



May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Reading in the Dark

Peter Sís



Speaker Peter Sís, center, at the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture with then-ALSC President Mary Fellows, left, and Dr. Brenda Dales of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, the lecture venue. Photo by Bert Shepard.

Three-time Caldecott Honor illustrator **Peter Sís** presented the 2012 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture April 4, 2012, at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

I was born in the mid-twentieth century at the crossroads of Europe in a country that no longer exists—Czechoslovakia, now Czech Republic. Looking back, I can say that books meant everything in my life, and not just because I grew up in a time before television or computers but because I lived in a dark totalitarian empire, not even realizing it, with books being the only beams of light.

Books shaped my ideas; they held my dreams, my fears, and my hopes. Books made me draw pictures of what I had read. They became the most important and continuous stepping-stones through my life.

One hundred fifty years ago, [British philosopher] Herbert Spencer wrote, “Children should be led to make their own investigations and to draw their own inferences. They should be told as little as possible and induced to discover as much as possible.”

Luckily this was true of my early childhood. No television, no computer, no babysitters—the word “babysitter” did not exist in Czech. I spent my preschool days with my grandparents, who introduced me to nineteenth- and twentieth-century books—fairy tales like those of the Brothers Grimm and Karel Erben with their princesses, ogres, knights, and even death; also cautionary tales in the tradition of Wilhelm Busch’s *Max and Moritz*, where pictures show what happens to disobedient children. The punishments I still remember were severe—like if you do not eat your soup, you will go blind, or if you are too curious, you just might die. This was scary stuff, but it was hard not to be fascinated by it.

You get scared, you get happy, you are a child. You are learning about the world that is close to you, but I had no idea that I was living in a place called Czechoslovakia, which had been a Democratic republic since 1918, annexed by Hitler, liberated by the Red Army, and taken over by Communists to become part of the Soviet Empire. Marxist social philosophy was the opposite of Herbert Spencer’s progressive idea to allow children the freedom to learn from experience. Anything considered bourgeois and

decadent was forbidden. This included religion and many books and ideas. But people still held on to their books and kept their thoughts to themselves; they also kept their religious beliefs even if they did not express them openly. It was all very confusing for a small child.

My parents, both artists, told stories to my sister and me. They read us fairy tales and the books of wonderful modern Czech writers and illustrators (pre-World War II) like the brothers Karel and Josef Apek or Ondřej Sekora, and they drew pictures with us. That was fun.

My father’s mother—my grandmother, Marie—did not want me to grow up in sin, so she took me secretly to visit imposing churches. She told me Bible stories and showed me the statues of saints and paintings of martyrs. We read *Fireflies*, a Czech classic written by a clergyman named Jan Karafiát, while she insisted that I not tell anybody. This was a heavy load and not the best preparation for what was to come in my Communist school.

Nor did the other side of the family make things easier. My grandfather Karel was a railway engineer and spent the 1930s designing the technical aspects of the train stations in Cleveland and Chicago. So my mother spent a short time in the Midwest. The family had a library of books they brought from America, which introduced me to many American children’s books of that period. I loved their colors and smell. The best of them, in my opinion, was the biggest book I had ever seen. My grandfather collected the funnies—comic strips from Chicago newspapers—and got them bound in a large volume that was taller than I was at the time. I pored over the pictures, virtually lying down on a page, to follow the stories of Little Orphan Annie, Mutt and Jeff, Crazy Kat, the Katzenjammer Kids, and many more. I wore that volume out of existence, but it was in a way a good preparation for the future, my life in America.

Those early years with my sister, my parents, and my grandparents are wonderful in my memories, full of play and sun. We caught glimpses of political reality from time to time—People’s Militia marching, flags flying, tanks on parade.

But we did not understand, and besides, little boys like that sort of thing, especially marching soldiers. So when my father came home one day in a uniform, I did not realize it marked the end of the safe part of my childhood.

My father was drafted into the Czechoslovak People's Army, as were all young men of his age. He was a documentary filmmaker and became part of the Army Film Corps. He was sent to China, which was also part of the Communist Bloc at that time, to teach the Chinese People's Liberation Army filmmakers how to shoot a documentary. He told us he would be back for Christmas, and then he was gone.

