

Acceptance speech by Kirsten Murphy

When I heard from my editor at Penguin that I had won an award for “The King of Whatever”. I was understandably thrilled. When she told me of the particulars of the award, a prize which recognises the peaceful resolution of internal and external conflict in children’s literature, I felt a sense of irony, as right at the moment, I was embroiled in my own sort of conflict.

Around this time, I was attempting to voice some concerns I was having as a bridesmaid, to the bride in question, co8ncidentally, in a very reasoned, peaceful manner. It did not help matters that this aforementioned bride was fast becoming more of a *bridezilla*. I attempted to spare her feelings, while getting my point across in an effort to resolve the issues. When I had said what I needed to say, I felt sure that she would see things my way, all the while marvelling at my insights and honesty. We would then have an open discourse and make the necessary compromises to ensure the entire bridal party’s happiness.

The following day I was officially stood down from the post of bridesmaid . . .

From this incident I learned about the power of perception. More specifically, that we cannot from a moment assume that the people who surround us think in the same manner as we do, view a situation just as we do. Understandably, different experiences shape who we are and what we think, one of the real challenges of life can be trying to maintain personal integrity and happiness while accommodation others.

This is one to the things that Joe and his brother Anthony face in “The King of Whatever”. This idea of trying to carve out your own path, finding what makes you happy, while considering the thoughts and feelings of friends and family. Joe and Anthony experience various internal and external struggles, and whether they know it or not, at the heart of it all, is their desire from the parents to be proud of them, which is something that doesn’t really seem to leave us at any age.

I wrote this novel for a few reasons. One reason was that I was inspired by the Ralph Waldo Emerson quote that appears in the front of the book: “What lies behind us and what lies before us are little matters compared to what lies within us.” I wanted to communicate to a young adult audience the idea that ordinary is OK. We will not all be rock stars or famous sports people or geniuses at the age of seventeen; most of us will lead a relatively ordinary existence, but one we can be proud of. For, it’s the people we are and the relationships that we have with others that matter.

I also really feel that there is something to be said for *social* brilliance. I see this quite often as a secondary school teacher. Students who affect the classroom dynamic in an overwhelmingly positive way. These students put even the most reserved of their peers at ease, treating everyone the same. They may not be academically gifted, but they give everything a go, and often excel in their seemingly mundane part-time job as McDonalds or Safeway, always making the best of everything.

In writing, “The King of Whatever”, I also wanted to say that for most of us, the idea of deciding what to do with our lives at the age of seventeen is quite ridiculous. We have to start somewhere, but what might make life less daunting for 17- or 18-year-olds when they come to make these decisions, is the fact that we generally don’t finish where we begin. Eddie McGuire is not there locking in our choices for life, something we can be grateful about for many reasons. Not everything can be planned to the letter and I’ve learned, and consequently, my characters tend to learn, that life’s often better than that. It is, to recycle a proven cliché, all about the journey.

When I write, I always try to explore the many relationships that teenagers experience in their everyday lives; primarily those of family and friends, generally with a love interest thrown in for good measure. I want to explore typical teenage issues and adult issues for that matter, with humour and in a way that is accessible to teenagers.

Essentially, I try to write the kinds of books that I would have loved to read as a teenager. And those weren't books with duplicitous characters or harrowing issues. They weren't books with dark themes that some authors insist are reflective of real life for most teenagers. They were books that I could see a little bit of myself in. They were books with humour, and above all, hope.

That's why it is so special to me to be awarded a prize like the Children's Peace Literature Award. An award that promotes something so valuable in today's world. It's the ultimate affirmation that what I seek to do in my writing is somehow working and is appreciated. So I thank the judges and The Australian Psychological Society, Psychologists for Peace for this immense honour. What a great world we would live in if all our leaders too, looked for constructive, non-violent approaches towards the resolution of conflicts. Thank you very much.