



Caldecott

MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH



Sophie Blackall received the 2016 (Randolph) Caldecott Medal for *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear*, written by Lindsay Mattick (Little, Brown/Hachette). Her acceptance remarks were delivered at the Newbery-Caldecott-Wilder Banquet on Sunday, June 26, 2016, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

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



"What about a story?" said Christopher Robin.

"What about a story?" I said.

"Could you very sweetly tell Winnie-the-Pooh one?"

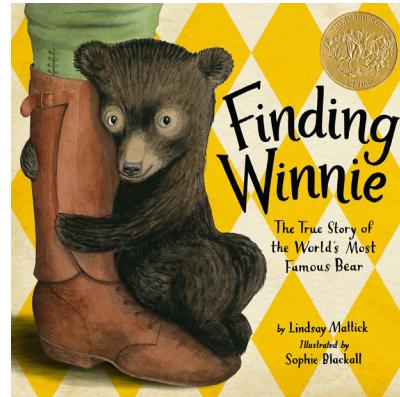
"I suppose I could," I said. "What sort of stories does he like?"

"About himself. Because he's that sort of Bear."

I am also that sort of bear and I'm going to tell you stories mostly about myself.

Sixteen years ago I won a green card in the lottery, which allowed me and my family to immigrate to America from Australia. When my Green Card was first issued, it listed my nationality as French Polynesian and my occupation as "entertainer." The nine months I had to wait for a replacement card were passed in fear of being discovered as a fraud on both fronts. I am half waiting for someone to say, apologetically, that this whole Caldecott thing was a bureaucratic bungle. So I'm going to speak quickly.

Thank you to the 2016 Caldecott committee. Your collective expertise and years of preparation, the thousands of hours you spent poring over picture books, your dedication and commitment all give me faith that



there was no bungle, and I am overwhelmed with gratitude. Thank you for the work you do to connect children with books that will change their lives. And for calling on a dark winter morning and changing mine. I will remember the sound of our mingled laughing-and-crying for as long as I live.

Thank you for choosing *Finding Winnie* and *Last Stop on Market Street* and *Trombone Shorty* and *Voice of Freedom* and *Waiting*. Christian, Bryan, Ekua, Kevin: I am deeply honored to be in your company, and it is humbling to share the stage with Matt de la Peña and Jerry Pinkney.

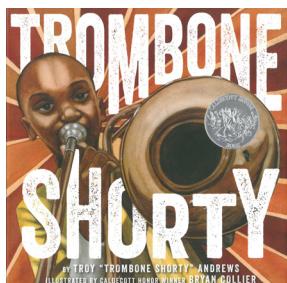
I am inspired every day by the work of my fellow writers and artists. I'm fortunate to live in Brooklyn, which has a

Sophie Blackall is an Australian-born illustrator based in New York. She has illustrated over thirty books, including the bestselling Ivy and Bean series, *Ruby's Wish*, which won the Ezra Jack Keats Award, and *Big Red Lollipop*, among the *New York Times* 10 Best Picture Books of 2010. Her editorial illustrations have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *Time*, among other publications. Her work also is featured in a global pro-vaccination campaign and on a well-known NYC subway poster.

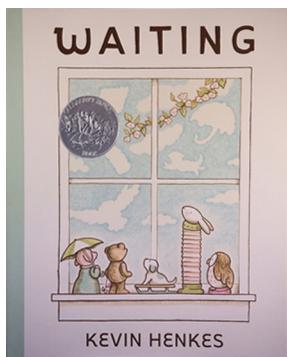
FUN FACT: Sophie shares a studio space in Brooklyn, New York, with illustrators Brian Floca, Sergio Ruzzier, Eddie Hemingway, and John Bemelmans Marciano.



2016 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS



Trombone Shorty
Andrews, Troy
Illus. by Bryan Collier
Abrams



Waiting
Henkes, Kevin
Illus. by the author
Greenwillow

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disproportionate population of children's book makers, and even more fortunate to share a studio with some of the best of them: Brian Floca, Edward Hemingway, John Bemelmans Marciano, and Sergio Ruzzier. We share not only the physical space—a grimy loft in an old factory near the stagnant waters of the Gowanus Canal—but also our ups and downs, advice and gossip. We share reference books, recipes, long nights, pen nibs, outrage, archives, painkillers, dark chocolate, sightings of our resident kestrel, and, almost every day, lunch.

I know my work is better for their company, I know *Finding Winnie* was better for their input, and I know how lucky I am.

We were together when the awards were announced and they are all here tonight, and I wouldn't be here without them.

I understand the committee must consider each book in isolation from an artist's previous books, but for me, they and their publishers are all connected. Chronicle, Holt, FSG, Candlewick, Dutton, Atheneum, Abrams, Workman, Putnam, Viking, Schwartz & Wade: thank you for trusting me, for your encouragement and support and friendship. To every editor who ever took a chance on a new illustrator—in my case, Victoria Rock at Chronicle—you will always be our first love, and we will always be grateful.