He did come back for Christmas, but not until two years later. Time and distance seemed greater then, and I felt as if he had been gone for many years. I had almost forgotten what he looked like. He brought back fantastic tales about the Tibetan world and its boy-god-king, the Dalai Lama. He told me many stories he did not dare talk about in public. Some of them I retold in my book *Tibet Through the Red Box*. They were even more fantastic and at odds with Communist teachings than my grandmother's stories of saints and miracles.

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I was now six years old, and it was time to go to school. It started with the basics but also a daily dose of politics. All children in the Communist school system were supposed to be indoctrinated, as I try to explain in *The Wall*, my book about growing up behind the Iron Curtain. We learned to read and write—in Czech and Russian—but we were also supposed to prepare to become young pioneers with red scarves, trumpets, drums, and banners. We studied and memorized the life stories of Lenin, Stalin, and other heroes from the Communist Olympus. When I speak to people who grew up in other Communist countries I realize we all know the same stories—and the Russian language, which was compulsory.

Hansel and Gretel, the lives of saints, American comics, and Tibetan fairy tales did not mix well with any of this, but I think they saved me from being completely brainwashed. Some teachers did, as well, because not all the people were fanatics. This was a difficult time for parents who could not safely speak their minds, in fear that we might repeat what they said at school! What if we talked in front of the wrong person? The repercussions for the family could be severe.

Drawing and reading. That was my escape from this confusing reality. There were the classics from the past like *Robinson Cru-*

soe, and books by Hans Christian Andersen, Alexandre Dumas, Jules Verne, Rudyard Kipling, and Robert Louis Stevenson. I no longer recall which ones were approved by the government and which were banned.

It was changing all the time. But I do remember a neighbor lady, an old professor who secretly lent me “Western” books, warning me not to tell anyone. This made them very special. All of a sudden, here I was with a pile of “secret” books that I read with a flashlight under the blanket. This made them the most amazing books imaginable, though in reality they weren't literature of a high level. They were Wild West stories and thrillers, and who knows if I would have enjoyed them as much as I did if they hadn't been forbidden. I must have been about fourteen years old when the world we were told about at school and read about in our textbooks—the world of brave Soviet soldiers, pioneers, peasants, and revolutionaries—started to look different.

It was a strange world to grow up in. Nobody was quite sure how the Communist inquisition worked. (Take blue jeans as an example: at times they were considered Western and decadent; at other times they were okay because they were the clothes of the working class.) The Soviet minister of culture Andrey Zhdanov proclaimed writers the “engineers of the human soul.” While the Soviet masters were fond of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and Jack London's *White Fang*, I have to say each book was extended by a substantial appendix explaining the social conditions and working-class status of the heroes. The official opinion on Russia's own Tolstoy (was he a pacifist?) and Dostoyevsky (was he a nihilist?) was constantly shifting. I am not quite sure how I came to read Dickens and Balzac. They probably came from the family library, as did Ernest Thompson Seton and Upton Sinclair.

Not government-recommended were A. A. Milne and Lewis Carroll. Pooh, Eeyore, and Alice were considered decadent, while the writers Astrid Lindgren and Arthur Ransome were published by the State House of Children's Books, the publisher of some beautifully illustrated books on poor-quality paper.

The big discovery for me was Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and his *Little Prince*. These, together with the Saul Steinberg books my father brought from the West, were life-changing.

In the 1960s, more and more Western books, which until then had been censored and unknown, started to be published and arrived in the bookstores every Thursday morning. I remember long lines extending around the block with hundreds of people waiting for the new book by Artur Rimbaud, Raymond Chandler, Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow, Graham Greene, Günter Grass, anybody—our only connection to the outside world. Literary periodicals were reprinting much of what was interesting in the world.

Then in 1965, Allen Ginsberg came to Prague as a messenger of the Beats, and the fact that the Communist government promptly deported him made him even more magical and mysterious. We were all howling. We circulated the poems of

Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gregory Corso. Prague Spring of 1968 was in the air, and it started at a convention of Czech writers, with speeches by Milan Kundera, Ludvík Vaculík, and Václav Havel. A few months of this most exciting and promising time followed. The border was opened and we could travel to the West, perform theater on the steps of our art school, and play in our own rock bands. All of a sudden we were catching up on all the books we had been denied. It was quite a flood: Henry Miller, Jack Kerouac, Bram Stoker, Boris Pasternak, Colette, Albert Camus, Carlos Castañeda, Aldous Huxley, J. R. R. Tolkien . . . even Prague's own Franz Kafka, who had been denounced as decadent and Zionist until then.

