

Sydney Taylor Honor Book Acceptance Speech  
*Jennifer Elvgren*

Good evening,

I would like to thank the Association of Jewish Libraries and the Sydney Taylor Book Committee for choosing *The Whispering Town* as a Sydney Taylor Honor Book. I am deeply honored. This book would not be possible without Kar Ben Publishing, Joni Sussman, Judy Groner, and Fabio Santomauro . To them, my deepest gratitude.

I usually get asked how I came to write about such a big topic in a picture book. Somewhere around late elementary, early middle school, my grandmother gave me her copy of *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom, and my mother gave me a copy of *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. From a young age, I pondered the bravery of those hidden and the bravery of those who protected the hidden.

I carried this interest in Holocaust literature as I grew. Around 2009, I read Ellen Levine's nonfiction book *Darkness over Denmark: The Danish Resistance and the Rescue of the Jews*. One Jewish boy recollected his father trying to find the Gilleleje harbor on a moonless night while villagers stood in doorways whispering directions.

As I read this, a storyboard unfolded in my mind. *The Whispering Town's* title came first, followed by the characters. Anett appeared, then Carl. As they began to move through the story also set in Gilleleje . I imagined a hiding place, bravery, friendship and hope.

It became imperative for Anett to bring comfort to Carl and his mama in their cellar hiding place in the form of visits, good food and books. When Anett came face to face with Nazi soldiers at her own door, I knew she had to dig deep and be calm and collected so that she did not give away her friends in the cellar.

Facing a moonless night, I wanted Anett to be part of the solution, arranging for a chain of whispering voices to guide Carl and his mama to the harbor. The hope of escape and reuniting Carl with his papa in Sweden sealed Anett's and Carl's friendship forever.

For these young readers, I wanted to portray danger, not horror. I intended this book to be the start of a lifelong discussion of the Holocaust, focusing initially on kindness and bravery. I am hopeful that this award will introduce this book to new readers who will start new conversations.

Once again, thank you.