

Children's Peace Literature Award
Joint Winner Kate Constable – Response to receiving the Award
21 October 2009

It was an honour and a thrill and a wonderful surprise to have been nominated for this award, in the company of six such brilliant Australian authors. Congratulations to everyone, especially my co-winner, whoever you are. I wish I could be there with you today.

In the world of young adult literature, it sometimes seems that nothing is taboo any more. We can write about sex and drugs and death and violence and incest and war and bullying; in fact, it sometimes seems that those topics are all we are allowed to write about. But there's one subject that's particularly unfashionable at the moment, and that's God.

God is not sexy. (I hope I don't get struck by lightning for saying that.) At least, He's not sexy in Australia. In America, He's very sexy.

Over in the US, there's a whole body of Christian literature for young people, but that wasn't the kind of book I was interested in writing. It seems to me that there are a lot of kids out there who spend a good part of their adolescence asking questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Why do bad things happen in the world? There are kids looking for answers in all sorts of places, and some of them find what they're looking for, and some of them don't. And those were the kids I wanted to write about, and write for, because their story so often goes untold.

It always seems to happen, when you're writing a book, that whatever subject you're writing about is suddenly all over the news. And sure enough, while I was writing *Winter of Grace*, there was suddenly a huge amount of debate about God. I kept hearing Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens on the radio, arguing that religion was the worst thing humans ever invented, and defenders of various faiths arguing the reverse. And the thing that struck me all too often was that the tone of the debate was so rude, so contemptuous, so offensive to the other side, whatever the other side might be. It was really disappointing.

I believe it should be possible to discuss these things with respect and courtesy and thoughtfulness and sympathy, because these are big questions, important questions. And if we can't talk about the big questions in quiet voices, and listen to each other, then the human race is in very serious trouble. So if *Winter of Grace* can be a quiet voice in that conversation, then I'm very satisfied.

I'd like to thank Psychologists for Peace for creating this award and for the marvellous work they do in promoting peace and conflict resolution. I'd like to thank my publishers, Allen and Unwin, especially Eva Mills, Susannah Chambers and Jodie Webster. Thanks also to my husband, Michael, and my lovely daughters Alice and Evie, who don't always set a perfect example of peaceful co-operation.

Thank you.

Read out at the announcement ceremony for Children's Peace Literature Award 21 October 2009.