



Joyce Sidman is the winner of the 2019 (Robert F.) Sibert Award for *The Girl Who Drew Butterflies: How Maria Merian's Art Changed Science* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt). She delivered her acceptance remarks at the ALSC Book and Media Awards Program on Monday, June 24, 2019, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

For more information about the Sibert Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/sibert-medal>.



# Sibert

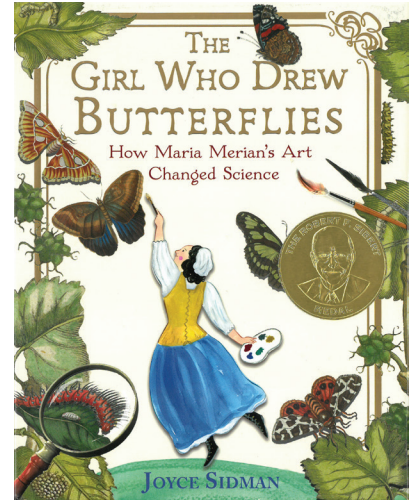
## MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Good morning! I am delighted to be here with all of you, and deeply honored to be accepting the Robert F. Sibert Medal, something I never expected to receive. I would like to extend my thanks to Kathy Jarombek and the rest of the Sibert Committee, as well as congratulations to all of my fellow honorees, whose work inspires me every day.

I am a poet. I am used to writing short things. Granted, I think about them for a long time, research their subject matter, and labor exhaustively over every single word. But the kind of sustained inquiry, source-checking, image-finding, and long-form prose that went into *The Girl Who Drew Butterflies* was new and very daunting to me.

To be honest, I really didn't want to do it at first.

I had heard about Maria Sibylla Merian and seen gorgeous hand-colored pages from her book on tropical butterflies. I had read about her life: she grew up in an artistic household in 17th century Germany, and learned to paint at her stepfather's knee. To escape an unhappy marriage, she fled with her daughters to a religious commune, and later moved to progressive Amsterdam, where she was finally allowed—as a woman—to set up her own studio. Then, at the age of 52, she braved shipwrecks and pirates to sail across the Atlantic Ocean to Surinam to study tropical butterflies—the first solely scientific mission by any naturalist, male or female.



Still, I resisted. While I wanted to tell Maria's story, I had never written a biography. And I was also struggling with a grave personal crisis: my husband's aggressive prostate cancer had recurred, and the diagnosis was terminal. He would be forced to quit the work as a surgeon he loved so much, and undergo treatment after treatment to prolong his life. I would need strength and courage to walk this path with him.

What I didn't know was that Maria was a force of nature. And in the same way she defied the conventions of her time, plowing through all obstacles, she slowly broke down my resistance. Her voice—and her story—kept calling to me. Who was I to turn away a woman who had broken so many boundaries and risked so much?

So I plunged in. And in one of those lovely quirks of fate, Maria captured

Joyce Sidman is the winner of the 2013 Award for Excellence in Children's Poetry from the National Council of Teachers of English in recognition of her aggregate work. She is the author of numerous award-winning children's poetry books, including the 2011 Newbery Honor Book, *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night*, and *Song of the Water Boatman and Other Pond Poems*, a Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award winner. Sidman lives in Wayzata, Minnesota.



# Sibert

## MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

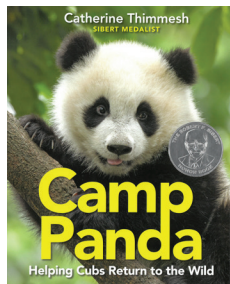
my husband's imagination as well. "I love this book," he would say to me. "It's such a great story! And it's not poetry!" At home full-time, growing weaker and weaker, Jim followed my progress closely and cheered me on, finally understanding what my writer's life entailed. He lived to see the book published in February 2018 and attended the book launch, but died several months later. Looking back, I see that Maria's indomitable spirit had surrounded us both, giving us hope and courage when we needed it most.

My heart-felt thanks go to my editor, Ann Rider, and to the entire Houghton Mifflin team, who believed in this project from the beginning, and went the extra mile to create as beautiful a volume as possible. To my family—Eli, Gabriel, Marta, and Juliet—you are my heart and my solace. And most of all, to Jim, who said to me before he died, "Write, write, write! You have to keep on writing."

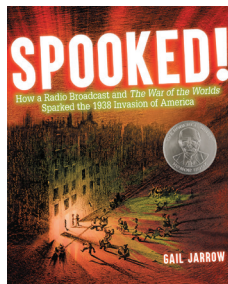
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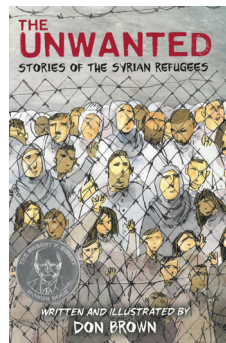
### 2019 SIBERT HONOR BOOKS



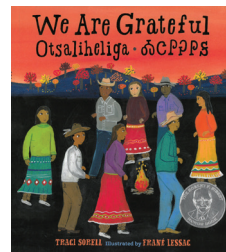
**Camp Panda:**  
*Helping Cubs Return to the Wild*  
Catherine Thimmesh  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



**Spooked!:** *How a Radio Broadcast and The War of the Worlds Sparked the 1938 Invasion of America*  
Gail Jarrow  
Calkins Creek/Highlights



**The Unwanted:**  
*Stories of the Syrian Refugees*  
Don Brown  
Illus. by the author  
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt



**We Are Grateful:**  
*Otsaliheliga*  
Traci Sorell  
Illus. by Frané Lessac  
Charlesbridge



**When Angels Sing:**  
*The Story of Rock Legend Carlos Santana*  
Michael Mahin  
Illus. by Jose Ramirez  
Atheneum/Simon & Schuster

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