WRITE AROUND THE MURRAY 2026

Barry Young River of Stories

2026

Short Story

Winners

BOOKtique
COMMERCIAL CLUB ALBURY
AlburyCity
Rotary Albury Hume District 9790
Hume Bank
office choice albury/wodonga

Short Story
Years 3 & 4
Winner
Jude Parker
Bethanga Primary School

A Sheep Named Gon (John)

The grass glistened in the afternoon sunset on a boring, old farm where nothing exciting ever seemed to happen. There was a sheep named Gon (John). Gon did not like adventures or anything exciting really. Gon lived with thousands of other sheep. He had one friend and one friend only. His name was Victor. Victor, unlike Gon, was quite adventurous. Victor was always trying to escape the paddock to eat the vibrant, green grass on the other side of the fence.

"I am sick of grass. Aren't you Victor?" Victor raised his head with a mouth full of grass.
"No! Why?" Victor said with a hint of confusion. Gon went on eating grass with a feeling of quiet disappointment. He drifted off, dreaming about the one thing that brought him joy- getting his yearly time with the shearers. Having his fleece shaun and feeling the warm summer breeze. Victor had an idea! He whispered under his breath, "If Gon doesn't like grass then maybe he will like something else."

That night Victor didn't sleep, he was too busy thinking of things that Gon would like. Ice cream? No. Lollies? No. "GOT IT!!!" Victor shouted.
"Go to sleep" Gon baaad in annoyance.

The next morning, Victor told Gon to pack his bags as they were going on an adventure. "We are going to find you something you admire," luckily Victor had a map of his tunnel system.
"This is going to be a long day," Gon said along with a yawn. Suddenly, Victor started racing off to a hole in the fence. Victor got out very fast but Gon on the other hand struggled. Gon knew the route to the shearer's shack, or at least he thought he did (he did not).

About ten minutes later they were completely lost. Suddenly Gon had an idea.
"You said something about a tunnel system right?"
"Yes," replied Victor, "but the closest entry isn't for about ten kilometers."
"So I guess we will have to start walking," Gon said in a spontaneous voice.
"Hey Victor, why are you always trying to get out of the paddock?" said Gon in a curious voice.
"Well, there is so much more than just 2,500 square meters of paddock. Am I right?" Victor said it as a joke but it made him sad.
"So that's why you brought us on an adventure?" Gon said with a lot of realisation. Victor shook his head, "I did this for you Gon...for you," Gon sagged his head as if he had asked something wrong.
"Look we're here," said Victor with a side of relief.

The tunnels were dark and the air was thin. After quite some time of walking they came to a trap door. Victor opened that trap door. Looking around he could just tell that it was their farmer's house. The farmer was asleep but the farmers kid was awake.
"So I guess we go back to the boring old 2,500 square meters of paddock," Gon said as a joke. They both baaaaad in laughter.
"So what was your favourite part of that adventure Gon?" Victor said, hoping to get a reply.
"Hmmm my favourite part of the adventure was going with you Victor," Gon said. "AND having an adventure," Gon said quickly with no hesitation.

Short Story
Years 5 & 6
Winner
Best Overall Primary School Short Story
Lucie Reynoldson
Victory Lutheran College

Where is Yellow Hair?

I am lying on the floor, and I feel lonely. But then I see her—the one with the milk. I need to get her attention!

"Waaaaahhh!"

"It's okay, bubba. Here is your food," she says.

"Waaaaahhh!"

Yes! She puts the bottle in my mouth. The warm white stuff comes out. That's better. Oh—is that her?

The girl with the yellow hair and freckles. Huh, where did she go? Will I ever see her again? Oh, there she is!

"Peekaboo! Ooh, peekaboo!"

Yellow hair, you are so funny. Uh oh, not the elevator! It looks like Mum, but I'm not sure. All she does is pick me up and walk around. Why can't I roll around by myself?

"Time for bed, my gorgeous boy."

What? Already? That's not fair! Oh no, here come the blankets. Oh ooh, they are warm and soft! I feel cosy, like a sausage roll. I think I'm getting sleepy...

IT'S MORNING YAY! Let's go. Three, two, one.

"WWWAAAAAHHHHH!" I cry.

