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MaryKay's Excellent Caldecott Adventure

MaryKay Dahlgreen
Oregon State Library

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MaryKay's Excellent Caldecott Adventure

by **MaryKay Dahlgreen**
*Library Development Program
Manager, Oregon State Library*

August 2001

The call comes asking if I am interested in running for a position on the 2004 Caldecott Committee: I am very confused if that means I read the books in 2003, 2004, or maybe even 2005. As it turns out, I read books published in 2003 and we determine the winner in January of 2004.

May 2002

The even better call comes in that I have been elected to the 2004 Caldecott Committee. I am delighted and pretty darn sure I will do an extraordinarily good job!

January 2003

I attend my first meeting of the 2004 Caldecott Committee. My incredible overconfidence is shaken for the first, but not the last, time as I meet the other members of the Committee and realize just what heavy hitters they are in the children's literature arena. I also attend a publisher's dinner and have a chance to chat with the Chair of the 2004 Caldecott Committee. I can't wait to get started.

March 2003

I begin to receive boxes of books. Hundreds of books, thousands of books, millions and billions and trillions of books. And these are not just any books; these are "thin, oddly shaped books" as the love of my life so enjoys calling them. And the bad news is that we don't just pick from the "distinguished" books that have been published, we get almost all the picture books that are being published in the United States this year. And as we all know, thanks to Madonna, anyone can write a children's book.

July 2003

In the months leading up to July 2003 there is much Sturm und Drang about whether to hold the ALA Annual Conference in Toronto, Ontario, Canada since they are experiencing a SARS epidemic. Even though attendance is required for

Committee members at both the Annual Conference and Mid-Winter Conference I am fairly certain I could get an excused absence if I can't attend. I try to assure my co-workers that I won't come back with SARS and if I do I promise to submit to quarantine. The decision is made to hold ALA in Toronto and the decision is made that MaryKay can continue her excellent adventure. At our meetings we don't hold formal discussions of the books, but we do bring books to have practice discussions about and my outlandish overconfidence is once more taken down a notch (or two). I return home without SARS but with a bad cold that could be SARS and I get a seven day weekend when my doctor tells me to stay home.

January 2004

I have been reading, reading, reading; thinking, thinking, thinking; talking, talking, talking for the past nine months. I re-read my favorites and the titles that have been nominated by the committee members and the titles that other librarians have suggested. I torment my grandchildren, niece, brother, sister-in-law and anyone else I can think of by sharing the books and more importantly, my thoughts about them. I worry about our choices. I read some more. I AM READY TO GO!!! The bad news is that the Willamette Valley has been hit with one of the worst ice storms in history, state offices are closed down, Oregon State University is closed down and worst of all, the Portland Airport is closed down (if I could get there on the sheet of ice that is I-5). I frantically call the chair of my committee, trying to hold back my tears, and tell her I may be a day late. Then I frantically call the airline to see if I can get a plane out of Eugene, which I do get. It is a late evening flight so I don't get to San Diego until after 2:00 a.m. Running on adrenaline, I get up to attend an 8:00 a.m. meeting the same morning. I would love to be able to provide details of my time with



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the 2004 Caldecott Committee when we determined our choice for the most distinguished picture book published in 2003. However, I can't provide details and quite frankly, I can't remember too many details. I will share some of my impressions of that experience and the experience of the months leading up to it:

Choosing the Caldecott Medalist and Honor Books is a HUGE RESPONSIBILITY which is not made any easier by the amazing Medalists from years past. The experience consumed my life for a year.

I will NEVER second guess a Caldecott, Newbery, Siebert, or any other ALSC award committee again.

The 2004 Caldecott Committee was the most amazing group of smart, funny,

insightful, respectful people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. We laughed, we cried...

Serving on the 2004 Caldecott Committee was one of the highlights of my professional life.

Still January 2004

The Committee walks into the ALSC Awards Press Conference, after having called our Medalist and Honor Book illustrators to let them know they had been selected, to the applause of our colleagues. Even better, the applause continues after the announcement of our selections. It doesn't get any better than this.

June 2004

Wait, it does get better than that. For the past six months I have been invited to a variety of places to talk about my Calde-



2004 Caldecott Award Winner Mordicai Gerstein (center) with the Caldecott Selection Committee.



cott adventure. I have had children ask for my autograph on the Caldecott bookmark I handed out to them after I told them about being on the Caldecott Committee. I have been able to give away nearly 700 picture books to libraries, bookmobiles, friends, family, and a variety of others. I have been called on the phone and thanked!!!! by Mordicai Gerstein. In Orlando at the Annual Conference I got to meet the Medalist and Honor Book illustrators. I got to meet the real Ella Sarah. I got to sit at the Newbery Caldecott Banquet with Mo Willems and his wife.

April 2006

I have been expecting to forget just how amazing this excellent adventure has been. However, this last week at a meeting of children's librarians in New Jersey, at lunch one day, several of us who had been on a Caldecott Committee talked

about our experiences. It all came back to me and I am wondering when I will be eligible to serve again. ALSC nominating committee, are you reading this?

2004 Caldecott Medal Winner
The Man Who Walked Between the Towers
by Mordicai Gerstein

2004 Caldecott Honor Books
Ella Sarah Gets Dressed
by Margaret Chodos-Irvine

What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?
by Steve Jenkins & Robin Page

Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus
by Mo Willems



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