Elizabeth Partridge

One of the great things about the Sibert medal, unlike the other Newbery and Caldecott, is that it goes to both author and illustrator. Which is so fitting for *Seen and Unseen*, as this is the most collaborative book I’ve ever worked on.

While there is not generally magic in Sibert Award-winning books, there was so much serendipity and magic in the making of *Seen and Unseen*. Way back in 2016, Ariel Richardson at Chronicle Books asked me if I would like to do a book on my godmother, photographer Dorothea Lange. I had already written several books on Dorothea, and I said no. But … wait, I admitted, there was one group of her photos I’d love to know better, and those were the images of the Japanese American incarceration.

I also knew that Dorothea’s good friend Ansel Adams had photographed Manzanar, the same incarceration camp Dorothea had focused on. Dorothea was always dismissive of his job, feeling he just didn’t “get it.” Perhaps I could make something of their two viewpoints.
I quickly found the amazing photographs of Toyo Miyatake imprisoned at Manzanar, who smuggled a lens and film holder into camp and took images only a trusted insider could. Three brilliant photographers, three very different images of the same experience. The magic had begun.

I knew right away that my words and the photographs would not be enough – there were things Dorothea was not allowed to photograph, and things Ansel chose not to photograph, and critical times no one photographed. We needed an illustrator as well.

Ariel found Lauren Tamaki and the magic notched up. Usually in a picture book, the author turns in a finished manuscript, and the illustrator begins their work. But we didn’t do this. We couldn’t. I already was all over Lauren’s space by providing the images. And as Lauren fell deeply into the project, she found images that worked better than mine, and first-person quotes and ephemera that needed to be in the book. And I was not shy about tossing in suggestions for the developing layouts. The magic was in full force as photos, sketches, and words flew around between Ariel, Lauren, and me.

And now, the collaboration and the magic continue as you, my beloved librarians, put the book in the hands of young patrons. I hope our book will help them understand that truth, obfuscation, and a point of view are embedded in all photographs. And as restrictions on what kids can read tighten with alarming frequency, it’s critical we keep making and sharing books on our hidden histories like the Japanese American incarceration. Nothing short of our democracy is at stake.

My deepest thanks to the three photographers and to Lauren Tamaki, Ariel Richardson, the brilliant team at Chronicle Books, and members of the Sibert committee.

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**Lauren Tamaki**

Thank you to the Robert F. Sibert committee members. I am truly humbled to accept this honor.

I’ve found that real growth often requires confrontation. When I was approached about illustrating a book about the Japanese American incarceration, I was, of course, excited to work with Elizabeth Partridge. But I was also incredibly nervous about tackling this subject.
Elizabeth turns towards difficult topics in her beautiful nonfiction work. Despite my personal connection to the incarceration of Japanese Canadians during World War II, I had avoided confronting the realities of this shameful history.

I could only face this painful event when I started research on this book. For many Japanese Americans and Canadians, ‘moving on’ from this trauma was important. But unresolved trauma endures; it lives in the body of a person and the body of a nation. I had to push past my uncomfortability and give *Seen and Unseen* all I could.

I had many joyous moments amidst the challenges. I learned that my grandfather George Tamaki had fought for the rights of Japanese Canadians after they were forced to sell their homes. I learned Grandpa George had taught at a camp in British Columbia in the most incredible way: by connecting with one of his students, now almost 90 years old! Imagine my delight when I stumbled across her story, complete with a photograph of my grandfather standing with his class. What an unexpected gift!

The collaboration I enjoyed with my author and editor was another one of these wonderful gifts. The little team that we formed was miraculous.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for trusting me with this story, which I know meant so much to you. You’re a writer at the top of your game, and you trusted an illustrator who was fairly new to the book world. A leap of faith, to put it lightly.

Thanks to our editor, Ariel Richardson, who helped bring me onto this project and also propelled me with her generosity and expertise.

Thanks to Lydia Ortiz, my design sister. This project, with its many logistical challenges, reignited my love for design and Lydia was game for a truly collaborative process.

Many thanks to the whole Chronicle team: production wizards Aki and Ashley, managing editors Lucy and Claire, publishing director Ginee Seo, Andie and Carrie in marketing, and Caitlin in publicity. Thanks to Marie for the fact-checking.

Thanks to my agent, Charlotte Sheedy, for insisting I take on this book and for the continued support from CSLA/Salky Literary Management.
Boundless thanks to mom, dad, Jillian and to my husband Ben, whose patience with my piles of paper and endless working hours can’t be undervalued!

When I confronted the hard history of the Japanese American incarceration, I was honoring those that experienced it. I’m grateful that *Seen and Unseen*, bolstered by this incredible honor, can contribute to a legacy of bearing witness and healing.

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**2023 SIBERT HONOR BOOKS**

*Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement*
written by Angela Joy; illus. by Janelle Washington
Roaring Brook Press, a division of Macmillan Children’s Publishing Group

*A Seed Grows*
written and illustrated by Antoinette Portis
Neal Porter Books/Holiday House

*Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott*
written by Mara Rockliff; illus. by R. Gregory Christie
Random House Studio, an imprint of Random House Children’s Books, a division of Penguin Random House

*The Tower of Life: How Yaffa Eliach Rebuilt Her Town in Stories and Photographs*
written by Chana Stiefel; illus. by Susan Gal
Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.