

Interview with Tod Collins

Author of *The Festive Season in a Part of Africa*, a story from *Cries from the Heart – Stories from Around the World*

Where do you live?

I live in a small rural town called Underberg in South Africa. I am a veterinary surgeon dealing with everything from tropical fish to farm animals. Most of my time is spent on beef and dairy farms.

Do you make your living through writing or something else?

I write for fun, and relaxation. We experience many interesting and amusing cases which I have recorded for my descendants' interest, and for publishing in our local monthly magazines such as *Pets' Health* and *Getaway*.

What inspired *The Festive Season in a Part of Africa*?

The event as described in the story was so poignant that I sent it to a couple of my friends (colleagues who practise in urban environments) to remind them of what we country folk do from time to time. One fellow so enjoyed the writing that he forwarded it to his circle of Christian friends. One of these people knew of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) Short Story Competition and was certain that my piece was a lot better than the winning story of that particular year. This led to my entering *The Festive Season in a Part of Africa* in the 2004 Competition. It was winner of the Southern African section.

How long did it take to write and why did you write it?

The original writing took one evening. However, once I was aware of the specifications of the CBA competition I worked on it over a great many hours.

What other published works have you written?

Our daily newspaper *The Witness* runs an annual short story competition which I have entered twice.

Last year, 2007, my story called *Meeting Susamatekkie* won the Snapshot Short Story Competition. I am particularly happy with this recognition because for the first time in all my writings I felt that I had written astutely, cleverly – using a lot of innuendo, including pathos, humour and a stroke of cynicism. The limit of 800 words forced me to write powerfully.

Were you happy to have your story published by Oxford University Press?

Happy is a gross understatement. I was thrilled and honoured. My ancestry includes newspaper editors, journalists and my great grandfather, Churton Collins of Cambridge, who was esteemed as a man of words. The recognition by as great an institution as OUP is one of my life's highlights.