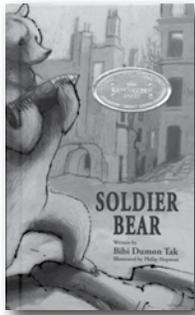


Good morning. On behalf of Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, I would like to tell you how honored we are to receive the 2012 Batchelder Award for our book *Soldier Bear*.

It seems only fitting that the original language for this translated book should be Dutch, given our company's longtime Dutch connection. Eerdmans Publishing Company, of which we are an imprint, was founded 101 years ago by a Dutch immigrant. (And the company is still proudly independent, I might add.) Its earliest books were actually published in the Dutch language to serve the large community of first-generation immigrants in West Michigan in the early 1900s. We've come a long way from those days, but we do remain attached to our Dutch heritage.



# Batchelder Award Acceptance Speech Both Foreign and Close to Home

Anita Eerdmans

*Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, received the 2012 Mildred L. Batchelder Award for *Soldier Bear*. Originally published in Dutch in 2008 as *Soldaat Wojtek*, the book was written by Bibi Dumon Tak, illustrated by Phillip Hopman, and translated by Laura Watkinson. Anita Eerdmans is Vice President of Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.*

Our company is located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which can seem a little bit off the beaten path from the main New York–Boston children's publishing corridor. But there's a Batchelder connection here too—it turns out that the original idea for the award came from Eleanor Burgess, the children's services librarian at the Grand Rapids Public Library back in the mid-1960s. Apparently she had been so inspired by a speech of Mildred Batchelder's that she was moved to propose a new award for children's books in translation, to be named in honor of Ms. Batchelder. And now, nearly fifty years later, someone from Eleanor Burgess's own backyard has won the award.

There are many good reasons for publishing children's books in translation. One might be to familiarize kids with people that are different from themselves. Another might be to show them how much we have in common with people around the world, despite our different cultures and surroundings. But none of this matters without that prerequisite for all good children's fiction—memorable characters inhabiting a good story. So as with the books we originate here at home, the first thing we look for in foreign language titles is a compelling story.

*Soldier Bear* is a wonderful example of just that. The characters—both animal and human—are endearing and real. The story has humor and adventure and tenderness. The settings are exotic, ranging across many countries, from Iran

to Scotland. And to top it all off, the novel is based—almost unbelievably—on a true story, the evidence for which is provided in photographs of the real *Voytek* the bear at the back of the book! The book feels both foreign and close to home.

In this polarized time in the political and cultural life of our country, when it has become common to use words like “foreign” and “European” and “other” as *insults* hurled at opponents, it seems that more than ever our children need the bridge to other people and other places that books in translation can provide. At Eerdmans, we intend to continue including international books as a regular part of our publishing program, and we view this award as a strong vote of encouragement to do that.

And now for my abundant thanks.

First and foremost, thank you to ALSC and the 2012 Batchelder committee, chaired by Susan Stan. Knowing that our book was selected by a panel made up of such distinguished and discriminating judges has made it especially gratifying.

Thank you to my brilliant colleague Gayle Brown, whose job title is art director but who actually has a guiding hand in everything we do at Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. In these years of lean budgets, Gayle has often been our only representative at the Bologna Book Fair, and it is her keen eye for the best in foreign language books that has brought so many wonderful titles in translation to our list.

Thank you to Bibi Dumon Tak, for a wonderful, well-told story. And thank you to our translator, Laura Watkinson, whose gift for producing a seamless English rendering of the original Dutch produced a manuscript that was so clean, with a text so readable, it was a joy to work with.

And finally, thank you to the many, many librarians, including the wonderful folks at USBBY [The United States Board on Books for Young People], who do so much to encourage and support international books year in and year out. It would be impossible for us to continue publishing these books in translation without your continued interest and support.

Thank you very much. 🐻