To everyone at Little, Brown: thank you for gathering behind *Finding Winnie* like a tidal wave. It was a phenomenal effort from every department. This award belongs to all of us.

All the same, I'm glad the medal has

my name on it. When we were kids, my older brother had a silver christening mug with his name on it, even though he was no more christened than I was; we were both heathens. I had no such mug. I may have mentioned this oversight once or fifty times to my mother when I was around eight, seething with life's injustices. One day my mother, fed up, went to the local thrift store, came back with a christening mug, and plonked it down in front of me.

"There!" she said, triumphant.

"Trevor," said the mug, in Edwardian script.

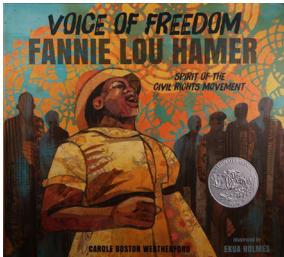
I was completely, utterly satisfied. I embraced the mug wholeheartedly, but I often wondered what happened to Trevor.

Trevor marked the beginning of my obsession with old things. Especially enigmatic things, like an unfinished cross-stitch—"HOME, SWEET..."—or a porcelain doll with one hand-carved wooden arm. It's not so much the things—though I love the things—as the stories they hold: stories that connect us to the past. I forage for the stories of other people's treasures, too: a Dust Bowl baby's shoe made from the skin of a rat; the last stick an old dog laid at his owner's feet; a father and son's dog tags, thought lost, discovered entwined in a drawer.

So you can imagine that Lindsay Mattick's box of mementos made my heart skip a beat. A box of photographs and diaries revealing, piece by piece, a profound friendship between her great-grandfather and the orphaned black bear he named Winnipeg. Winnie for short. I am so thankful to Lindsay for sharing her story; it was an honor to bring it to life.

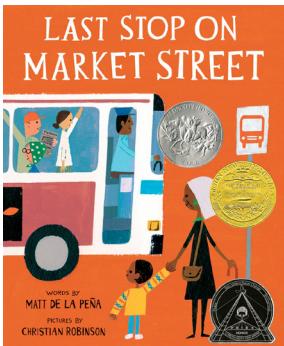


2016 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS



Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement

Weatherford, Carole Boston
Illus. by Ekua Holmes
Candlewick



Last Stop on Market Street
de la Peña, Matt

Illus. by Christian Robinson
G. P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin

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Winnie-the-Pooh was the first book I bought with my own money. It was an old, worn edition. A prop in my mother's antique shop. I read it in my secret spot under a table. I used to hide the book so nobody would buy it. Eventually my mother sold it to me for a dollar, and I polished the steps to earn the money. I had never known a book like it. A book with interjections and digressions and ponderings. One that meandered and backtracked, that bounced and hummed, that drew you in so close that you felt you were in the very forest itself, and at the same time allowed you to step back and see the actual form of a book. With characters so endearing you hated to leave them behind. So you didn't.

I spent a year working on *Finding Winnie*. I traveled to England to rummage in the archives of the London Zoo, where I reveled in the Daily Occurrences, the zookeeper's handwritten record of comings and goings, in which I read that the day Winnie arrived it was foggy, a white-whiskered swine was unwell, and at 7:00 a.m. the temperature in the Hippopotamus House was fifty-four degrees. At the Imperial War Museum I learned that in WWI, Canadian soldiers were issued boots with cardboard soles that disintegrated in the mud of the Salisbury Plain, where it rained and rained and rained. And back in the studio I had access to Brian Floca's considerable knowledge of locomotives. Thank goodness, because my train would otherwise have resembled a jumble of licorice.

In a year that was uncommonly weighted with grief from the loss of a dear friend, *Finding Winnie* brought sweet distraction and great joy. One

of the main reasons for the joy was working with Susan Rich.

Susan introduced herself to me with an extremely winning email. I had recently beseeched my wonderful and wise agent Nancy Gallt, "Don't let me take on any more books just now. Seriously. Even if I tell you this one is a *find*. Remind me that I haven't had a weekend off in a year. That my children are withering from neglect. That I ought to be going to physical therapy."

But in the face of such an email, Nancy's best efforts were a lost cause: I was a love-struck sailor hearing the siren's call. I once told my family I would sail off into the sunset with Susan Rich. They refer to her simply as "Sunset." The thing about Susan, apart from her wit, genius, humanity, grace, and humor, is that she has a fantastic voice. I would answer the phone and an hour later we would have covered trim sizes and train journeys, soldiers and serendipity, beloved, bedraggled toys and the contents of preschoolers' pockets.

We solved problems and shared stories and navigated every twist and turn together on possibly the most delightful collaboration I have ever known.

