



Victorian winners in UNHCR School Writing Competition

A year-twelve student from Braybrook College Melbourne has won first prize in a UNHCR Writing Competition for the story of her journey as a refugee.

Sudanese refugee Anthieng (Betty) Majak was just six-years-old when she arrived at Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp in 1992, after a three-month walk from Ethiopia. Today, a VCAL student studying for her final year exams, she is first place winner in the 'personal story' category of the UNHCR's annual high school writing competition.

Anthieng's prize-winning story *A Deep Painful Memory* charts a harrowing and perilous journey from Ethiopia and narrow escapes from bandits who took advantage of the vulnerable refugees. She became separated from her family trying to cross the border from Ethiopia into Kenya, and witnessed the beating and killing of her uncle. Life in the refugee camp was not easy but she was eventually reunited with her brother and sister and brought to Australia in 2003 under the humanitarian programme.

Anthieng's story offers valuable insight into the refugee experience.

"Becoming a refugee involves saying goodbye to all that you know, like relatives and friends who you care for most. It is often a sudden decision made amid fear and chaos. What follows is rarely easy or straightforward," says Anthieng.

Writing competition judge and Time Magazine journalist Tom Dusevic said Anthieng's story was well observed with good descriptions. Another judge, former Australian cricket captain Ian Chappell, said the piece was well structured and informative.

Another Melbournian, 16-year old Aisha el Kurdi from Werribee Islamic College, won second place in the essay category on the topic *It takes courage to be a refugee*. Her fellow student from the same college, Medina Hajdarevic, won a highly commended award for her personal story of her family's escape from the former Yugoslavia to eventual acceptance in Australia.

UNHCR runs an annual writing competition for high school students around Australia with the aim of generating understanding of refugee

issues through the sharing of personal stories. The competition now comprises three categories: an article based on an interview with a refugee; a personal story written by a former refugee; and an essay based on the World Refugee Day theme *It takes courage to be a refugee*. In 2005, more than 160 entries were received.

The stories of winners and finalists in all three categories have been published in a book, *Refugees: telling their stories*, available online at unhcr.org.au or in hard copy from UNHCR.

UNHCR's External Relations Officer and third competition judge, Ariane Rummery, said the collection includes some excellent writing from Australian high school students and also showcases the diverse refugee communities that have built a new home in Australia over the past five decades. "The collection includes stories ranging from refugees fleeing WWII, the 1956 Hungarian uprising, Cambodia in the 1970s, Bosnia in the 1990s to the more recent arrivals from Sudan," she said.

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