



Presentation of the Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2010

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Jury President of the Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2010

Ms. President, Distinguished Laureates, Most valued Hosts and Sponsors, Esteemed Guests.

As the president of the 2010 Hans Christian Andersen Award jury from the ancient country of Iran, I am very proud to be here in Santiago de Compostela to introduce this year's winners David Almond and Jutta Bauer, two of the most distinguished artists in children's literature. The Queen of Denmark, HM Margrethe II, the patron of the awards, has also graciously granted me permission to extend her personal congratulations to the 2010 winners of the award.

When *we* were children and futurists looked in their glass balls and talked about the 21st century, they saw it as an ideal time for children. No more wars, hunger, illiteracy, poverty, disease, violence or homelessness. We thought we could make a more beautiful and safe place on earth for our children. But today, children across the world are increasingly the victims of unspeakable disasters, some natural but most manmade.

Every day we hear about the child victims of tribal conflicts in Africa, and Asia, in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and social unrest in Latin America. We hear about the ever increasing trafficking of children.

It is a reality that we, as the residents of the small Island of children's literature, cannot stop these disasters, but we can provide some relief for these children.

When I am speaking about "We", I mean all of us around the world who work for the well-being of children, who seek to support every child's Right to Become a Reader. We are the committed people who believe that only by becoming readers can children around the world hope to change their circumstances.

The residents of this small Island include artists, writers and illustrators who give hope to children and motivate them to move toward a brighter future.

One of these people is David Almond who writes about children in crisis, while continuously giving hope to them. He speaks to them about a beautiful future.

When I think of the devastating earthquakes that shook and destroyed the lives of tens of thousands of children in Haiti, in Chile, in Pakistan or in Iran, I think of *Skelling*, Almond's story about "very scared" children who dream very awful things:

They'll dream about dangerous crows with ugly beaks. They'll dream about vicious children plundering the nest. They'll dream of death all around them." And as traumatized children identify with these characters, Almond's story speaks about hopeful dreams too: "But there'll be happy dreams as well. Dreams of life. They'll dream of finding their own tree one day, building their own nest, having their own chicks (David Almond, *Skelling*, p. 132)

Bibliotherapy is a vital activity for all children around the world. It can help children in conflicts in Southern Lebanon, in Ramallah and Gaza, in Colombia, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it can help children who live in a two-parent home in a secure society. Whether a child is traumatized by violence or is simply afraid of the dark, Almond's words can reassure that there is light after darkness, there is hope after despair.

It is Almond's device to accompany a scared child in a deep, dark tunnel in "Kit's Wilderness" and stay with him until the light comes. He says:

We ran an age, a million years. Far into the earth through secret unknown tunnels... Where was I ? Deep inside the earth. Nothing, nothing to be seen. Then touched him... I held him tight. I held him tight for hours, for a million years, till at last we heard the footsteps in the tunnel, saw the distant light of the lamps, heard the voices of the men who'd come to find us... (p. 96).

He knows children need hope. In *Skelling*, he finds a symbol in the world of myth to give confidence to children with Persephone, "who was forced to spend half a year in the darkness deep underground. Winter happened when she was trapped inside the earth..." and then

Spring came when she was released and made her slow way up to the world again. The world became brighter and bolder in order to welcome her back. It began to be filled with warmth and light. The animals dared to wake, they dared to have their young. Plants dared to send out buds and shoots. Life dared to come back (David Almond, *Skelling*, p. 137).

And I am sure that many children in crisis around the world dare to wake and blossom, after reading Almond's books.

This year, both of our winners work to calm children who face disturbing situations. A very difficult and challenging task. Almond achieves this by putting the

contrasts of dark and light beside each other and Jutta Bauer does this by depicting children's problems and questions to help them understand them.

Bauer wants to show children a ray of optimism, security and love through her picture books.

She creates books for children who are victims of violence, are struggling to make sense of the loss of a loved one, or have questions about life. When these children open one of Bauer's books, they find a friend inside its pages. Bauer is firmly on their side and conveys a deep sympathy for their sorrows and gives them hope. Even if they have been torn apart, one day they will be sewn back together.

The readers of Bauer's books are very small. But they have big questions about the world. She makes them laugh while answering their questions. Bauer helps lessen the trauma of children who are facing the loss of their loved ones.

What is death? In "Opas Engel" before dying, grandpa tells his grandchild about his life and his guardian angel who has always watched over him.

Every morning as a boy, he would run past the big statue of an angel on his way to school, and bullies, buses, high trees, deep lakes – none could touch him. Even through war, hunger and unemployment, and all the strange things life threw at him, Grandpa's angel was always at his shoulder, looking out for him.

In Bauer's hands, life is an ever changing adventurous journey full of happiness and sadness, and death is not a scary abstraction, it is a natural conclusion to this great ride. Yes, life ends for all of us, but it goes on too. Bauer's sweet, humorous illustrations show children that there is no horror and distress when a life lived fully ends. There is a gentle sadness about losing someone we love, but there is also acceptance that death is a natural part of life.

In her book Selma Bauer shares her philosophy of life with children. This story is very simple, with lots of humor for small children, but it is a story for thinking as well. It is a small book about a big question.

Selma is asked: What is happiness?

She says: Happiness is eating a little grass at sunrise,
Playing with the children until lunchtime, a little
exercise after lunch, a little more grass, a chat with her
neighbor Mrs. Miller in the evening, and then a lovely
long sleep.

And if she had more time? She would eat a little grass, play with her children

And if she won a million dollars? She would eat a little grass, play with her children...

Almond and Bauer both seek to make the world more understandable and tolerable for children. This is not an easy thing to do in a world created by adults and filled with injustice and violence.

Mr. Almond and Ms. Bauer, the 10 international jury members and I admire your ability to speak to children about their fears and hopes in a language they understand. Your empathy for them shines through the pages of your art.

Please accept our deepest respect, and our congratulations for your efforts and success.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to this year's jury, the 10 distinguished experts who are the representatives of children's literature across the world. They spent more than 9 months studying the books and dossiers of 28 authors and 27 illustrators who were nominated from 32 countries. Alicia Salvi from Argentina, Annemie Leysen from Belgium, Nadia El Kholy from Egypt, Maria Jesus Gil from Spain, Karen Coeman from Mexico, Ernie Bond from the USA, Darja Mazi-Leskovar from Slovenia, Jan Hansson from Sweden, Helene Schär from Switzerland and Regina Zilberman from Brazil, on behalf of IBBY I thank you for your devotion to your duties and your dedication to taking on this enormous job with such attention to detail and without any prejudice.

And, I would like to thank Mr. Kang the CEO of Nami Island Inc., the sponsor of the Hans Christian Andersen Award for his generous support of our work on behalf of children and reading.

Now it is an honor to invite the 2010 winners to the podium to receive their diplomas and medals from Patsy Aldana the President of IBBY, and to deliver their acceptance speeches.

