



Acceptance Speech for the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award 2010

Kathy Knowles (Canada)

Joana Efua Felih (Ghana)

It is hard to believe that Kathy and I are standing before you as honoured recipients of the IBBY-Asahi Award. When the news of this announcement arrived in March, we were overwhelmed with joy as we realized that our efforts, along with those of our hard working colleagues, were noticed and endorsed by an international jury.

I started as house help for the Knowles family during the time that Kathy and her family lived in Ghana, but since learning my role as a librarian 20 years ago, I have shared the joy of reading with thousands of children in my community and have taught others to do the same. My experience in Ghana has also taken me beyond its borders to Tanzania and Canada where I have learned new ideas to promote literacy and reading.

My work as a librarian began in a garage at the Knowles' home on Osu Avenue in Accra. This small space was transformed into a beautiful library with books, colorful wooden jig-saw puzzles, and furnished with little red and blue chairs and tables. Children came in their numbers to listen to stories, and they took delight in trying to read books for themselves and selecting their favorite stories.

The growth of our library project happened because the children who came to our first library loved to read and they told their friends. It was their enthusiasm for reading, along with dedicated leaders from their communities who wanted libraries for their people that pushed us to assist more and more communities in Ghana and beyond.

Teaching adults how to read at the library's literacy classes has also enriched my life, as there is no better feeling than to know that one has made a positive difference, especially to someone whose life was challenged through the burdens of being illiterate.

Now, as I travel through the streets of Accra, countless young adults come up to me and say, "Auntie Joanna. Is that you? You're still the same and you never change. May God bless you." Some of these individuals are now university graduates in the fields of medicine, banking and journalism, just to mention a few. Parents also return, often many years later, to express their gratitude that our library played a significant role in their child's life.



I am grateful to the almighty God for allowing me to play my part, and to all our devoted and selfless volunteers who have supported us, not forgetting my program director Dr. Kathy Knowles.

Joana Efua Felih

Working hand to hand next to Joanna has been one of my life's greatest gifts, and accepting this international award together is a great honor for us.

I strongly believe that libraries without excellent leaders do very little because one has to lure children to the wonders of the written word, especially in Africa where books are viewed more as an academic tool and not pages of wonder and adventure.

The Osu Children's Library Fund is fortunate to have a team of dedicated and hardworking librarians who do their very best to make books come alive. Not only that, the libraries we create are places where children feel at home, explore their hidden talents, see beauty in our gardens and know that they are always welcome.

As Joana has mentioned, it is a privilege to have played a part in this library project, helping one child at a time enter into the wonderful world of books. This prize money will continue to help us meet this goal.

In closing, on behalf of everyone involved with Osu Children's Library Fund, we would like to thank IBBY Canada for nominating us, the organizers of the 32nd IBBY Congress for hosting this wonderful event and finally, for the people of Spain for their warm welcome, especially those we met during our five-day walk along the Camino. We are most grateful.

Kathy Knowles

