



Caldecott

MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

I turn forty this year, and I've noticed that I still don't feel like an adult. I feel like a kid who is pretending to be an adult.

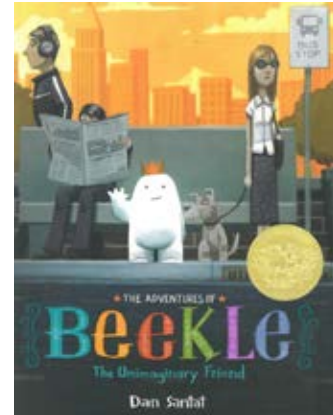
I look around, and suddenly I've ended up with a beautiful wife, a lovely house, two great kids, and an assortment of pets (courtesy of my beautiful wife). I sort of know how to do my taxes. I have no clue how the billing of my health care works, and I'm just completely faking being a parent of two small children. (They will be unleashed on the world in about twelve years. Let's hope it works out.)

This is my eleventh year in children's publishing, and in those years I've produced over sixty books. I still feel new to the business. I still feel like I'm pretending to know what I'm doing. I still feel like I have something to prove.

The question I'm asked most often by people is: "Why do you work so hard?"

I'm not a workaholic. I think that would imply that I'd work this hard at any profession. I'm not obsessed with power, fame, or money, because the profession of making children's books embodies none of these characteristics.

I am, however, a prisoner of my own insecurities.



It's intimidating the first time you see your book sitting next to books you admired when you were a child. Santat is shelved alphabetically right next to folks like Shel Silverstein, Dr. Seuss, and Maurice Sendak, so you can probably understand where I'm coming from. I suddenly found myself floating among bright, shining stars, and I remember thinking, "What am I doing here? This must be a mistake."

Up to a certain point, I feel like I've managed to get where I am out of pure hard work. I always wanted to believe that hard work could mask any shortcomings I had in true ability. Perhaps if I worked longer, or painted with more precision, no one would notice that I had no clue what I was doing. I wanted

Dan Santat received the 2015 (Randolph) Caldecott Medal for *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend* (Little, Brown).

His acceptance remarks were delivered at the Newbery-Caldecott-Wilder Banquet on Sunday, June 28, 2015, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

For more information about the Caldecott Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/caldecott-medal>.

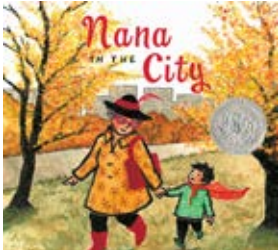


Author and illustrator Dan Santat has worked on numerous picture books, chapter books, and the graphic novel *Sidekicks*, featuring Captain Amazing. He is a winner of the Silver Medal from the Society of Illustrators for *Oh No! (Or How My Science Project Destroyed the World)*, written by Mac Barnett. Santat also is the creator of Disney Channel's hit animated series, *The Replacements*. He graduated with honors from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, and lives in Southern California with his wife, two children, and various pets.

FUN FACT: On his Tumblr account in March 2015, Dan wrote, "Yesterday was the first time my hand has ever cramped up. Strangely it wasn't my writing hand, but the hand that was keeping the book open....We should make all of our books out of tissue."



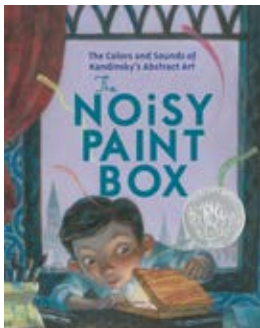
2015 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS



Nana in the City.
Castillo, Lauren.

Illus. by the author.

Clarion/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

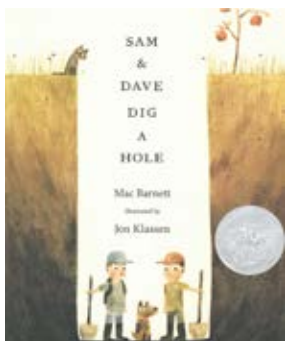


The Noisy Paint Box: The Colors and Sounds of Kandinsky's Abstract Art.

Rosenstock, Barb.

Illus. by Mary GrandPré.

Random House Children's Books



Sam & Dave Dig a Hole.

Barnett, Mac.

Illus. by Jon Klassen.

Candlewick

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to believe that hard work was this great equalizer that could help me achieve what my peers made look so effortless. I constantly worried that I would be discovered as an impostor and that everything would fall apart, so I would tell myself, "I have to work harder."

I was not an overnight success. My career can be characterized as one that began slowly but rose steadily. I would set small career goals for myself year after year.

"I hope I can get a book published someday."

"I hope I can get another book published."

"I hope I can get a better advance."

"I hope making books can be a full-time job."

"I hope my publisher will actively promote my book."

"I hope my publisher will put me on a book tour."