"It's okay, we're here," Mum says.

"Sniff."

I've done my job. Ok, now I am happy! Oh no, YELLOW HAIR, DON'T LEAVE! NOT THE BUS! She's gone!

What do I do now? I don't get it. Why does she have to go to school? Surely she learns enough from me. I mean, we are best friends, and I know so much more than her. Why can't I teach her?

"You are such a cutie!" Mum said. "Let's get you dressed and go to the shop and…"

"WWAAAAHH!"

Wait, no, not the car, the strappy thing. Oh my gosh, its torture. The seat is always lumpy, like, what is it like? I don't know.

"WEEE!" I scream.

Mum is turning the big circle. Ooh, I am feeling sleepy.

"Oh thank goodness, the baby is asleep," Mum sighs.

Oh, that's so rude, but I can't open my eyes!

BROOM-BROOM!

Are we there already? At the, what did she call it? Oh, the… shops!

Oh, oh, it's so colourful. There's so many mums here… I'm jiggling and singing, and I just can't control it.

"Ooh, you have lots to say, don't you, mister smarty pants."

Oh, it's another one of those mums talking to me!

"Ok, my baby boy, we will buy you a few suits and Mummy a dress, and then we go to pick up… wait, no, I shouldn't tell you. It needs to be a surprise, boop!" Mum says joyfully.

Oi, don't boop me on the nose like that!

"Ok, in the car quickly and we shall go!"

Wait, no, we have to go back. Yellow hair could be in there!

"WAAH OOOH"

Oh no, my eyes are closing again, what am I going to do?

"Oh, come on go to sleep" sighs Mum

"My baby boy," screams a voice

Oh, it's yellow hair! Oh, is it cuddle time? Yes, it is! Warmth. I feel it! It is snuggly and warm, and oh, I feel sleepy.

"Finally he's asleep," Mum laughs.

"YAY!" they both say in excitement.

Short Story
Years 7 & 8
Winner
Ellie Parker
Catholic College Wodonga

The Cheat

I settle into the familiar trance of my nightly routine, walking down the busy street with my hands in my pockets and my gaze on the path. I navigate through a sea of unsuspecting people, trying to maintain a low profile.

Millions of smells waft through the street. Millions of sounds dart through the air. While the overwhelming scene might deter some people, this is all I know. All I am able to do.

Thieve. Pickpocket. Steal.

I walk past a bar of drunken people, cheering and celebrating. Perfect, unfortunate targets.

My hand flicks into a woman's coat pocket, careful not to bend my arm obviously or attract attention. I feel house keys, useless to me. A small wrapper, a tissue – thankfully unused. She's clearly tipsy, but I still don't linger too long. I gently slip my hand from her pocket and continue on.

Another lady has left her handbag slung over her chair, sitting on the black stool as she sips her wine – definitely not her first glass this night. Her handbag is branded, and I notice a rectangular bulge. I slide my hood off and pull my hair onto my shoulders, morphing into the gentle image of an innocent woman. Adopting the portrait of a feeble and naïve lady. Acting quickly, I put my hand on the lady's shoulder.

"Hey, do I know you?" I ask brightly, slipping an energetic mask onto my face. I try to appear clueless, airy, just another person in the crowd.

The blonde-haired woman studies my face with deep emerald eyes, completely distracted from her handbag. I quietly, slowly, carefully rummage through it and find a coin purse – the bulge that I saw. I fiddle with it until I can swiftly click it open. I can feel at least five fifty-cent pieces, plus a one- or two-dollar coin.

"Jacinta?" the woman asks me in awe. "Is that really you?"

Determined to put on a convincing show, 'recognition' flashes across my features as I pull her into an uncomfortable hug. "So good to see you!"

Her intense perfume chokes me, the sweet scent making me dizzy. I click the purse shut, clasp it tightly, and place it in my pocket as I pull away from the random lady who is convinced, I am her long-lost friend, Jacinta.

She begins rambling on and on about how much has happened since 'I' saw her, while I just nod incessantly.

"Yes, well, I'll see you around," I cut her off hastily. "Have a good night!"

"Call me later, okay?" she yells out, but I'm already out of sight, back onto busy street.

