

## Bank of New Zealand Katherine Mansfield Young Writer Award – Mark Davidson



Mark Davidson is in year 13 at St Patrick's College, Wellington.

A relative newcomer to writing and to reading, he accounts some of his success to teacher, Mark Lower. 'His exciting, unconventional teaching methods most definitely have aided me in my writing.'

Earlier this year, Mark was inspired by the minimalist writing of Hemingway and has tried to capture this style in his writing.

In his spare time, Mark enjoys art and cooking, is a keen rugby follower and loves walking.

Next year, Mark hopes to study English Literature and Media Studies at Victoria University. His ultimate aim is to become a full time author.

### Man's Best Friend

It was around 7.30 in the morning. The night had passed. Daybreak filled the sky with grey clouds. It was windy. The wind ran through the gorse and thistle bushes and across the dense green paddocks. The morning was still wet. Sammy put on his gumboots and walked to the dog kennels. The dogs were sleeping and whimpering. Sammy moved alongside the kennels, staring into each cage. The ground was damp from the dripping water coming off the shed roof. Sammy felt rested in the presence of the dogs.

His father was out in the paddocks moving the sheep for shearing in a few weeks. Sammy shivered and whimpered like one of the dogs. Some of the locks were loose and the cage doors rattled and annoyed the animals. He heard Misty whimpering more than any of the other dogs. Sammy stood by her cage and watched her. She rolled back and forth to find a comfortable position. He felt the air on his face, it was wet and heavy. His cheeks in the early morning blue-grey sky felt strained. Sammy shook his hands to keep them warm. The clouds continued to move fast and roll about the sky. They were patchy grey clouds that let in rays of sunlight. They would pass over to make darker patches on the ground.

'Sammy, let's go have breakfast,' said his father. 'It's almost 8.' His father looked flustered standing out in the open. The frosty morning must have been worse before dawn. His father walked slowly back to the house. The sight was a relief. The lights were on in the kitchen and the windows looked very thick. The house was further down from the kennels. It was white and very clean from the outside. It had two storeys and lots of windows. Sammy's room was up top and he would wake in the mornings to look at the kennels; his hands would get very cold when he opened his window. The window skirting was brown, and on a good day from the top storey you could look out right across to the other ridge and down into the valley. The garden was tidy and the flowers were wilted from the night's rainfall. A large pine forest ran parallel to the farthest fence and past that was dense green farmland. The pine forest was planted around one hundred years ago, it was a strong plantation and the forest's scent was refreshing, and the scent could be smelt from the house. It was a pleasant area. He would sometimes help his father herd the sheep. He smiled every time his father swore at the cold or the dogs. He would sit on the quad bike and gaze at Mr MacLean's skill with the dogs.

Sammy's dad went inside first. Sammy pulled off his gumboots and stepped inside. The fire was burning and the air was thick and warm. His nose was icy and red. The house had a low ceiling but his father could still stand up. The walls were painted a warm off-white and the carpet was torn around the edges of the room. His father sat quietly at the table. Sammy watched him arrange the breakfast items. He placed everything down lightly while he stared at the table cloth.

'The dogs were cold this morning,' said Sammy.

'It's good for them,' said Mr MacLean 'they need the moisture.'

'Oh.'

'It keeps them healthy. You won't be if you don't eat your breakfast.'

Sammy ate his toast and watched his father. His father stared at the tablecloth and took spoonfuls of porridge.

Sammy's mum sat down and started eating.

'Keep him inside. I won't be long.' said Mr MacLean. Sammy's mum nodded.

'Where are you going Dad?'

His father walked into the hallway. Sammy could hear him fumbling around, then he heard the backdoor shut.

He stared at the tablecloth.

'Daddy needs you to help Mum clean up.'

'Why can't I go with Dad?'

'Help me clean up.' She stood up. 'Take these plates.'

The wind howled against the house. Outside the kitchen window it was hazy. The rain was falling lightly. He heard the dogs barking. His father was at the cages. He thought it was strange, he thought that his father would normally be in the shower.

