

THE HAPPINESS JAR

Book to Screen Pitch

SUMMARY

The Happiness Jar (easily retitled) is an Australian story with quintessential characters, played out against the colourful and pressing heat of the remote Kimberley in the wet season, juxtaposed with the smoky heat and hum of a busy thriving city in India.

A family seemingly breaks apart with the weight of the burdens they have placed on themselves and on each other. The narrative's conflict is driven by family secrets – the relief at the expected passing of a child with a long-term illness, the unspoken challenges of living with a Vietnam veteran father with PTSD, and two adult siblings and their tolerance of a mother's neurotic approach to managing life with a husband who has chosen to be declared missing for 20 years.

The Happiness Jar is at its heart, a story of faith in oneself, in each other and of redemption. It is the story of three journeys, intertwined and interdependent, in the wake of a loved one's death, reminding us as it always does, of the shortness of our own lives. This is a love story, of self-love.

The story resonates with the following films/series:

TITLE

Dirt Music
Shantaram
Holy Smoke
Japanese Story
Bran Neu Dae
Samson and Delilah

FILMIC CONNECTIONS

Love and grief in the remote Kimberley outback
Indian heat, Indian culture, tourist trappings
Questioning faith and what we believe
Remote adventure, love in the outback
Aboriginal educational setting and hope
Remote adventure, landscape

FIVE KEY STRENGTHS would make this story a visually appealing and successful screen adaptation including:

- Set in a highly appealing 'filmic' Australian Landscape
- Distinctly Australian, relatable characters
- Numerous visceral scenes
- Important indigenous themes
- Australian experiences are at the heart of the story

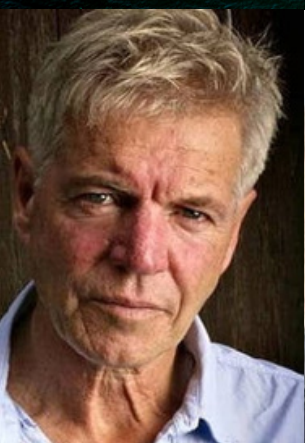
Set in a highly appealing 'filmic' Australian landscape

- The story is set in four main locations - Broome, Western Australia; a remote fictional Aboriginal community in the Kimberley, Western Australia; Varanasi, India and two domestic households.
- The novel is set in the early 2000s, with flashbacks to the 1980s which allow for playful and nostalgic art direction, costume and styling - however it could just as easily be translated to a modern era, using an Afghanistan/Iraq War veteran.

Distinctively Australian, relatable characters

The characters are highly accessible to a general Australian audience including:

- Brian Hudson (think of Barry Otto, Colin Friels, Jack Thompson circa 1990, Gary Sweet) is a Vietnam veteran with PTSD. Deemed a missing person since 1980, he now makes his living as a sly-grogger, living on the outskirts of a remote Aboriginal community in a run-down caravan.
- Beth Hudson (think of Susie Porter, Greta Scacchi, Essie Davis) is a housewife who wears her repression and her devotion to her family on her face. She's a regular churchgoer, conservative and tight-lipped, but capable of release if only someone would light the fuse.
- Matt Hudson (think of Liam Hemsworth, Kick Gurry) is a brickie's labourer who forgot to come up with a life purpose. He's tanned and goodlooking, albeit aimless, angry and blokey.
- Rachel Hudson (in flashback only: think Samara Weaving, Olivia DeJonge), is the daughter who died too young but kept the family together with her joy for life. She is free spirited and an avid traveller despite living with a terminal illness.
- Pip (love interest to Matt: think Emma Booth, Emily Browning) is a fiery red-head working on a pearl boat in Broome. She's demure but rough around the edges and thinks Matt might be interesting - he must be, as he was brother to her wild spirited friend, Rachel.