But our spring freedom didn't last. By August, Soviet tanks had arrived and the opened door in the Iron Curtain had slammed shut. And once again, there was censorship, fear, and darkness. Nine hundred university teachers in this small country lost their jobs, as did two out of three members of the writers' union. They became bus drivers and janitors. They were persecuted, exiled, and imprisoned. But it was hard for the regime to stuff the rabbit back in the hat. Information from the West was seeping through the cracks in the wall. Samizdat, the new form of publishing, was now the norm. Dedicated people were copying banned books in secret and again we were reading in the dark with flashlights. The price of such books was steep.

Life, as well as art, was censored with much more ideological determination than before. The government called this oppressive period "normalization." Louis Aragon, a leftist himself, called it "The Biafra of the Soul." Plays and films were banned. Books that were thought to be subversive were destroyed.

I had just finished my studies at the Academy of Applied Arts and was looking for my place in this world. The difference from the early years of Communism was that the artist was personally responsible for the political content of his or her work. My first assignment was a record cover for a rock album called *The Airport*. It was by Karel Erno, a singer who was closely watched by the government. I did a painting of a little airport with a windsock blowing in the wind, from left to right. When I delivered it, the art director asked if I had checked which way the wind should be blowing. I thought he was joking, but these were uncertain times and the question was highly ideological. From left to right could mean that the wind was blowing from the West toward Moscow. Or other things. The art director called the Ministries of Interior and Culture and asked for an official ruling. We waited anxiously for about twenty minutes. The phone rang, and I was told, "You are lucky. Your wind is blowing correctly." I decided to switch to animation. Maybe the details would fly by and the censors wouldn't notice.

Czech animation had a proud and wonderful tradition. However, I picked the wrong story—Miloš Macourek's "The Island of 6,000 Alarm Clocks"—for my first professional animated film. It was about alarm clocks that wake people up every morning; that is their joy and purpose in life. But the clocks get upset when they are not appreciated for doing their job. Every morning, they get hit by people. Disillusioned, they quit their jobs and march off together in search of a place where they can ring as loud and as much as they please. The film was charming to look at, but it was doomed, for this was a time when people couldn't travel freely. Czech writers and artists like Kundera or Miloš Forman, who had left during the Prague Spring, did not even dare to come back. So the film, like much else, was shelved. Still, my animation won the West Berlin Film Festival's Golden Bear award, and I was "leased" by the Czech government to make films in the West for a fee.

I made a film in Zurich, Switzerland, and in London, England. But, more important, being in London gave me the opportunity to study with Quentin Blake, who was my tutor for a short time. I will always remember showing him a picture and asking what color the background should be. "Just do what you think best," he said. "You know what color you want, you're asking me because you want to be sure." I found old habits hard to shake.

Then the next film project took me to the United States of America, to Hollywood, California, where I was to work for a few months on a film for the summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. I also got involved in an animated film of a song by Bob Dylan for a new TV channel called MTV. This was fantastic! This was like a dream! Here I was in Los Angeles walking

the streets—sorry, driving the boulevards I knew from Chandler's stories and rarely seen Hollywood movies. And just when everything looked so promising, the Soviet Union and its satellites pulled out of the Olympics, and I received a cable to return home immediately.

This presented a dilemma. If I stayed and finished the film, the Czech government could make life difficult for my family in Prague. But what if the film became a hit? Would that justify my disobeying the order? I decided to stay. But the film did not impress MTV, and now I was afraid to go back. I had taken too long to make up my mind—and I was eventually sentenced in absentia to two years in jail for not coming back in the first place.

So here I was, in America, wondering what to do next—animation? sets? paintings? While I was searching for the answer, the director of the Municipal Art Gallery in Los Angeles, Josine

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Ianco Starrels, sent some of my pictures to Maurice Sendak. I knew nothing about this until I got a call from Mr. Sendak, a name I somehow recognized, who asked if I had any interest in illustrating children's books. To tell the truth, I had really given no thought to it, but if you were broke in Los Angeles, unable to go home, and Maurice Sendak called you, what would you say?

