

## Features category of Sikuville Journalism Awards draws large number of entries

The Features category of the Sikuville Journalism Awards not only draws a large number of entries - this year there were 52 entries - but generally also attracts a high quality. This makes it a difficult category to judge.



Ma Malan, multiple Sikuville Journalism Awards, receiving her Features Writing category award in 2016.

“It was a hard task to whittle down the entrants to just three finalists and one commendation,” says Pippa Green, a judge for the category. She adds: “The qualities we looked for were thorough reporting, clear writing, preferably with the minimum of clichés, and innovative story ideas that served the public interest.”

A multiple winner of the category, having won the Award three times, Mia Malan, director: Bhekisisa/*Mail & Guardian* health editor, says the difference between producing a mediocre and gripping feature, lies in a journalist’s ability to create suspense throughout a story.

“To write a story in such a way that each paragraph leaves a question with the reader that’s answered in the next paragraph. To do that, a writer needs a couple of skills: strongly developed storytelling skills, an excellent ability to listen and observe surroundings during an interview and good research skills.”

While it is very important, she adds, is to tell stories about issues you’re passionate about; that is not enough. “Be prepared to put in long hours. You won’t become a good feature writer by working 9 to 5, or Monday to Friday. Spend time reading the work of writers you admire, make notes about the writing techniques they apply, and then use them yourself.”

### Feature writing not a dying art

While feature writing is not a dying art, she believes, because it is so time consuming, it is become harder to make time for feature writing. “General newsroom environments no longer provide sufficient for feature writing. Again, if you’d like to do features well, you need to put in extra hours in the evenings and over weekends.”

On the other hand, she says, specialist donor-funded positions or projects have been created in many news rooms, that allow for long-form journalism. “One of my favourite long-form writing sites is the UK-based science journalism site, Mosaic, funded by the Wellcome Foundation.”

While Malan has not entered this year, she is firm in her belief in the importance of the SikuVile Journalism Awards. “The Awards have the most credible panel of judges of any journalism award in the country, and the judging panel is larger than that of most other awards while the judges come from different backgrounds – both academia and newsrooms – making provision for a wide range of opinions. Judges also rotate from time to time, which helps to stimulate new discussions each year.”

This year’s category entries spanned a range of topics from in-depth anniversaries of key historical events such as the sinking of the Mendi 100 years ago, or the commemoration of the Women’s Day March, or 16 June’s student uprising, to profiles and features on critical social justice topics to innovative business stories.

The Awards ceremony will take place Thursday, 19 October at The Venue Greenpark also known as Johannesburg World Trade Centre in Sandton, Gauteng.

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