



**EMGARGOED: NOT FOR PUBLICATION PRIOR TO 10:30AM 18 MAY 2016**

## RETIRED NURSE WINS 2016 FINCH MEMOIR PRIZE



Mary Tennant

Sydney Writers Festival – Rex Finch, Publisher, announced today that retired nurse Mary Tennant had won the 2016 Finch Memoir Prize for her story, *I Knew You'd Have Brown Eyes*. The winning manuscript was selected by an independent judging panel made up of Debra Adelaide, Maggie Mackellar and Dominic Knight.

Finch said, 'This is a powerful story about the complexity of attempting to create a relationship between a birth mother and a child she gave up for adoption. Mary writes in a clear, simple style that clearly shows the hurt, vulnerability and longing of mothers who were compelled to put their children up for a forced adoption.'

Mary Tennant said that winning the Finch Memoir Prize was 'exhilarating because Finch has provided an avenue for my story to reach a broad audience.'

She added, 'I always knew my story was worth telling, but I was unsure that I could write and format in such a way that it would appeal to readers. It was very rewarding to be judged the winner by well-known and gifted authors.'

*I Knew You'd Have Brown Eyes* charts the journey of mother and child from an unhappy parting at birth through the changing of Australia's adoption laws and a bitter-sweet reunification that stopped, stuttered and restarted before finally becoming a relationship.

Spanning forty years and set against a backdrop of changing social attitudes in Australia, it is the story of a young girl searching for meaning, coming to terms with her guilt and grief, and learning that breaking the silence brings empowerment.

The Finch Memoir Prize is annual publication prize for a previously unpublished memoir. It is worth \$10,000 and publication on the Finch list. The book will be available immediately from the festival booksellers and in paperback (\$27.99) and ebook (\$9.99) nationwide from Thursday 19 May.

### BOOK DESCRIPTION

A conservative Catholic family in Queensland in 1974 is no place to be a pregnant teenager. With an authoritarian mother and facing enormous societal pressures, Mary must make a decision to save her future ... but it is one that will haunt her for the rest of her life.

After putting her baby son up for adoption, Mary tries to return to her old life and her studies to be a nurse but finds that she cannot escape thoughts of her son or feelings of guilt. The situation is made worse because her mother and family completely ignore what has happened to her; she cannot talk to anyone about how she feels. Even after travelling throughout remote Australia as a nurse and health advisor, and marrying and having two daughters, she feels incomplete and restless.

Then the adoption laws regarding contact between birth mothers and their children are changed. She decides that the time might be right to find out if her son wants to meet her. But nothing is ever as simple as it seems and the quest to become a part of her son's life, turns Mary's life and world upside down all over again.

### JUDGES' COMMENTS

'This is a powerful memoir about shame, guilt, regret and growth. It tells the all too familiar story of teenage pregnancy and adoption ... the author is to be congratulated on turning her pain into a story that many people will relate to and recognize themselves within.' **Maggie MacKellar, author of *When it Rains***

'A standout memoir, told with clear-eyed grace and nicely controlled passion ... This is written with great confidence and clarity, is moving but not sentimental, and is an absorbing read from start to finish.'

**Debra Adelaide, author of *The Women's Pages* and *Letters to George Clooney***

'This is just lovely ... it's that rare thing – a personal memoir that feels thoroughly universal.' **Dominic Knight, author and former ABC radio broadcaster**

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Tennant is a retired registered nurse. She completed her general training at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, midwifery at the Mater Mother's in Brisbane and Community Child Health certificate at Curtin University Perth. Later she obtained a Bachelor of Applied Science (Nursing) and a Masters in Public Health and Tropical Medicine and worked at the Telathon Institute for Child Research. Mary has worked in hospitals in Brisbane and Perth but the majority of her career has been in Aboriginal Health. She is available for interviews.

