



Geisel Award Acceptance Speech

Reading on My Own

Kate DiCamillo



Kate DiCamillo is the winner of the Theodor Seuss Geisel Award for *Bink & Gollie*, which she coauthored with Alison McGhee.

I'm going to fly to the moon." These are the first words I read on my own.

The sentence is from Else Holmelund Minarik's book *Little Bear*, and the words appear beneath an illustration by Maurice Sendak that shows Little Bear in a space helmet flying toward a full moon.

The helmet is made out of a cardboard box with two curly wires attached to the top of it. It doesn't look very much like a real space helmet, but it sure looks like it's working.

Because Little Bear is flying.

He is headed to the moon.

And I am reading about it.

On my own.

I am sitting in an orange, molded plastic chair in Mrs. Julich's first grade classroom at Clermont Elementary. The room smells like pencil shavings and Vo-BAN and other people's closets. It is late afternoon. The room is empty. Where is everyone else? I don't know. I only know that I am Reading a Book on My Own.

My feet tingle.

My shoulder blades itch.

I surely wouldn't have been able to articulate it then and I can barely articulate it now, but what happened for me that afternoon was something like this—I realized suddenly that I could not be contained.

Even gravity was powerless.

I could fly.

I could go to the moon.

I could read.

And now, forty-one years later, when I look at that picture of Little Bear with his



makeshift helmet on his head and the moon in front of him, I have to bend over and catch my breath.

I feel dizzy with possibility.

What if some child in some empty classroom, opens up a book and sees two girls, one short and one tall, and what if that child looks at the picture of those girls putting on their roller skates and sees words above their heads?

What if that child reads, on her own, the sentence "Let's roller-skate!"

What if all the doors are suddenly flung wide?

It makes me dizzy.

Holly McGhee, Karen Lotz, Chris Paul, Jennifer Roberts, Alison McGhee, and Tony Fucile: I thank you.

And to the committee, thank you, each of you, all of you, for honoring this moment in the life of a reader.

Thank you for allowing us to be a part of it.

It makes my feet itch.

It makes my shoulder blades tingle.

It humbles me. ☺