I slip into an empty alleyway and lean my head against the cold bricks. Cool air caresses my face as I gaze into the rooftops above. A pipe drips across from me, the steady tapping echoing in the almost quiet alleyway. It's not as loud in this little nook, almost like I'm underwater. And yet, by myself at last, this is where I can breathe.

I click open the purse again, dumping its contents into my palm. Five fifty-cent pieces, like I'd guessed, plus a two-dollar coin. Six dollars and fifty cents.
Could be better, but seeing as the night has only just begun, I'm doing fairly well.
I place the small, cream-white purse and shimmering coins into my pocket. I collect myself and prepare to head off again.
Then someone walks past. But they aren't just any someone walking past, like the dozens of other passersby who have come and gone.
No, this person is a clearly rich someone. A man who has no idea that he is about to be stolen from. Pristinely polished shoes, a sleek charcoal suit, a neatly presented tie, inky black hair styled to perfection. He walks with purpose and is currently on a call on his phone.
Shrugging off the wall, I tail him down the street. He is tall, so it's hard to keep up with his long strides; I take two steps for every one he takes.
As I near him, I notice a gold wristwatch displayed for all to see. It is barely noticeable in the dark, but I saw it glint under the watchful eyes of the streetlights just before. It's shiny. Expensive. Likely easy to steal - not that it's any of my business.
He ends the call and slides his phone into his pocket. Before I can stop myself, I reach out and snatch his wrist. I can feel the complex latch of the watch, possibly tricky to undo, but I've been lucky enough to have my hands on one of these once. It won't be too hard to remove it from his wrist.
I meet his eyes, sapphire blue and laced with confusion, shock, amusement.
"Can I help you?" he asks politely.
"Sorry, it's just… Do I know you from somewhere?"
Same old story. Only this is for much more than a few 50 cent pieces.
He regards me, before replying, "I don't think so. What's your name?"
I make something up on the spot. "Jacinta, but I'm known better as Jackie. What's yours?"
Thanks, Jacinta-woman, for providing me with a cover name. And some money.
"Lucas. Sorry, I'm not sure I recognise you."
I chew my lip, as though in dismay, as I slip the watch from his wrist. "That's okay. Uh, have a good day."
It's more than okay, in fact. It took a bit longer than I would've liked, but as I dissolve into the crowd, I now clutch an expensive wristwatch between my fingers. My find of the night. It won't take long finding someone to buy it. Then maybe for once I'll have a decent dinner.
I'm a cheat. A deceitful, lying, thieving cheat. I won't deny it. But I don't get fancy watches gifted to me, a meal given to me, a smile offered to me.
Nothing is granted.
Everything is taken.
Made happen.
Stolen.
So maybe I am a cheat.
But if it works out in the end, why should it matter?

Years 9 & 10
Short Story
Winner
Baxter Lowe
Victorian Lutheran College

Mikey's Dream

Mikey never expected to die today, but that's exactly what almost happened.
He was at his favourite fishing spot, because he loved fishing more than anything. Wait no, basketball was his favourite hobby! Mikey was also deep in thought. Though he had a lot of basketball friends he didn't have a special buddy. He wasn't fussed about it, but deep down he wanted someone to share things with, like basketball and fishing. Mikey was sitting on a warm rock by the river thinking about basketball, he was fishing at his favourite spot, his line hasn't had a touch for ages.

His eyes started to wander, watching everything that moved. The fast flow of the water, his line pulling to the side with the current. A colourful dragonfly landed on his rod tip making it bounce ever so slightly, his eyes locked onto it. It started flying smoothly up to the wavy tree branches. He looked over to a different tree where he could hear a loud obnoxious cockatoo in the branches, it perched there for a moment then took flight.

Hanging behind the tree branch where the loud cockatoo had perched was some sort of shoes, he wasn't quite sure what kind they were. Mikey was curious and decided to get a closer look at the dangling shoes. He looked down at the base of the tree that was leaning over the river's edge. He managed to find a safe path up the tree where he could cling onto the branches. He slowly made his way up the tree. The tree got skinnier by the second. He hung on for dear life as he managed to get to the end of the branch where he could get a better look at the shoes.
Leaning on a dangerously bending branch, he noticed they're a pair of old gym boots, Mikey was hanging by a thread. When he was only one foot from the boots he looked down at the flowing stream. It was then he remembered he can't swim! It was too late to turn back now. He really wanted the boots, so he gave a desperate final lunge swinging at the boots and grabbed them. He slipped and found himself hanging precariously by the laces of his shoes.