He introduced me to Susan Hirschman and Ava Weiss from Greenwillow, and I realized I would have to go to the East Coast, where most publishing was done. But how would I get there? By luck, Miloš Forman, a film director whom I had known since childhood, was finishing his movie *Amadeus* and asked me to make a poster for it. I got paid enough to buy an old car, and I drove across the country.

Coming from a Communist world, I half expected to find free or subsidized housing for artists with a small advance or stipend awaiting me. I quickly discovered this was not the capitalist way. I would have to pay my own rent. So I became an illustrator right away. Greenwillow gave me my first book to illustrate, and Steven Heller at *The New York Times Book Review* gave me weekly assignments. I also started showing my work to other children's book editors.

I had written a story and made a storyboard for a picture book about a rhinoceros that I was sure would be the best children's book ever published. I can hardly believe I could have been so clueless, though this gave me the chance to meet with most of the children's book editors at that time and learn how many different ways there were to say no to an idea. One of these editors, gentle and kind, was Frances Foster, who eventually helped



nothing about it. You did not grow up in New York." But I was learning about it, job by job and day by day.

It was an exciting time for me; I felt as if I was encountering history face-to-face. I lived not far from Dylan Thomas's White Horse Tavern. I met with editors and art directors at the Algonquin Hotel. I was meeting my heroes and giants in the world of arts and letters: Allen Ginsberg and Joseph Brodsky, Saul Steinberg, Milton Glaser, Seymour Chwast, Norman Mailer, Dr. Seuss, James Cagney, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Tom Wolfe, Tomi Ungerer, and illustrators and artists from many different countries. I felt that I was part of something important, big, and wonderful. I was in demand as an editorial illustrator, but I made sure I stayed

in touch with the book world. Newspapers and magazines come and go. The books stay . . . like they did in my childhood.

One of the early books I illustrated, *The Whipping Boy* by Sid Fleischman, was awarded the Newbery Medal and certainly helped me get known in the world of children's books. I illustrated many of his other books, as well as books by Julia Cunningham, Myra Cohn Livingston, George Shannon, Jack Prelutsky, Diane Ackerman, Goethe, Kate Banks, Jorge Luis Borges, José Saramago, and Pam Muñoz Ryan, to name a few.

I think all of the books that I've both written and illustrated are, in some way, about leaving one's own country and not being able to go back, only forward. They are messages in a bottle, diaries of explorers, travelogues of dreamers and seekers. After *Rainbow Rhino*, in which the hero discovered the mysteries of the world beyond the valley he lives in, came a series of observations of my

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me cut the story from ninety-six pages to thirty-two, and some years later a completely different *Rainbow Rhino* was published as my first written and illustrated picture book. This was a very special moment. Not able to go back home, I managed, with my green card travel permit, to get to Vienna, Austria, and meet with my parents to show them my first American picturebook. A special moment indeed!

I, who knew nothing about baseball, pizza, apple pie, or American children's books, had dared to become a writer and illustrator! When I told one editor I wanted to do a book about New York, she said, "You can't do a book about New York. You know

new surroundings for Greenwillow. These were *Waving, Going Up!* and *Beach Ball*. They dealt with experiences I could never have had behind the Iron Curtain in Communist Prague.

I became an American citizen in the spring of 1989, and the big scary Berlin Wall came down in the fall of the same year. The inhumane, suffocating Communist system was dead, or so I thought. I was now able to return home and was even offered a government post: Minister of Culture Petr Sís ☺! But I wasn't finished with my own exploration of the world. I was working on my tribute to America, to the New World, in *Follow the Dream: The Story of Christopher Columbus*. I felt free. My pictures

became large and full of new colors. Freedom gave me wings. In one picture a young Columbus reads *The Travels of Marco Polo*, and that book inspires him for the rest of his life. Later, Galileo reads Copernicus and Darwin reads Humboldt. Books were their inspiration and fueled their dreams.

And I'm proud to claim connection to the first ever illustrated picturebook: 1653's *Orbis Pictus* ("teaching children about the world through pictures") by Jan Amos Comenius, who was like me born in Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic.

I thought that "making it" in the American book world meant going on a book tour. It happened with *Follow the Dream* and started with a phone call from the owner of the now-defunct Eeyore's Books in New York City.

