enough experience as a writer?

Experience is subjective and irrelevant. If you write, you're a writer! When the 2017 collection was published, seeing my bio which boils down to 'I have a degree and I write poetry' between bios of people who have one-woman shows, published collections, and other professional credits was ridiculously intimidating, but it really goes to show that it's not who you are that matters in the competition, but your writing. I would definitely encourage entering – and if possible, forgetting about it until the winners are announced.

Q5: What's your one big tip for a new writer?

Don't worry about if other people will like what you're writing. Write for yourself, read things you like even if it's a poetry tumblr by a teenager you don't know (not to devalue either teenagers

or tumblr, both are great!), and if you're writing things you like, chances are someone else will too. Also – edit as much as you can bear. I spent too long trying to be precious about my writing and I'm finally learning to be brutal and cut entire chunks out – it feels like murdering a puppy but it really does improve the final version! (That's two tips, but I couldn't help myself.)

Please don't be modest – tell us about your successes – and try to be specific. There's no pressure to write oodles.

Thank you so much. Your response will encourage other under-represented writers and help Creative Future to continue to deliver excellent services.