I handled my career one book at a time. Each small goal seemed attainable if I just worked hard. Each book I made was a chance to improve myself and to learn. The beauty of youth is that you have the strength and energy to climb mountains, the optimism to know you will get there, and all the time in the world to reach the summit. I was searching for answers, hoping that one of these books would give me an epiphany on the secrets to making a great book. The knowledge was gathered in pieces. A good idea here, a clever trick there, but never anything that added up to a whole. It was like staring at the ruins of a great empire from long ago, but you had to use your mind to fill in all the blanks.

Part of navigating my way through these ruins was reading reviews.

The advice you hear from everyone

is to ignore all book reviews because they will just depress you, but then what is the point of book reviewers?

I read reviews. I read every single one.

I read every glowing post singing my praises and every cruel one-star review from Anonymous. I read not to torture myself but to search for answers, hoping maybe one of you can tell me what it takes to make a great book. Whatever you may have said in print could never be any worse than what I say to myself.

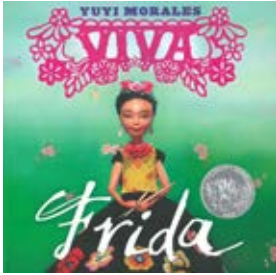
Five years ago I was offered a very lucrative job as a doodle artist at Google. It was the type of job where money no longer would have been a concern. My wife could have quit her job, lived closer to her family, and spent more time with our kids, who would have received a solid education in one of the country's finest school districts. A few friends of mine who worked down the street at Yahoo! told me that they knew hordes of people who would kill to work at Google. This was an opportunity for me to stop all the self-doubting. This was a chance for me to decline with dignity: "Sorry, I'm not making books anymore because Google hired me to do their branding."

But there was a pain in my side. What was wrong with me? Why didn't I want this?

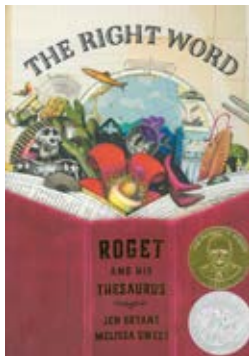
Perhaps a more responsible husband and father would have chosen this job for both career and financial security. The publishing industry, at the time, was going through a rough patch, and in 2010 Google was number four in Fortune magazine's 100 Best Companies to Work For. Google told me that I could still publish books, but the work at the company would probably require most of my attention. I tossed and turned for weeks trying to decide what I wanted to



2015 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS



Viva Frida.
Morales, Yuyi.
Illus. by the author.
Roaring Brook/Neal Porter



***The Right Word:
Roget and His Thesaurus.***
Bryant, Jen.
Illus. by Melissa Sweet.
Eerdmans Books for Young Readers



This One Summer.
Tamaki, Mariko.
Illus. by Jillian Tamaki.
First Second

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do. I asked a few of my peers about what they would do.

“Uh, I’d take the job,” one would say. “So, wait, you’re telling me they’re hiring?” asked another.

I was hoping for them to tell me to “keep it real” and that making books was what I was meant to do. When Google asked for a response, I asked for an extra week to think things over. Then another. I even avoided their phone calls. Ultimately, I turned the job down because I knew that for the rest of my life I would have asked myself, “How good could I have been? How far could I have gone? How high could I have climbed?”

When forced to make a decision, I realized that the anxiety of not knowing my full potential greatly exceeded my anxiety over feeling inadequate. I wanted to know that I could shine just as brightly as all the other stars. I had to work harder.

Fast-forward four years. I was very nobly called “one of the hardest working people in the industry” in the *Huffington Post* in 2014. That year, I published thirteen books. It was the hardest year I had ever worked, and since then I swore to myself I would never work like that ever again. At one point, I slept for a total of twelve hours in an entire seven-day week. My brain was so exhausted that I would break down and cry at my computer. I broke down so many times that I lost count. On top of all that, several members of my family were hospitalized for health reasons that year, and I remember sitting beside them in a hospital room thinking, “This will probably be me pretty soon if I keep this up. I can’t do this forever.”

At this point, I felt I had nothing left to give. The universe had told me that I can’t work as hard as I used to. I used to

be able to work until 2:00 a.m. and wake up at 6:30 every day to get the home started and get the kids to school with ease. Now I sit down at my desk at night to begin my evening shift of work, and I find myself passed out by 11:30 p.m. only to wake up at 3:00 a.m. realizing another night has been wasted. That’s even with a fresh 10:00 p.m. cup of coffee in my system.

I am only human.

The strange part of all this was that I was angry at myself because I felt like I was being weak.

