

Bookends

Akshita Nanda

Who: Poet Guan Liang Loh (above), 27, who won the Moving Words Poetry competition and is published in the anthology of the same name, launched last Saturday.

It is his first time in a book, though the secondary school English literature teacher has been published in the online literary journal, *Quarterly Literary Review Singapore*, as well as two issues of literary magazine *Ceriph*.

An avid reader of local poetry, he favours the verses of Alfian Sa'at and Alvin Pang over, say, the classic English poets such as Wordsworth. "I like that kind of strong reactive voice towards things happening in Singapore – things such as urban landscaping and how HDB living tends to isolate people. These speak to me more than a poem about dandelions, sheep and grass," he says.

He is the elder of two sons born to a civil servant father and a mother who is a clerk.

Mr Loh won an iPad2 for his poem about memories, *Picture Perfect*. Apart from being published in an anthology, the poem was displayed in MRT trains and stations from August until Wednesday, as part of a larger initiative to promote poetry locally.

The Moving Words project was organised by local writers' group The Literary Centre and sponsored by SMRT.

It displayed published works from local poets such as Rasiah Halil and Gilbert Koh and also invited submissions from the public from May 21 to July 15. About 2,000 were received in Chinese, English, Malay and Tamil. The 12 best entries were displayed along the SMRT network.

These and more than 80 others picked from the submitted poems were compiled in *Moving Words 2011: A Poetry Anthology*. It retails at \$21 at major bookstores.

What are you reading now?

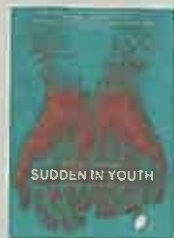
I'm still halfway through the *Moving Words* poetry anthology and there are some good ones in there. Local writers tend to resonate more with me. They write about places and spaces that are more identifiable.

The last good book I read was Alvin Pang's *City Of Rain*. It's abstract but at the same time it captures certain moments in Singapore life that touched me.

More recently, I also read his collection *What Gives Us Our Names*. It's a series of allegories about different qualities such as courage, hope and success. It personifies these qualities and spins a story about



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them. I like it because it makes you think. Even though there are moments you might not understand what is going on, they make you think about the different values we teach our children.

If your house were burning down, which book would you save?

It would either be Alfian Sa'at's *One Fierce Hour* or Felix Cheong's *Sudden In Youth*. Both are autographed copies. It's a tough choice to make because I like these two local poets.

What Gives Us Our Names by Alvin Pang (2011, Math Paper Press, \$10) is available at Books Actually. *Sudden In Youth* by Felix Cheong (2009, Ethos, \$19.50); *Moving Words 2011: A Poetry Anthology* by various authors (2011, Ethos, \$22.80); *City Of Rain* by Alvin Pang (2010 reprint, Ethos, \$21.80); and *One Fierce Hour* by Alfian Sa'at (1998, Landmark, \$16.80) are available at Books Actually and Books Kinokuniya. Titles printed by Ethos are available online via www.ethosbooks.com.sg.