Lots of thoughts were running through his head, but there was no getting wet just yet. He tried to pull himself up, suddenly the branch snapped. Mikey Tumbled down into the fast stream swirling around trying to stay afloat then something strange happened. It felt like he was being dragged to shore, his arm was forced forward holding the boots as if they we're acting like a propeller. He lay on the pebbly bank for a moment to catch his breath. He thought, 'Did I almost die?'
Mikey picked up his bike and rode home dripping wet and snuck into the house by the back door so that his mum didn't notice that he was drenched. He cleaned himself up and sat on the end of the bed staring strongly at the gym boots wondering if they'd fit. He dried them off and pulled them on with one good tug. They were a perfect fit, Mikey told his mum he was taking out the bins but really, he was sneaking out to the local basketball court. He vaulted over the fence; it seemed easier than he remembered. Mikey jogged over to the park where the old rusty hoop was. Bouncing the ball from hand to hand he felt as if it was as light as A feather. Mikey shot the ball from the back of the court as he always did. The ball fell smoothly into the net then smashed back down to the dusty court. He stood there stunned!

His arm was still stuck in the shooting position from the shock he was in. He couldn't believe his eyes. He picked up the ball and shot it again; it still went in as smooth as last time. Mikey shot again. From all over the court, 'BANG!' Every ball went in! A massive grin was glued to his face. No matter what he did, every crazy shot went in!

It was the night before the big game; the team had one last training session. Mikey rocked up with confidence, throwing the ball with a mighty force from full court. Swish!! Straight into the net, his teammates were stunned, even the coach was clapping. Mikey walked up to his friends, so many questions were thrown at him, "It's the boots" Mikey replied.
He was overheard by Fuzzball the biggest bully. I "have to get my hands on them boots"
"Well let's go get them" Billy Bad Ass replied.
"Not just yet, we can get then after training when he walks home," mumbled fuzzball.
The bullies hid in the bush by the creek and waited eagerly. They spotted him walking along the path. Mikey heard a rustle in the thick bush and decided to take the alleyway home. Fuzzball's plan failed. He wasn't giving up that quick. He Snuck up behind him and snatched the boots from his loose grip. Mikey turned in sudden surprise. "Oi give them back" Mikey yelled. As the bullies ran off giggling and cheering!
Mikey was emotional about his boots being stolen, He sat on the side of the path, thinking about what happened. He heard a bike chain clattering from a distance; it was too dark to notice who it was. The bike stopped a foot or two behind him "Mikey?" A voice softly said,
Mikey turned around "Robbie?" replied Mikey
"What are you doing on the side of the road?" asked Robbie.
"The bullies from the other team just rolled me for my boots."
"You can always get a new pair?" suggested Robbie, "but they're my special boots, they make me play the way I do, I'm nothing without them," he said sadly.
"What the boots don't mean anything, you have the most talent I've ever seen!" Robbie stated. "Says who?" asked Mikey curiously.
"Everyone! The coach, the parents, I even heard the ref say you're a very skilled player. We all love you," grinned Robbie.
"Really, you mean that?" Mikey said surprised,
"Yes, you're awesome man," smiled Robbie. "Come on I'll walk your home." He stuck his hand out to help him up.
"Remember, head up we can win tomorrow's big game!"
The next morning arrived. Mikey was pumped, as he packed all His gear ready to smash the 'Fat Cats' He stood there confused wondering where he put his boots. Then he remembered, his mood flicked slightly, but he wasn't letting that stop him.
When he Arrived at the game, teammates rushed over "hey man I heard what happened, that's so messed up" said Jacob one of his teammates. There was 2 minutes until the game started Mikey was nervous to play without his special boots, the game was about to start, when the bully showed up late, wearing the boots! The referee threw the ball up and blew his whistle to start the match.
Mikey got the ball, he could still feel the skills in his body, he took a deep breath and played how He always did make amazing shots from All over the court. The bully played terrible, when the other teams coach called the timeout, the bully threw the old gym boots at the bench "They suck man" said the bully disappointingly, Mikey saw what happened and quickly ran over and grabbed the boots and put them on, He instantly felt amazing, playing even better than he has ever played, there was 10