'What's Dad doing with the dogs?'

'He's got to go up to the back of the farm.'

'Why didn't he go out the front?' Sammy looked up at his mother. She was picking up the plates, but she was obviously holding back tears.

Sammy opened the front door and ran out. The wind was screeching in his ears. He felt small running into the rainy haze. He screamed 'Dad! Dad! Dad!'

Misty's cage was empty. He kept running into the haze. He wasn't sure where his father was. Sammy stopped and turned around and around. He ran off again following the fence line. Mr MacLean's figure walked with Misty limping behind him. The thistles tossed with the wind. Sammy surveyed the paddock and caught a glimpse of his father's dark figure.

'DAD!'

Mr MacLean did not stop. Sammy saw through the haze the rifle in one hand and Misty following. The rifle was a simple design, it had a clean-cut wooden handle, the trigger was heavy to pull, and sometimes Sammy would struggle to pull it. The barrel was shiny and black, the whole rifle was quite heavy and Sammy knew this, but he would still always try to carry it for his dad when they went hunting. They hunted a lot, especially in the pine forest that Sammy thought smelt nice. Mr MacLean liked the rifle. Sammy breathed heavily in his small voice. It resembled a whimper. He reached his father and paced carefully behind him. He stared up to Mr MacLean.

Mr MacLean ignored him. Sammy stopped walking.

'Don't Daddy. Don't!'

'Go home.'

'No.'

'Go home!'

'I'll look after her.'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'She can't run with the dogs, which is what she is meant to do.'

'So?'

'She is a dog, not a human. If she can't run she isn't needed.'

'I don't care!'

'Go home.'

Sammy watched his father walk off again. Misty limped behind him into the distance. Sammy sat down on his knees. He kept his eyes shut. The grass was wet and cold on his bumpy skin. Sammy smelled the tartness of the grass. He didn't shake his hands to stop the cold. The grey clouds moved overhead and a dark patch moved over him. In the surroundings Sammy seemed to contrast the dullness of the still grass. His small voice heaved in air. Sammy shook with the cold, which pierced his numbing hands and nose.

He stood up and followed his father. Sammy thought of Misty whimpering that morning. He remembered when she was a puppy, he would make her chase him around the garage at night to tire her out. Sometimes his dad would watch the two play together and when it was close to 8 o'clock he would make Sammy go to bed. Sammy would take Misty back to the cages and sit and watch her fall asleep. He sometimes wished he could stay out all night with Misty, he wished she could go to school with him, and he wished she could follow him, he wished Misty was his best friend. She was always his favourite. Mr MacLean walked past the old barn. He stood on a small rise near the old barn. His figure was dark against the grey clouds speeding past. The clouds had thickened and darkened. Misty sat at Mr MacLean's feet. He looked out over the valley. Sammy ran to the old barn, and slipped inside. He wanted to try and stop his father but it was too hard. The barn was as cold as the outside and it was dark and dusty. It smelt like wet sawdust at a timber store. The smell got up your nose. He scratched his red nose. He crouched down on the rotting wooden floors. He couldn't help but feel useless. There was a gap in a weatherboard that he stared through. His father stood still, then raised the rifle and aimed.

Behind him the grey clouds rolled past while the thistles blew side to side with the wind crashing at the barn and howling. It made Sammy shiver in the cold dark barn. He watched his father standing still, Misty stared at Mr MacLean and whimpered, Mr MacLean tightened his grip on the rifle.

The gun cracked. There was a loud scream that came from Sammy and a hissing that rang in the air. Misty's figure dropped to the cold wet grass, she did not make one single noise after the shot. Sammy's ears rang and his eyes flooded with tears as he saw his father hesitate then pull down the rifle. Sammy turned and leaned against the rotting weatherboard. He sat on the cold ground. He whimpered like a dog. The wind howled like a wild beast and the rain started to fall heavily. The father picked up the dog and walked down the other side of the hill. Sammy could not see through his hazy eyes, he slowly wept and stared at the floor.