Whiddon Bush Poetry | Winner 2026

Still Country at Heart

The highway hums the same old tune
beyond the cotton rows,
the sky still stretches wide and blue
where summer wind still blows.

But now the boots sit by the bed,
not by a weathered door,
and paddocks live in memory
instead of just next door.

At Whiddon Weeronga the mornings start
with sunlight through the lace,
a kettle hum, a walking frame,
familiar, gentle pace.

The bush isn't walked as often now,
no fences left to mend,
no early starts with frosted reins
or stock routes without end.

The horses run in stories told
across a dining chair,
and cotton blooms in recollections
drifting through the air.

They may not stand on gravel roads
to watch the dust clouds rise,
but you can see the outback still
alive behind their eyes.

Then down the hallway laughter comes,
small boots on polished floor,
the school kids burst in bright and loud
like seasons at the door.

Drawings clutched in tiny hands,
wide smiles without disguise,
questions asked with honest hearts
and wonder in their eyes.

And suddenly the rooms feel wide
as paddocks after rain,
as little voices chatter on
of horses, crops and cane.

The locals working shift by shift
bring more than meds and charts.
They bring the town, the gossip too,
and genuine bush hearts.

They know whose grandson's droving now,
whose dam is running low,
who's had a good cotton harvest
and who's praying for it so.

A cup of tea becomes a yarn,
a blood pressure check - a laugh,
and someone mentions Friday night
and cricket on the grass.

They may not ride in troop line neat
beneath the blazing sun,
but when the children visit here
their younger days still run.

Because country isn't only land
or fences, stock and grain,
it's people, grit and loyalty
that drought can't quite drain.

And though their boots no longer cross
the red dirt road each day,
the spirit of the bush still walks
these corridors in its way.

For in this small, familiar place
where cotton skies still start,
they may not live out in the scrub
but they are still country at heart

Whiddon Wee Waa