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Gary D. Schmidt Josette Frank Award 2024 Acceptance Letter

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Dear Children's Book Committee,

Since hearing the news of the Josette Frank Award from the Center for Children's Literature of Bank Street College, I've been going through the lists of past winners, sort of reveling in the memories of past winners that I read as a kiddo. These include books like:

- *The Big Wave*
- *Judy's Journey*
- *The Moved-Outers* (which I've also written about in an academic text),
- *The Devil In Vienna*
- *A Taste of Blackberries* (the first book to make me cry),
- and *A Sound of Chariots*.

This list also includes the amazing *Crow Boy*, probably my favorite picture book of all time, written by one of our first graphic novelists. You can tell what academic book I'm working on right now! And then, I came to books that I've taught in my children's literature classes:

- *Shades of Gray* (which led me to invite Reeder to campus),
- *Rabble Starkey* (which led me to invite Lowry to campus),
- *Journey to Jo'burg*
- *The Sign of the Beaver* (which led me to read all five of her novels—including the virtually unknown *The Prospering*),
- *Homesick* (which made two adult students who had been MKs weep in class),
- *My Louisiana Sky*
- *Clementine*
- *Home of the Brave* (read in one sitting at an airport),
- *After Tupac and D Foster*
- *Blue Skin of the Sea* (which led me to invite Salisbury to campus),
- *Because of Winn-Dixie*
- *Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* (which led me to invite Chris to campus),
- *Brown Girl Dreaming*
- *Wonder*
- *The War That Saved My Life* –and so many more.

You can't believe how wonderful it is to think of my own *The Labors of Hercules Beal* joining this stunning list. How could I have imagined this when I first read *The Big Wave* in second grade, from one of those cheap Scholastic reprints, with the first page missing. (I still remember being frustrated by that missing page.)

Reading through your past lists is like reading a history of my own reading life—though I do have to admit that reading last year about *Augusta Savage* jolted me, since I had hoped to write a picture book about her *The Harp* sculpture, and now that this book has come out—well, once Marilyn Nelson has written about something, there's no reason to try to take up the same project! You're never going to write something as good.

If it can be said that awards such as the Josette Frank award fight for children, then Bank Street has, for many years, fought valiantly for children. You've held high standards of artistic excellence AND encouraged writers and illustrators who want to talk about the world that real children inhabit, even if it's a pretty broken world that fills those pages. Just listing those titles suggests how the award has honored books that are honest accounts, that point to a world that doesn't always value children and their experience, a world that often wars against them. But these books assert that in that world are children whose lives are mighty and lovely, and that their immediate experience is not always to be determined by the brokenness children find around them every single day. What could possibly be more important in today's literature than a book that a child could pick up, read, and come away saying, "I can grow too"?

To be part of this collection is . . . well, everything. In some ways it seems to bring me full circle; in other ways it is a huge encouragement to go on. So, thank you for your work, and now for this award, which I accept with heartfelt thanks.

Yours,

Gary D. Schmidt