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From: Pamela Goodes
Linda Wallace
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M.E. Kerr named Margaret A. Edwards Award recipient

Writers who can capture the thoughts and feelings of teenagers on paper are a special breed.

On Monday, January 25, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association (ALA), announced the 1993 winner of the Margaret A. Edwards Award for lifetime achievement in writing books for young adults.

M.E. Kerr (Marijane Meaker) joins Richard Peck, S.E. Hinton, Robert Cormier and Lois Duncan as previous award winners whose work is esteemed both by teens who devour their work and librarians who specialize in serving this demanding audience.

Kerr, one of the pioneers in realistic fiction for teenagers, is being cited for four books: "Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!" (Harper & Row, Harper Trophy Keypoint Book, Bantam, 1972. Ursula Nordstorm, editor); "Gentlehands" (HarperCollins, Harper Trophy Keypoint Book, 1978. Ursula Nordstrom, editor); "Me Me Me Me Me: Not a Novel" (Harper & Row, 1983. Charlotte Zolotow, editor), and "Night Kites" (HarperCollins Children's Books, Harper Trophy Keypoint Book, 1986. Charlotte Zolotow, editor).

M.E. Kerr named Margaret A. Edwards Award recipient -- add one

"M.E. Kerr's courage to be different and to address tough current issues without compromising and with a touch of leavening and humor has earned her a place in young adult literature and in the hearts of teenagers," said Marion Hargrove, chair of the 1993 Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee. "Her characters and plots often deal with ordinary teenagers who, faced with extraordinary situations and events, must make tough choices. M.E. Kerr's characters -- the teenagers, the parents, the animals -- are real."

Overweight and starved for attention Dinky, in "Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack," uses the only words she knows that will get her parents attention.

"This novel relates the classic struggle between teenagers and parents in a realistic, humorous fashion," said Hargrove.

In "Gentlehands," Buddy's summer romance with Skye is interrupted by the shocking revelation that his cultured, refined grandfather is the notorious Nazi war criminal, Gentlehands.

"This novel is on one level a simple love story between a rich girl and a poor boy and on another a powerful novel about class differences, loyalty, betrayal and the burden of history."

"Me Me Me Me Me: Not a Novel" is an autobiographical look at the real life people, events and situations which Kerr uses as springboards for the characters and plots of her novels, according to Hargrove.

"Teenagers will share the excitement and humor in her escapades - particularly those who want to be writers!"

Erick's life is uneventful and calm in "Night Kites" until he and his family must deal with his older brother, Pete's secret - that Pete is gay and has AIDS.

M.E. Kerr named Margaret A. Edwards Award recipient -- add two

"Pete teaches Erick that "Night Kites" are different. They don't think about the dark. They go up alone, on their own, and they are not afraid to be different. The humaneness of Erick and his family are revealed as they deal with Peter's disease."

The Margaret A. Edwards Award, \$1,000 and a citation, honors an author for lifetime achievement in writing books for teenagers. It is given to an author whose work helps teenagers to better understand themselves and their world. The award, now in its fifth year, is administered by the Young Adult Library Services Association and sponsored by School Library Journal magazine.

A native of Auburn, N.Y., Kerr attended the University of Missouri. She now lives in East Hampton in Long Island, N.Y.

Kerr has written adult mysteries under the name Vin Packer and has written other books for adults under the name M.J. Meaker.

"I was very much formed by books when I was young, " says Kerr. "I was a bookworm and a poetry lover. When I think of myself and what I would have liked to have found in books those many years ago, I remember being depressed by all the neatly tied-up, happy-ending stories, the abundance of winners, the themes of winning, solving, finding -- when around me it didn't seem that easy. So I write with a different feeling when I write for young adults. I guess I write for myself at that age."

Kerr will receive the Edwards Award at a luncheon during ALA's Annual Conference in New Orleans.

Members of the Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee were: Marion Hargrove, chair, Prince George County Memorial Library, New Carrollton, Md.; Ellen Chu, Rochester (N.Y.) Public Library; Patrick Jones, Tecumseh Branch Library, Ft. Wayne, Ind.; Mary I. Purucker, Santa Monica (Calif.) H.S. Library, and Janet P. Sarratt, East Junior H.S. Library, Gaffney, S.C.

M.E. Kerr named Margaret A. Edwards Award recipient -- add three

A brochure listing the award-winning books is available from ALA Graphics, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611. The cost is \$24 for 100 copies. Single copies are available free on request from the Young Adult Library Services Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, 60611.