It’s a hard day when you face the moment you realize you’ve pushed yourself as far as you can possibly go. The feeling that you’ve peaked. You weren’t an overnight success, you were slow and steady. The hard lesson after ten years in the business is that you are no longer the young, fresh, new talent, full of promise. Art styles come and go, and perhaps people have grown bored of your work and maybe now you’re viewed as a has-been. It has only been four years since declining a job offer you fought so hard not to regret, and you will never be able to forgive yourself for being so selfish. You turned down a job that a good, responsible husband and father should have chosen, but instead you decided to pursue your own interests. You can’t look your children in the eye knowing that you took an opportunity from them and squandered it. You convince yourself that this is who you are, this is as good as you will ever be, and you will have to work this hard for the rest of your life just to keep up.

This is as good as it gets.

At a book event last year, a few author friends openly expressed their concern for me. “You should slow down. We’re



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afraid you're going to kill yourself if you keep up this pace."

The honest truth is, I would kill myself to achieve what you've achieved.

It is perhaps a curse that I want far more than what I am capable of. I don't need to be great. I just want to be "just as good." I think I've given all I have to give, but deep inside, I have to work harder.

On February 2nd, 2015, I woke up fifteen minutes before I got the call. I woke up with an intense case of heartburn from constant worry. In those brief fifteen minutes, my mind wandered and inevitably settled into a familiar place. I reminded myself that I wasn't good enough.

People talk about books at the end of every year, as they always do.

Your friends and colleagues tell you to ignore the chatter because it will only drive you insane (and it does), but you peek and you begin to think, "Maybe?"

"Maybe" is a dangerous place to be, because it fills your mind with hope, and sometimes that can be an awful thing. Hope is not something you earn. Hope is something you are given and you have no control over. The probability of hope fulfilling such a lofty goal is slim to none, and it will most likely lead to disappointment. At best, you hope for an Honor, because they give out more of those, so your odds would be improved. To imagine winning the Caldecott Medal feels pompous, implying you somehow feel like you deserve it. This is an odd state of mind coming from a person who after years of hearing award announcements was convinced that if there was ever going to be an award given to an Asian American author whose name started with a D and ended in an -an Santat, the winner would probably still be Mo Willems or David Wiesner.

There is no point in hoping for the unimaginable because chances are it will never happen. It's like being disappointed because you never got to talk to aliens. Magic only happens in fairy tales and feel-good movies. You don't like the feeling of disappointment, so you prepare for the inevitable by simply telling yourself, "They probably already called the winners, and how dare I have the nerve to think that I even had a chance?"

Then the phone rings, and the voice on the other end tells you that you won the medal, and you begin to cry.

The emotion you feel is overwhelming, because you just experienced the unimaginable becoming a reality.

I would like to thank the 2015 Randolph Caldecott Award Selection Committee from the bottom of my heart. After ten years of working like a dog, I realized that this is not a prize that can ever be earned, but I want to be worthy of it. I would be a fool not to realize that, in a world of infinite possibilities, it could be feasible to argue that many other fine books in 2014 could have worn the highly coveted gold sticker. *Beekle* may not be perfect for everyone, but I was happy to know that it was perfect for fifteen people on the committee. Thank you for being my perfect other half. Thank you for changing my life and letting me, for the first time, feel that I was good enough.

I would also not be here were it not for my fellow authors and illustrators. You make this "job" that we do seem so effortless, and you inspire me to keep telling my own stories by working on your own. I read your work. I study your books. I even study how you all present to an audience. We've occasionally confided in one another in private, reminding me that we all have the same insecurities. I've had the privilege of working with some of you,

and I have learned to be better at my craft by your example. When the award was announced, I received an outpouring of responses from many of you sharing your sincere happiness for me, and for that I thank you. There was a moment of worry in which I envisioned a universal eye roll with everyone uttering, "Ugh, that guy?" All I've ever wanted was to be as good as you, and I thank you for letting me feel like I am worthy of your praise. You are the stars in the sky, and I thank you for allowing me to shine with you.

I would like to thank my parents for allowing me to pursue my dream and for your willingness to let me explore the world untethered. Your good intentions of grooming me to become a doctor were noble, but as you can see, I was never meant to be a man destined for a safe and secure type of profession. While I dashed your hopes of becoming a doctor (which should have been evident by my college grades), I was driven by my desire to give you the undeniable confidence that I was going to be okay making a living as an artist. I would not have been able to look you in the eye if I had been anything less than good enough, and I hope that you are proud.

I would especially like to thank my wife, Leah, who supported my decision to decline the job offer from Google. I know perfectly well that it would have been a dream come true for her if I had accepted the job, and I am forever indebted to her sacrifice and belief in me while selflessly allowing me to pursue my dream. She has comforted me when I am sad, cheered for me when I succeed, and has always been there to hold down the fort when I am away on trips. She has been my spirit on this long journey through life, starting all the way back in the days when I studied biology, through the years I went to art school, and with me in my career up to this day.



