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Carmelinda Scian wins 2015 Toronto Star Short Story Contest

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STEVE RUSSELL / TORONTO STAR

Carmelinda Scian won the 2015 Toronto Star Short Story Contest for her piece "A Dragonfly Dashed by My Face." Andrew Bryant placed second with "His Country."

By: Sean Wetselaar Staff Reporter, Published on Wed Apr 22 2015

A story about the harsh reality of life in rural Portugal in the 1960s has won the 2015 Toronto Star Short Story Contest.

The author, Carmelinda Scian, said she was inspired to write her piece, titled “A Dragonfly Dashed by My Face,” by some of her own experiences growing up in Portugal and by what she observed as a child.

The story, which follows a young girl through the morning before her last day of school and the challenges of coming of age, beat out almost 1,700 submissions. The three finalists were announced at an awards presentation Wednesday evening at the Yorkville Public Library.

Scian takes home a \$5,000 cheque and tuition to the Humber School

for Writers correspondence program in creative writing.

“I’ve always loved English. I loved reading, and the theatre — the whole bit,” said Scian, who holds a master’s degree in English from the University of Toronto. “About five years ago, a friend actually said, ‘Why don’t you try and write?’ I thought I couldn’t do it, but I thought, why not?”

Scian, who has a day job as a hairstylist, took a writing course in autobiographical fiction at U of T’s school of continuing education. In 2013, she won the Open Seasons Award from the Malahat Review. On her success in the Star contest, she said, “It doesn’t even seem real yet, especially considering how many entries there were. It feels almost like it’s not happening to me.”

The second-place finalist was Andrew Bryant, from Burlington, with a story called “His Country.” It takes place on a kibbutz in Israel, a setting the author knows first-hand. It’s a tale of “control,” Bryant said — “people trying to control, degrees of control, and how you can lose control in the blink of an eye with just a change of circumstances.”

Bryant, who works for an irrigation company, has been writing for four decades. He has had several pieces published and entered numerous contests, winning several of them. He has also entered the Star’s short story contest several times, and said the news that he was a finalist this year “made my day.” He takes home a cheque for \$2,000.

The third prize winner is Whitby writer Carin Makuz, who brings home a cheque for \$1,000. Her story, “Quality Goods,” also follows a child, this time through the turmoil of difficult relationships with parents.

Makuz is a workshop facilitator for abused women and at-risk youth. She likes to combine text with photography, and runs a blog where she reviews books and interviews writers.

All three stories will be published on thestar.com, beginning Thursday with the third-place winner, followed by the second-place

story on Friday and the first-place winner on Saturday.

This year's contest was judged by Vickery Bowles, the city librarian for the Toronto Public Library; author Heather Birrell; Toronto Star books editor Deborah Dundas; and Star theatre critic Richard Ouzounian.