



author in our age.

Can you tell us a little about your new novel and the inspiration behind it?

My starting point was how secrets in a family are passed over into the generations: from mother to daughter to son to daughter etc. Then I was the bravery of the SOE female agents of WW2 and the price many of the survived, paid for their courage. Tortured, sworn to secrecy from their own until 1970s, many had serious mental problems. Also, I wanted to explore how fate can alter our lives forever.

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On My Bedside Table...

The Sydney Writers' Festival always

includes the announcement of various awards.

At the time of going to press, one of those awards was the Finch Memoir Prize, an annual award for an unpublished life story or memoir that offers publication and prize money of \$10,000. Most often, these are stories where the authors have tracked a difficult passage in their lives. Last year's winner *Green Vanilla Tea* by Marie Williams dealt with the degenerative effects of her husband's motor neurone disease and the impact on her young sons.

The 2014 Winner of the Finch Memoir prize goes to a very different story, *Spinifex Baby* by Karen Harrland. Wide-eyed and optimistic, 28 year old Karen and her now husband Al left the green climes of Tasmania to take on a 2 year contract to manage Etabuka Station a conservation property of half a million acres in the Simpson Desert in Western Queensland. One hundred and fifty kilometres from the nearest town and 700 kilometres from Mt Isa, Karen and Al were about to embark on a two year journey that would test their resolve, their strength and become an unforgettable part of the fabric of their relationship. Only a couple of weeks into their stint, Karen found out she was pregnant, suffered a difficult pregnancy and overwhelming post-natal depression—all far away from her family and



Karen said to The Hoopla that she started writing *Spinifex Baby* because there were “bits of the hardship that were still needed to get out and every time I wrote a page it felt like it was removing them from me.” Her story is an astonishing in true grit and determination it takes to exist in the often brutal Australian outback.

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