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I was an only child growing up, but my agent, Jodi Reamer, is probably the closest thing to a big sister that I will ever have. My fondest memory is of her shouting at me in the middle of a street in Beverly Hills. This may have been partially due to the fact that I tried wearing cargo shorts to a fancy restaurant, which in turn ended up with me changing in the middle of the street into a pair of jeans, which I had luckily found in the trunk of my car. I remember it fondly because she told me exactly what I needed to hear. She said, "Stop being so down on yourself. You are good at what you do and you will succeed. Give us three years and I promise you that you will be in a much better place." Given her track record with a long list of very impressive clients, this perhaps was all part of her master plan. I apologize that it has taken us five years to get to this point instead of three, but I doubt it will tarnish her reputation for being the best in the business. Forgive me for all the long phone calls filled with self-doubt and constant worry. I am still a kid pretending to be an adult. I should also add that it has been permanently burned in my mind to always wear pants to a fancy dinner.

If you may recall, I never queried you, because I never considered myself good enough to be represented by Writers House. Thankfully, because of our mutual friend Lisa Yee, we managed to find each other. Lisa Yee is the best friend an author could ever hope for in publishing. We started our careers together at the same time through Arthur A. Levine Books. We've had long discussions over countless numbers of lunches, and I hope to have more in the years to come.

I would like to thank all the various librarians, teachers, and book bloggers whom I have had the opportunity to know over the years. I would especially like to thank Betsy Bird and Julie Walker Danielson for noticing me from the very beginning of my career and casting a spotlight on my work. I would

like to thank Minh Le, John Schumacher, Travis Jonker, Matthew Winner, Jennifer Kelley Reed, Colby Sharp, and many others, too many to name. I value your friendship and thoughtful discussions online, and I will always happily raise a glass with you at future book events. I would also like to thank all the members of the Nerdy Book Club, who work tirelessly to promote great literature to children all over the country.

I would like to thank everyone at Little, Brown Books for Young Readers who played an instrumental part in the success of this book, especially my art director, David Caplan, and my editor, Connie Hsu. I have known Dave for over seven years, all the way back to when we worked together on a series at HarperCollins. Dave continues to push my knowledge of design and typography, which is why I requested him by name when I arrived at Little, Brown. He meticulously nitpicks the smallest of details when I am ready to call it quits, and he makes me look better by always going the extra mile, whether it be selecting coated or uncoated paper stock or exchanging Rhodamine Red for Magenta. Dave brings me one step closer to improvement with his impeccable taste in design and equally high standards.

A month before *Beekle* was released, I remember waking up in a panic. I couldn't stop thinking about the ending to the story, worrying that it wasn't entirely obvious to everyone that Alice, the girl in the story, had written the entire adventure about how she and Beekle met. I remember my editor, Connie Hsu, calling me that day to talk me off this metaphorical ledge; to assure me that the slight ambiguity is what would make the story better. She told me that some people would not love the book, some people would not understand the book, but that was the beauty of the book. Like the character himself, Beekle may not seem perfect to everyone, but he was perfect to those who closely examined all the little details, and that in itself is a perfect

representation of the book. Connie and I exchanged many long phone calls wrestling this story into shape. As a superb editor, her notes were clear, honest, and true, and the story would not be this beautiful without her aid.

And, finally, for my kids. In the days leading up to fatherhood, I worried about what it would be like to be a father and about the insecurities I had about being able to handle the duties of parenthood. I've never expected your respect simply because I was your father. I work hard because I hope that over the years, perhaps in the twelve years before you are unleashed to the world, you can look back and see me as a man who felt it was always important to work hard and earn respect. The name Beekle was my oldest son's first word for bicycle, and from that word he inspired me to write a story about the day he was born. It was a day I could only imagine, but I knew we would be perfect for each other. Alek and Kyle, you both taught me what unconditional love truly is, and one day I hope that you can share this book with your kids and your kids' kids and teach them to know how it feels to be loved unconditionally.

This speech that I am giving will be transcribed into zeros and ones and released into a sea of information so that you can always hear my voice. Let this be my love letter to you even long after I am gone. Understand that I am not perfect, because no one is, and we are all only human, but despite all my insecurities, it is also in our nature as human beings to try our hardest because we cherish the feeling of acceptance from those who we hold closely near us. Thank you for being my inspiration and reminding me what it still means to be a kid, though I still have no clue how to be an adult. *Beekle* is a book that I made to the best of my ability, but despite my faults, you are both proof that I am capable of creating something perfect in this world. With the birth of the two of you, I have witnessed



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proof that I was able to be perfect twice. Though this book is not nearly as perfect as both of you, I'm glad it was good enough.

Thank you.

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For more information about the Caldecott Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/caldecott-medal>.