

Oban mannie wi an ee' fur a guid Scots poem

An Oban man with a Gaelic background and strong Highland cultural inheritance has written a poem which made the short list of a national poetry competition.

Yet Donald Macdonald's poem was not written in Gaelic as one might expect; Donald took a step into unfamiliar territory and penned his first attempt at competitive writing, *The Mannie Wi the Poly Bag, Tiananmen Square, 1989*, in Scots for the McCash Poetry Prize.

The prestigious competition has been running since 1973 and has been jointly promoted by Glasgow University and *The Herald* newspaper for the past three years. The theme for 2005 was 'Heroes' in recognition of the 700th anniversary of the death of William Wallace.

In early November 2005, Donald, an Oban community councillor, attended a special reception in Glasgow University with 30 other poets, where each poem was read out by its author in front of a panel of judges - two professors of Scottish literature and *The Herald's* poetry editor.

'Poems can sometimes be a bit flat when read out - but when these poets read out their own work it made the poems come to life,' recalls Donald.

The community councillor's poem commemorates the bravery of a young man who stood up to tanks in Tiananmen Square as China appeared to be on the verge of becoming a democracy.

'It was a scene I witnessed on live television 16 years ago and ever since then it has been there at the back of my mind - and I've wanted to do



Donald Macdonald with his poems that were nominated for a national poetry prize.

something about it,' said Donald. 'The McCash Prize gave me stimulation to write.'

Donald added: 'I don't really read much Scots poetry myself - I wrote this poem out in English first time.'

Donald then admitted his Scots poetry success became a family affair. 'My daughter Kirsty had just finished her PhD in Scottish Literature at Glasgow University and her linguistic abilities made up for my deficiencies in the Scots language,' he said.

Although Donald did not go on to lift the main MacCash Poetry Prize he considers himself privileged have been included in the short list and to have taken part in the ceremonies.

A Barcaldine couple had been married for less than a month when the husband commented to his friends that his wife was not at her best in the kitchen. 'We have three choices for dinner each night,' he advised. 'It's either go out, take out or thaw out!'