Numerous visceral scenes

Several scenes in the story would render the film heart-stoppingly real and suspenseful for the viewer including:

- The hunting of a kangaroo by first peoples.
- The hurling of an urn full of human ashes, in the middle of the desert.
- Matt becomes lost and disillusioned in the muddy desert as the intensity of the wet season descends around him. He sees a tree in the distance struck by lightning.
- Several 'fish out of water' scenes where the conservative middle-aged Australian housewife feels vulnerable in a foreign country, pushing her buttons to breaking point such as:
 - being caught up in a crowded street melee surrounding an Indian guru;
 - her vulnerable episode of mental illness or 'psychosis' alone in a hotel room;
 - her personal redemption in the waters of Varanasi, submerging herself fully clothed in water she knows is filled with the ashes of others.
- The final scene (as told) of the redeemed veteran marching for the first time ever in the Anzac march alongside his mates.

Important indigenous themes

Potential to attract funding and create valuable indigenous casting opportunities:

- The setting of a fictional Aboriginal community allows for showcasing the issues raised in the story including the indigenous health and education gap – issues that Australians are passionate about, but perhaps know little about in reality
- Several Indigenous actors would be cast, as well as indigenous representation on the creative team, allowing the production to generate employment for indigenous talent.

Australian experiences are at the heart of the story

Several currently relevant themes drive the narrative conflict:

- Veterans/PTSD
- Missing persons
- Indigenous health/education gap
- Unspoken underlying racism
- Family life affected by childhood illness (in this case, Cystic Fibrosis)



Previously published in 2013, *The Happiness Jar* by Samantha Tidy has been reformatted for 2023 release.

As a literary novel in manuscript and published form the novel won/was shortlisted for the following awards:

WINNER, ACT Writing and Publishing Award for Fiction 2014

RUNNER UP, FAW Christina Stead Award 2013

(to Hannah Kent's *Burial Rites*)

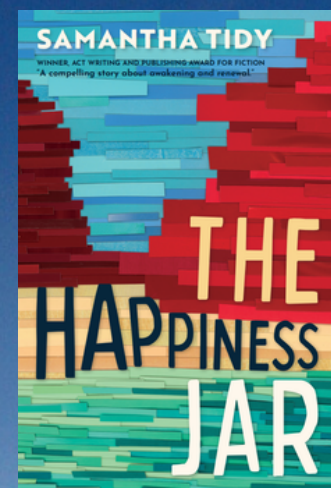
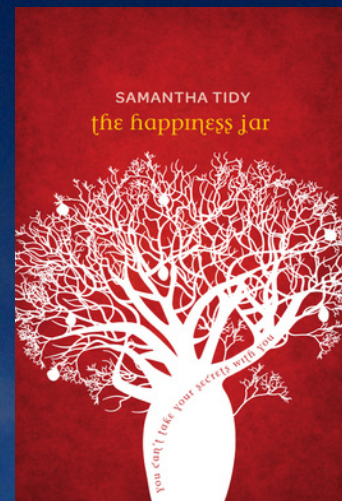
RUNNER UP, FAW Jim Hamilton Award, 2010

SHORTLIST, Penguin Varuna Scholarship, 2011

SHORTLIST, HarperCollins Varuna Award, 2011

"This year's winner (*The Happiness Jar*) is a compelling story about awakening and renewal. Written in a beautiful and direct style, its journey of transformation takes us from the Australian city, to remote country, to the crowded streets of India. Its characters are wonderfully and vividly drawn: raw and never sentimental. Through their experiences, Samantha Tidy prompts us to reexamine our understandings of grief, legacy, honesty and family. *The Happiness Jar* is a powerfully constructed and at times surprising work: a thread that runs back and forth in time between different cultures, places and points-of-view. Above all, it is a satisfying, original and engaging novel with a unique perspective, and a worthy winner in 2014."

— Judges Comments, ACT Writing and Publishing Award for Fiction 2014



CONTACT

PUBLISHER

Sam Rutter

Publishing Director

Storytorch Press

sam@storytorch.com.au

storytorch.com.au

M: +61 403 340 091

 Storytorch.