He said, "You are coming to my store. What is your shtick?" I did not know what he meant, so he explained, "Books don't sell themselves. You must charm the customers. Do you play guitar? Do magic? Juggle?" What could I do? I got my younger brother involved. He was a student in Prague and played guitar, and we put together a cabaret performance with puppets, drawing, umbrellas, costumes, and songs, which we sang cheerfully with our Czech accents. Random House sent us all over the country—there were so many independent bookstores then. Looking back, I think it was rather insane, and some of the booksellers who became my friends later asked why someone with a beautiful book felt he had to sing and dance and maybe scare the children with it? Well, it is a good question, but it gave me a chance to see a lot of America.

Follow the Dream was published the year I got married, and our honeymoon travels gave me the inspiration for picture books like *An Ocean World*—a wordless book about a whale released from an aquarium wondering where she belongs—and *Komodo!* about a Komodo lizard and a boy who dreams about meeting him. And he does!

I was still fascinated by explorers and travelers, so the next book was *A Small Tall Tale from the Far Far North*, about a hero of my Czech childhood, the adventurer Jan Welzl, who left Europe for life in the Arctic. There is a lot of ice and snow in this book, and just when I was painting snowflakes on a picture of Welzl stuck to a magnetic mountain, I had to drop everything to rush my wife to the hospital. Our first baby was being born! I am sure my wife would tell the story differently, but for me as a children's book author everything changed.

I wanted to make a book for little baby Madeleine. Just at this time, I got a phone call from the editor at Doubleday, Ms. Jacqueline Onassis, another name I somehow recognized. She had just returned from Prague, where she met with President Václav Havel, and she asked if I would do a book about Prague. This was a perfect birthday gift for my newborn daughter! *The*

Three Golden Keys made me go back into my childhood, not the oppressive years but before that, to a time of innocence, when I was safe and learning about life with my parents and grandparents.

Doesn't every newborn child deserve a special book? The book for our second-born child, Matej, was *Starry Messenger*, about Galileo Galilei. The inspiration came from my admiration for Havel and other great thinkers of history. I wanted to show that the explorer or dreamer doesn't always have to travel to discover new territories. He or she can be sitting by the drawing table like me! Discoveries happen in the human mind, and they are not always appreciated in their own time. They can even be dangerous. *Do you hear me, Matej?*

Now the children were walking and talking. They were being children, and I was observing and getting ideas. These were the best of times for a children's book creator. *Madlenka* was a story about my little girl when we were living in downtown Manhattan, where everybody on our block came from a different country and cul-

tural background. *Fire Truck* was about my little boy's obsession with the fire trucks in the fire station across the street from our apartment. The hero of the book loves the fire trucks so much that he becomes one! So the books followed in quick succession, one for Madeleine, one for Matej: *Madlenka's Dog*; *Trucks, Trucks, Trucks*; *Ballerina!*; *Dinosaur!*; *Ship Ahoy!*

My life might have gone on in this manner had it not been interrupted by a letter from my father in Prague. He was not well and he wanted to leave me his

diaries from Tibet. *Tibet Through the Red Box* was the outcome, and my father lived to see it published. He died a few days before September 11. I left for his funeral from my studio, in the shadow of the twin towers, on September 10. The next day, the Twin Towers were gone, and nothing would be the same again. Seven firemen from the fire station across the street from where we lived had perished. Candles and flowers and shock. I could not see how children's books would make any sense out of this changed world.

At this sad and confusing time, I got a phone call from the Metropolitan Transit Authority's Arts for Transit program, asking me to make a poster for the subway trains, and it made perfect sense. Here was something I could do for the community. Because the space for the poster on the trains was long and narrow, I did a drawing of a whale with a map and skyline of Manhattan. The image seemed to connect with the emotions of subway riders, who left messages and emails just saying "thank you." It was like we were all holding each other's hands. Just "thank you." That gave me hope, and I was fortunate to be involved in more subway art projects. The mosaics for the 86th Street/Lexington Avenue subway station are about hope. I called them "Happy City." They celebrate New York City's vibrant community of people from all over the world living together. There are fewer musicians playing instruments in the

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art than I imagined because a budget is a budget, but the four existing mosaics make me happy.