seconds left on the clock, the scores were tied. Mikey gets the ball and dribbles up the court as fast as he could and launched the ball with a mighty throw from half court Swish!!! Right on the siren the game winning shot, his teammates run over and carried him to the locker room, everyone was chanting his name, it made Mikey feel very special

The Next day, Mikey took Robbie to his favourite fishing spot, Mikey taught Him a lot about fishing, there was an odd silence for a moment as Mikey looked up at the tree and there it was the very branch he found the boots on, he looked down at his feet with a grin on his face. He pulled the boots off with one good tug and tied the laces together nice and tight, swinging the boots around as fast as he could, He let's go as they flew, and stuck high in the tree.

“What are you doing?” said Robbie confused, the boots land on the tip of a branch and bounce for a sudden moment, I love those boots, but it's unfair for everyone else. but at the end of the day, the real win is finding a best friend.

Years 11 & 12
Short Story
Winner
Best Overall Secondary Short Story
A O
Victory Lutheran College

The Bracelet

I do not remember being made.

I remember only hands.

Old hands, young hands, shaking hands, strong hands, hands smudged with paint and flour and ink and cement.

I remember my first owner, though, a timid girl, quick to smile and eager to please. We were alike in that way. Her mother first tied me around her wrist as a reminder to be brave at school. Years later, as a young woman, she tied me onto her best friend's wrist before boarding a ship to the Americas, her hands shaking just a little as she said goodbye. In time, that friend tied me onto another wrist, and then another, each owner's dreams, fears, and promises pressed into my threads.

As I sat on the wrist of seventy-eight-year-old Margaret, I could feel that our time together had almost come to an end. I felt it as Margaret stood, trembling softly, beside a hospital bed, holding me carefully. A newborn baby slept in her daughter's arms.

"She's beautiful," Margaret whispered as she slipped me onto the baby's tiny wrist.

The baby looked at me, held her breath and then let out a strong and hearty cry. Everyone in the room laughed.

"Don't worry, Lily," Margaret said softly. "This bracelet is special, and one day, you'll give it to your best friend, and then they'll give it to theirs. That's how friendship lives a long life."

I had heard those words thousands of times, but I still enjoyed the feel of them. They rejuvenated and excited me to follow a person for another set of years.

I had never been with a child like I was with Lily since birth; I grew up all over again through her. I watched her take her first steps and eat broccoli for the first time. I memorised her cry and her giggle. I listened to bedtime stories and songs sung terribly out of tune.

When she was five, she met Noah. He was sitting alone under a tree on the first day of school, his lunch untouched.

"Are you sad?" Lily asked, her voice small but eager.

Noah nodded sadly. "I don't know anybody."

Lily thought for a moment and sat next to him, legs crossed. "Now you know me."

At the end of the week, she untied me.

I understood. I have always had to understand.

As she took me off, her little fingers quivered. "Grandma said this is for my best friend."

Noah looked at her, then at me. And then he smiled as if Lily had just handed him the sun; I guess in a way, she had.

"There," Lily whispered.

"Now we're best friends."

Noah and Lily were inseparable. They raced bicycles, built forts, and swore they would always be friends. I had heard promises like that before; they always made my threads tighten a little bit. In my experience, they rarely made it past sixteen.

Lily and Noah made it to fourteen: high school. Lily liked books and drama club. Noah liked football, and somewhere between the fourth time they passed each other in the hallway without saying a word, I knew what had happened.

One evening, Noah sat in the shower, his head on his knees, crying quietly. He looked at me and turned me around his wrist.

"I don't even know when we stopped being friends."

Sometimes I wish I were human; it hurts to watch this lesson repeat itself.

Friendships hardly break; sometimes they are merely loosened. A missed call, a forgotten birthday, an unanswered message.

Until some day you realise that you have gone years without talking, and suddenly it feels too big to patch up.

