

St. Helena

Creative Writing – Short Story

The Volvo shifted down a gear, shuddering in protest against the long climb ahead. The old car never could handle the approach to St Helena. But that was all part of the nostalgia; the little old car, slowly clanking up the hill like a rollercoaster steadily chugging to its summit, feeling the nerves and excitement, your heart in your throat in anticipation of what 's to come beyond the peak's horizon. That's what the slope of St Helena was like for Harold and his wife. The North Coast summer breeze howled over the stereo playing their favourite mixed tape, as the car struggled with the great effort needed to reach the top.

Every time it was the same. For the briefest of moments, as the car lurched over the final hurdle and he got his first glimpse of that magnificent sweeping vista, Harold swore his heart skipped a beat.

From the top of St Helena the whole valley laid itself out like a 360 degree view of perfection. One half painted green with luscious, rolling hills, dotted with cute farm houses and small flowing streams; and the other, the deep blue of the Pacific Ocean, the coastline from Byron Bay to New Brighton, with Julian rocks in the distance and the lighthouse standing proudly on the cliff jutting out at sea. Harold felt like the whole of Australia had been placed in front of him, as if he was soaring above everyone else, without a worry in the world.

'After all these years,' Harold murmured, 'that view still gets me every time.' Although they still had a fifteen minute drive ahead, reaching the top of St Helena was like passing through an invisible border, crossing into the sensation of the heart-warming welcome and comfort of being home.

'Not long now love,' he said softly as he looked fondly at his wife beside him.

'Remember when we first moved here? The first drive up with the kids and we stopped at the lookout and we said "That's where we're going to live", and their jaws dropped open with excitement because they thought we were pointing to the lighthouse.' Harold chuckled at the memory. 'I'll never forget that wonderstruck look on their faces from their first view of the valley.'

'Ah, here we are,' as he pulled into the beach car-park, Harold drew in a long deep breath of the salty sea air he missed so much. He sprung out of the car, much faster than a man his age ought to, and walked around to the other side. Opening the door for his wife, he reached in and gently helped her out.

Together they strolled down the wooden walkway, which was now, mostly covered in sand. 'Must have been some storm,' Harold said wisely thinking about how the walk to the beach always changed depending on the weather. 'Remember love, when the kids were little and they'd jump from one board of wood to another. Hazel would always be able to skip one and land on the next one perfectly and poor Max,' Harold said with a laugh, 'would try to do the same and he'd just come clattering down, face first into the sand.' Harold shook his head and smiled at his wife. 'Of course when they were older all they did was grumble about how long the walk was and how inconvenient the distance between each board was.'

“No one walks with steps this close” he said in a high pitched whine as mimicked his daughter’s constant complaint. Harold grinned, delighted to find that now, the wooden boards were distanced perfectly for the small steps of old age, as if the beach had aged along with them, encouraging them to always return.

Reaching their spot along the beach, Harold and his wife sat comfortably in companionable silence, enjoying the picnic Harold had packed and spread out on the well- worn beach blanket that they always kept in the car for occasions such as this. Harold watched as the waves methodically crashed onto the shore, rolling each grain of sand in their calm but forceful surge back out to sea. The shadow of the cliff behind them was slowly engulfing the beach, and Harold knew it was almost time to go.

‘How about a walk up to the point before we leave?’ Harold gently helped his wife up and they made their way along the worn track leading up to the point. With the setting sun behind them, they stood silhouetted at the edge of the point, high above the endless stretch of water tinged with beautiful streaks of pink and yellow from the reflection of the sky above.

Harold closed his eyes, and drew in greedy gulps of the sea breeze that softly whipped his face. He held on to each breath as long as possible until, he thought his lungs might burst and somehow overpower the dull ache in his heart. Harold sighed and a tear softly rolled down the toughened landscape of his cheek. It was time. He clutched his wife in his hands, so firmly, so reluctant to let her go. But in his heart he knew that he must.

With a deep breath Harold slipped his hand into the silver urn and grasped a handful of ashes, letting them slip through his fingers. He watched as they twirled and danced in the ocean breeze falling gracefully towards the never-ending blue. Harold wiped away his tears and the ache in his heart began to ease. Finally he knew she could rest peacefully now. At long last, she was home.

FEEDBACK FOR CREATIVE WRITING - ST.HELENA BY [REDACTED]

MARK: 14/15

GENERAL COMMENTS:

[REDACTED]

A very emotive and descriptive story that deals well with the connection between remembered experiences and belonging.

I gave this a 14 out of 15, simply because without knowing the question or stimulus you are working with I can't give it full marks, but in terms of writing style, story line and characterisation you should be very happy.

Perhaps a few more shared experiences between husband and wife would heighten the emotional engagement with the reader? Perhaps you could include a drive past the church they got married or something along those lines.

To heighten the twist at the end, include a few more references to the wife sitting on her seat silently - hide the fact that she is not there. The reader begins to question why she never says anything and begins to make assumptions; for the greatest denouement you want to avoid this.

Your use of descriptive language is good. Try and weave in a few more similes and metaphors - we love those at the marking centre.

As HSC markers we know that around 80% of students go in with a preconceived creative writing piece; the challenge is to adapt it to the stimulus.

If you look at the last 3 years of HSC exams you will notice a different theme each time: link to identity, connection to places, association with the passing of time. The 15/15 pieces are ones that adapt to these perfectly.

Your best practice over the next few weeks and leading up to the exam will be to sit down in 40 minute intervals and use different stimulus from past papers and write your story using each individual question.

Be very conscious of time - it is usually the biggest enemy in Paper 1. There is no point of getting 15/15 in two sections but <10 in another. You want band 6's across the board.

Excellent work Jesse; I have no doubt that you will excel in your HSC.

Best of luck as you continue to prepare!

POINTS TO IMPROVE: Focus on greater lead up to twist at end. Increase literary features. Practice responding to different stimuli.