Doing public art was a healing process and made me realize that it was important to celebrate the human spirit and achievement again—and the great minds that changed our world and made us think differently. The human eye, which is part of my subway mosaic, transforms into the eye of a man who sees our world in a new context in *The Tree of Life*, my book about Charles Darwin—a very ambitious undertaking that I couldn't have finished without the firm and steady guidance of my editor, Frances Foster. (Oh, I was ready to give up so many times!) This book made me aware of many facts of life, not only Darwin's, whose house I visited and diaries I read, but also how a book comes alive through the hard and dedicated work of the entire publishing team: editor, copy editors and fact-checkers, designers, the production manager, marketing and publicity people, and salespeople. I also discovered, when touring with the book—only a Darwin puppet this time—that not all Americans believe in evolution. This is a free country after all.

Darwin came at the same time as a completely unexpected phone call from the MacArthur Foundation, and this time I did not recognize the name. In fact, I was supposed to be doing a telephone interview with *Publishers Weekly* that morning when someone named MacArthur called. I told him he would have to call back later because I was waiting for an important phone call. But the caller insisted that his call was very important, and it would change my life. I was thinking, "What a pushy sales pitch," and almost hung up. I'm glad I didn't. Receiving a MacArthur Fellowship was awesome and humbling.

But the foundation's statement that "Fellows are selected for their creativity, originality, and potential to make important contributions in the future" carried a lot of responsibility. My children were becoming teenagers. Their everyday adventures were not as much fun as when they were younger. I tried to connect with my inner child and their inner child in *Play, Mozart Play!* and *The Train of States*, but when I asked, "How am I doing, kids?" they would politely smile and say, "Great, Dad." I decided my MacArthur project had to be something really meaningful and important.

I had realized with the passage of time how difficult it was to explain, especially to my own children, where and how I grew up. It was like talking about life on another planet. I would make little jokes, little remarks, little drawings, then more little drawings and stories that were much more serious. This is how *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain* went through a number of incarnations before it found its shape and balance. The original vision was always there—told through my life's experience—of how a society can be gradually oppressed and suffocated by a totalitarian system. The book will forever feel incomplete to me—there was so much more to be said on so many different levels, but reaction to it has proved that it doesn't have to be the last word

on the subject. I've heard not only from children and schools all over America but from many people who were victims of the Cold War and survived the Gulags of the Soviet Union. I see *The Wall* as being different from my books about discovering new and distant worlds; *The Wall* is about the importance of creating better worlds that are free and democratic.

My children are just about fully grown now. The world is undergoing incredible changes in every which way. So is my life.

I was trying to go back in time in *Madlenka Soccer Star*; I recall bits of my childhood in the illustrations for Pam Muñoz Ryan's *The Dreamer*; and I am celebrating ancient wisdom and trying to find allegorical answers to the meaning of life, the pain and the beauty of the human journey, in my retelling of the twelfth-century Sufi poem *The Conference of the Birds*. All these characters are discovering and exploring the world . . . their world, our world, "iWorld."

"I have no town or village in America that I can really call home. But I have libraries. . . . These are awesome places and they give me a sense of belonging. Of being part of this country. Of being home."

Lately I have been wondering what this multitasking iWorld means to someone like me whose life work is creating pictures line by line with pen and ink on paper. Are there children looking at all the little lines and discovering the new world like I did, or are they just scrolling and scrolling?

I think I've found the place to look for the answer. I am the first one in my family to come to this country. It will be thirty years this July

that I have been here. Half my life. I have no town or village in America that I can really call home. But I have libraries. Everywhere I go, or we go as a family, I visit the local library. These are awesome places and they give me a sense of belonging. Of being part of this country. Of being home.

Last year, I had the chance to create three murals about the beauty of reading for the children's room in the public library in Champaign, Illinois. These murals are approximately ten feet by ten feet each, and the Champaign Library happens to be a center of the community. It's bustling with life and activity, full of people in love with books.

On a recent visit there, I found a group of children—from all ethnic backgrounds—sitting under my murals, completely immersed in books. Bright light was coming through the big windows—floods of light.

These children do not have to read in the dark.

These children are exploring and discovering the world through books. They are the Galileos and Darwins, the John Glenns, and Neil Armstrongs of the twenty-first century.

These kids will reach the stars and beyond, because with books anything is possible. ☺