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MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES

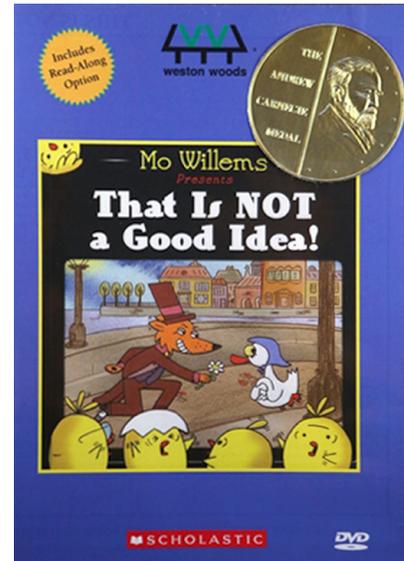
Carnegie Medal Acceptance Remarks by Mo Willems

That *Is Not a Good Idea!* is the title of the short film that Lizabeth L. Deskins and the Carnegie committee have so kindly awarded with a medal, but it could also very well be the title of my autobiography.

I seem to blithely, blindly carry on with my ridiculous, elaborate schemes only to discover that I, like the hungry fox in the story, will find myself in a stew. Thankfully, a less literal stew than *Hungry Fox's*, but still...

Not Good Ideas are my métier. For example:

It Is Not a Good Idea to tell a bunch of librarians, whose love for books has inspired and sustained someone's career for 13 years, that one's first love is film. But, it's true. I graduated from film school, not picture book school. While seldom remarked upon, I am inordinately proud to have written, produced, or animated at least one short film every year since 1988; a 28-year run that has included independent films, *Sesame Street* shorts,



television episodes, potato chip commercials, and adaptations of my books.

I love Buster Keaton, I love Chuck Jones, I love Pete Docter. Books are cool, too.

It Is Not a Good Idea to admit that, while this giant coin suitable for the largest vending machine imaginable has been engraved with my name, it's not my efforts that deserve recognition. The team of co-producers and



Producers **Paul R. Gagne** (left), Weston Woods Studios, Inc., and author/illustrator **Mo Willems** (right) are the 2016 recipients of the (Andrew) Carnegie Medal for *That Is NOT a Good Idea!* They delivered their acceptance remarks at the ALSC Book and Media Awards Program on Monday, June 27, 2016, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

Weston Woods was founded in 1953 by Morton Schindel with the mission to create audiovisual adaptations of books that truly capture the essence of those titles. That mission continues today. In 1996, Weston Woods became part of Scholastic. Weston Woods, headquartered in Norwalk, Conn., provides materials to more than 50,000 schools and libraries nationwide and has distributors in more than 20 countries worldwide.

Mo Willems' works in children's books, animation, television, and theater have earned him multiple Caldecott Honors, Geisel Medals and Honors, Emmy Awards, and a Helen Hayes nomination. He is known for his characters Knuffle Bunny, Pigeon, and Elephant and Piggie, and his work as a writer and animator for PBS's *Sesame Street*. He is also known for his work on Cartoon Network's *Sheep in the Big City* and Nickelodeon's *The Off-Beats*.

For more information about the Carnegie Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/carnegie-award>.





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editors at Weston Woods, the animation team assembled by the super-cool Pete List, and the vocal talents of my wife have made this film so fun to watch. My role as co-producer and sub-par voice actor has been to create more perspiration than inspiration for the team while they somehow executed my (and I'm using Mickey-Mouse-sized gloves for my air quotes) "vision."

The folks at Weston Woods have done this with grace on each and every one of the eleven projects we've made together over the past decade.

It Is ALSO Not a Good Idea to ask your teenage daughter to make a short documentary about how she really feels about her dad to be included with the cartoon, even if it comes out wonderfully in the end.

It Is Not a Good Idea to admit how much having this film garner the Carnegie Medal means to me. As an artist with a capital A, I am supposed to disdain worldly recognition. But, this award legitimizes short animation as a form that can (and I think should) work in schools, especially for reluctant readers. If we can get a

kid who has no desire to read laughing at a cartoon in the middle of the day and then show that the source material is, in fact, a book, we may just be leading someone down the path of becoming a devoted reader.

It Is Not a Good Idea to forget to honestly and sincerely thank Lizabeth L. Deskins, her fellow Carnegie committee members, ALA, and the teachers and librarians who celebrate the worth of media to encourage literacy.

I hope I don't forget to do that.