I had not yet heard her voice when I read that first email; I cannot now read it any other way.

Hello Sophie,

Susan Rich here with a manuscript for you to look at.

This one, this story, I think, is a FIND.

This is the sort of true story that you can't believe you don't already know. Unless, well, unless



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you actually do already know it. I find nonfiction thrilling when it shows us what almost wasn't—true stories that make us see that the world as we know it came to be when someone took a chance, made a choice.

I'm not going to say much more about the story, but you will see it is full of wonderful things to bring to life; a sea of white tents at the army barracks, a parade of ships crossing the ocean in 1914, The London Zoo...

I felt a little bereft when we finally finished the book. I remember Susan and I dragged out a last phone conversation, ostensibly about whether the tiny graphic element on the spine should be a spot or a diamond, but it was really about our reluctance for this particular journey to be over.

There's a curious lull while a book is being printed. Having raced, feverishly, to deadline, there are months before you will hold the book in your hands. I took to carrying around the F&Gs of *Finding Winnie*, like an expectant parent carries a sonogram print.

One day I gave a presentation to a large and rowdy group of kids. I went all out. I explained how to make a picture book. I drew for them. Upside-down. With Chinese ink. I showed them whisks from four centuries and how you can paint with squished blackberries. I took them on a journey to densely crowded dirt floor classrooms in Congo and a school in Bhutan halfway in the sky, where the student population is five and the commute is a two-hour vertical climb. I told them what it was like to watch kids in Rwanda open a book for the very first time and turn

the pages and look at the pictures and make out the words. And how little children walked for miles to a hilltop, where village elders told stories passed down through the ages.

At the end I opened it up to questions.

A girl shot up her hand.

"Can you tell us a story?"

"A story? *After all that*, you want a story?"

"Yes!" came the resounding cry.

And so I pulled up a tiny chair and took the F&Gs out of my bag and read them *Finding Winnie*.

You could have heard a pin drop. The principal came in halfway through and wiped a discreet tear. The teachers wept freely and reached for tissues in cavernous bags.

I have read the finished book often since then, and almost every time I get to the end, a kid will ask, "Is Harry still alive?" even though they know the story took place over a hundred years ago. And then, immediately after, "Is Winnie still alive?" and they are crestfallen to hear she is not, because somehow they know people get old and die, but they want bears to live forever. And occasionally I tell them that Winnie's skull is on display in London and her teeth are rotten from all the condensed milk, which is true and fascinating and slightly unsettling, like lots of the things I like, but usually we talk about our own stories. How we go about our lives, gathering stories from Daily Occurrences to tell our families over dinner, or collecting stories from our evenings to tell our studio mates at lunch. How our stories intertwine and overlap. How we are part of other people's stories as they are part of ours, no matter

where we were born, who we are, or where we live, and how we pass those stories down through the ages. How long after our mementos, our dog tags or Trevor mugs, are lost or left behind, the stories will remain. How sometimes we have to let one story end so another can begin, like when we move house, or grow up, or lose someone we love. But how we will always have those stories to revisit and reread. Within the pages of a book, "*Wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.*"

Everything is connected.

If I hadn't been bored out of my brain in my mother's antique shop, I wouldn't have resorted to a dusty book. If I hadn't encountered that book at that time, I would have been a very different child. If my mother hadn't kept me supplied with paper, I wouldn't have traced E. H. Shepard's lines over and over again. If my father, to whom *Finding Winnie* is dedicated, hadn't devoted his life to books, I wouldn't have known what a good life it could be. If I hadn't won a green card in the lottery, I wouldn't be living in America. If certain cells had arranged themselves differently, I would've had other children, whom I might not have liked at all, instead of Olive and Eggy, whom I love more than anything in the world. If I hadn't been dragged to a play, I wouldn't have met Ed, who brings me more joy even than Susan Rich. And I wouldn't have known his children, whom I adore. If I hadn't been addicted to stories of chance, I wouldn't have illustrated *Missed Connections*, and Susan would have sent someone else that seductive email. If Nancy Gallt



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and Marietta Zacker hadn't been wonderful and wise agents, I wouldn't be here tonight. And if Harry hadn't got off the train to stretch his legs at a train station in White River in 1914 and happened upon a bear cub; if he hadn't acted in a moment of daring, compassionate spontaneity, taken a chance, made a choice, *Winnie-the-Pooh* would not exist.

To the 2016 Caldecott committee: we are forever connected, you and I. You are my committee and I am your

medalist. To everybody I couldn't thank by name: **You know who you are.** Publishers, librarians, agents, educators, booksellers, writers, and illustrators, we are all connected by our love of books and the children who read them, and our profound belief in the power of stories to shape lives. We may never all be in the same room together again, but wherever we go, and whatever happens to us along the way, I will remember you all and this enchanted evening, and be grateful.

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For more information about the Caldecott Medal, visit
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