At sixteen, I watched Noah change, he still liked the same things, and he hadn’t necessarily become kinder or crueller, but he was alone in a way that felt all-encompassing.

That is when Shaun appeared.

Shaun was a predictable kind of person; he always entered as if the world owed him its attention. He laughed loudly at the right times, threw an arm around Noah's shoulder like they'd been friends for years, but his eyes were already moving past him, scanning for someone better to land on.

Noah never noticed. People rarely do when they're lonely enough to be grateful.

One afternoon, Noah untied me.

"You should have it," he said.

Shaun's eyes widened. "The friendship bracelet? Really?"

"You've been a good friend."

I had travelled through many friendships, and this one felt wrong. Shaun's grip was indifferent, his skin colder than the others, and yet there was an uneasy eagerness in the way he claimed me.My threads prickled with worry, as if I might unravel.

I stayed on Shaun's wrist and watched him forget Noah, though Noah never forgot him.

Maya arrived quietly, the way dusk does: so gradually that by the time anyone noticed, the world had already changed.

She sat in the back of classrooms, but she listened when people spoke, and her laugh made other conversations quieten to listen.

Shaun and Maya talked because that's what people expected of them. He grinned. She nodded. And I felt my fabric tighten.

At the end of the walk, Shaun held Maya's face and kissed her softly. Then he carelessly untied me from his wrist and placed me on hers.

"There," Shaun said. "It suits you more anyway."

Maya hesitated. "I don't think that's how it works."

"It is if you want it to," Shaun said.

Maya took me. She searched his face and felt a knot of guilt and obligation tighten in her chest. She could not bring herself to hurt him. It was simpler to accept, even if she already feared she would regret it.

I stayed on her wrist for a while, but I did not feel like I belonged there. Not yet. Because Maya did not belong to Shaun, and Shaun did not belong to Maya.

At eighteen, Maya moved again, this time to England. I crossed oceans once more. I watched rain strike old windows and listened to train announcements in unfamiliar stations.

Maya missed America, but she built a life anyway. And so, university lectures became jobs and tiny flats became homes, and the two of us fused; we had built a rhythm together.

And then we met Emma, and it was like everything stopped. Or became clearer.

Something about them did not make sense in the usual way. I had watched friends become strangers and strangers become friends. But I had never seen two people fit together quite like this.

So many people tried to find the right words for what they were to each other. Nothing quite fit. But to me, they were always just Maya and Emma.

Years later, Maya and Emma sat on a park bench. The sun was setting.

"You know," Maya said, "I've had this bracelet for thirteen years."

Emma smiled her knowing smile.

Maya tilted her head "I think it's time."

She untied me.

Emma looked surprised. "No, I couldn't."

"You could."

Maya tied me around Emma's wrist. Emma's eyes shone.

I had been untied many times. Usually, there was sadness, sometimes even relief. But when Maya's fingers loosened my knot, I felt neither.

It did not feel like an ending. It felt like simply moving from one hand to the other.

I still heard Maya's laugh every morning. I still listened to Emma read aloud in the evenings. I felt the beating of two hearts, the way the world almost stood still when the two of them looked at each other. The brush of the other's skin as they crossed paths in the kitchen and held hands.

Then the house grew quieter because time always wins in the end.

Every morning, Maya still made two cups of coffee.

By lunchtime, one had gone cold.

"Grandma," her granddaughter asked one day, "where did you get your bracelet?"

"A friend gave it to me."

"Your best friend?"

Maya smiled. "One of them."

The girl thought about this. "You can have more than one?"

"Oh, yes."

The little girl touched me gently. "Will I have a best friend one day?"

"I hope you'll have many."

A few weeks later, the house grew very loud again, with a sea of people coming and going. I stood by a photograph of Emma which stood beside a photograph of Maya. And I watched my two owners, smiling side by side like they always have.

The little girl entered the room. She picked me up carefully.

"Can I keep Grandma's bracelet?"

"You can," her mother said.

The girl slipped me into her pocket.

I could feel her small hand wrapped around me through the fabric, holding on the way they all had.

I did not know whose wrist I would find next. I never do. But I have never once regretted going.