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Hipple Award Speech

21 November 2015

ALAN Breakfast,

Minneapolis, Minnesota

The first sacred place I found all on my own was our local library. I have always been a child of imagination, but the library sent me spinning in so many directions at once I was joyous. A building filled with words--millions, billions, trillions, double quadrillions of words—all waiting for me. I don't remember learning how to read, which has led me to believe I was born with that skill.

My dad would walk me down to the corner, one block south from our house, and into this magical place. As I grew up, the library was rebuilt one block north of our house and I was old enough to visit on my own. I joined the summer reading club, which gave me an official excuse to have my nose in a book 24/7. Reading for me was a chance to see outside myself, to question what I believed and discover what I needed to believe. Reading shaped my life as much as any human presence ever has.

In college I found a book that saved my sanity: *Demian* by Hermann Hesse. The opening inscription spoke to me, called me out and made me listen. “All I really wanted was to try and live the life that was spontaneously welling up within me. Why was that so very difficult?” The main character was my age, 19—it was probably the first young adult book I read, though it was before an official YA classification existed.

When I started teaching, I wanted my classroom to be another magical place, which happened when I got the opportunity to teach *The Outsiders*, written by a teenager herself, S. E. Hinton, to my sophomore classes and through it, introduce them to Robert Frost. “Stay Gold” became our class motto and the way we signed yearbooks. We followed that book with others by Norma Fox Mazer, Judy Bloom, Richard Peck, Robert Lipsyte, M.E. Kerr, Norma Klein, Madeleine L'Engle, Gloria D. Miklowitz, Paul Zindel, Nat Hentoff, Virginia Hamilton, and more who followed—Laurence Yep, William Sleator, Sandra Scoppettone, Kin Platt, Robert Newton Peck, Gary Paulsen, Katherine Paterson, Scott O'Dell, Joan Lowery Nixon, Walter Dean Myers, Nicholassa Mohr, Lois Duncan, Robert Cormier, Nancy Garden, Harry Mazer, Sharon

Bell Mathis, H. M. Hoover, Isabelle Holland, Roza Guy, Bette Greene, Paula Fox, Paula Danziger, Ellen Conford, James Lincoln Collier, Christopher Collier, Alice Childress, Sue Ellen Bridgers, Robin Brancato, Jay Bennett, and on and on they came with more and more adults reading YA books.

At the insistence of a colleague of mine, I attended my first ALAN Workshop, absolutely another magical place! Hundreds of other word lovers showed up to get extra nourishment from amazing books that we were given and told to take back to the teens in our classes.

ALAN gives us permission to read these wonderful books, validates our need to keep reading and revisiting them so we can share them with the teens around us. So there isn't a "we" and a "they," but a room of involved readers. There is magic in watching a reader gain a special validation when she or he finds her- or himself in a book. One of my joys as a teacher was watching my students lose some of their loneliness and gain some self-awareness in these stories.

For all of you who might not know what a 4 by 8 by 5 teacher\* is and are definitely NOT one, ALAN validates you and the time, energy, commitment, and imagination you give your students. Two years ago in Boston, Daria Plumb and I were talking about our responses to people who ask, "Who is this ALAN?" She said, "I am going to start telling people, 'I, I am ALAN!'" and last year that was reinforced by our then president Walter Mayes.

Could all other Hipple Award Winners please stand up? Thank you.

Daria -- Who is ALAN? Response: "I am ALAN!"

Jennifer Buehler --Who is ALAN? Response: "I am ALAN!"

Walter-- Who is ALAN? Response: "I am ALAN!"

Could all ALAN members please stand?

Who is ALAN? "I am ALAN!"

Again-- **Who is ALAN? "I am ALAN!"**

To the inspiring Ted Hipple, the selection committee, and all who are ALAN, I humbly thank you for this award.

\* 4 walls, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week teacher