Carnegie Medal Acceptance Remarks

by Paul R. Gagne

Good morning. It is NOT a Good Idea to be the person following Mo Willems, but I'll try! Let me begin by adding my thanks to Lizabeth Deskins, the members of the 2016 Andrew Carnegie Medal committee and ALSC for choosing *That Is NOT a Good Idea!* to receive this honor. And aside from feeling like I'm going to melt every time I walk outside, there's a very satisfying sense of having come full circle to be accepting this award here in Orlando. I first met Mo at the Newbery/Caldecott banquet during the last ALA conference that was held here, in 2004. We spoke very briefly about mutual friends in the New York animation community, and agreed that we should do something together. That was the beginning of one of the most treasured creative collaborations of my career, and here we are twelve years and thirteen films later.

When I think about my own role in the process of adapting one of Mo's

books into a film, the phrase "as easy as falling off a log" comes to mind. It's easy because of Mo's background in animation—it's obvious that he thinks in very cinematic terms, and I think he envisions each of his books as a little movie. The layout of illustrations and text on the page feel almost like a storyboard for a movie, and nowhere is this more evident than in *That Is NOT a Good Idea!*, with the storyline of the fox and mama goose presented in "silent movie" format through square illustrations and title card text. This book was a no-brainer for us from the moment we saw it.

It's easy because the voice casting is already done for each of these films before we even start production. Mo has a background in standup comedy, Cher has a background in theater, and they're the perfect voice actors for these films. I love that Mo thinks of these films as an auditory family scrapbook album.

And it's easy because Mo always has a very clear vision of what he wants to see and hear in the film, and the ability to effectively communicate that vision to the animators, who have usually been people that he previously worked with during his animation days. Pete List was one of the animators on Mo's *Sheep in the Big City* series, and has since been the director and animator on most of the films we've adapted from Mo's books. Pete did a particularly brilliant job incorporating the "silent movie" format of the book's illustrations and seamlessly shifting back and forth between that and the "reality" of the Greek chorus of baby geese watching the movie.

To acknowledge and thank the rest of the team behind this production, Steve Syarto is one of the most important people on any of our productions. Steve is responsible for our video editing, sound design, and mixing, and is the person who takes the pic-



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ture and sound and weaves it all into a seamless whole. Steve took the “silent movie” element of the film a step further by adding projector sounds and processing them to sound like they’re coming from an old movie projector. Steve is also one of our directors, and he handled the recording of all the children’s voices for the baby geese. These included the children of our coworkers (Austin and Carly), the children of visiting authors and illustrators (Kate and Lily), and the children of other colleagues and friends of the Weston Woods family (Ellis, Logan, Sam, Eli, Sebastian, and Luca.)

For the music, I had always planned to score this with a solo piano in the style of the musicians who would play along with movies during the silent film era. An instance of serendipity happened at last year’s ALA conference in San Francisco. If you were lucky enough to attend Brian Selznick’s wonderful presentation for his book, “The Marvels,” you will no doubt remember Luke Eberl, the young musician who performed an original piano piece to Brian’s silent-

movie style slide show of the illustrations from the book’s opening sequence. Luke’s music is exactly what I was looking for. I made a beeline to give him my business card, and a month later the score for *That Is NOT a Good Idea* had been written and recorded.

On each of the films we’ve made with Mo, we’ve made an effort to include some “bonus” content—an interview with Mo, or a look behind the scenes showing how the animation or music was created. We were starting to run out of ideas for doing something different when Mo happened to mention in a phone conversation that his daughter, Trixie, had started playing around with making films using iMovie. I suggested asking her to do the video bonus for the next film, thinking it would be fun to take a home movie-style insider’s look at Mo’s process. Trixie came up with the idea of showing how it actually takes a village to create a picture book and get it into the hands of children, and “Team Mo” was born. Congratulations on your first professional film,

Trixie, and thank you for doing such a wonderful job!

I would also like to thank Melissa El-lard, my friend, co-producer, and partner in crime at Weston Woods. I’ve joked that we have a great working relationship because each of us is good at those things that the other person doesn’t like to do, but in all seriousness I can’t imagine being able to do my job without Melissa. And, as always, I want to thank our vice president, Linda Lee, for always being our rock with her guidance and support, and our extended family at Scholastic, and especially Lori Benton, for giving us such a good home. This past April hit the milestone of our twentieth anniversary with Scholastic, and we look forward to many more years together.

And, finally, I’ve said this before, and it bears repeating, that I wouldn’t be here without the love and support of my wife, Lynn, and our daughters, Melanie and Brianna, so thank you from the bottom of my heart.



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