

RED CEDAR SPEECH

By Virginia Frances Schwartz

Hello boys and girls, teachers, librarians and the Red Cedar committee. Today must be such an exciting day for you. I can feel your energy across all the miles to New York City, where I live, teach, and write. I am honored by the Red Cedar nomination of If I Just Had Two Wings and pleased that boys and girls had the opportunity to read it.

As a writer, it always amazes me how a book happens. It begins as a dream in an author's mind, spreads to their heart, and takes over their soul. A book must touch all those places to make it real. It reminds me of an old story about a velveteen rabbit, a stuffed toy who became real because a boy loved him. Books become real when authors transfer ideas and feelings from their minds and hearts onto the page with the vehicle of words. How that happens, how a story comes to life, feels like sheer magic to me.

If authors are lucky, their stories become published. Then their book goes out into the world. To places like Vancouver, Vancouver Island, Victoria, and all the towns and cities of your incredible province, British Columbia. It goes to you, the boys and girls who love to read.

You are the ones who open our books, imagine other lives and faroff times, see through a character's eyes, wonder about historical events that shaped the world, and ponder what that means for your life today in 2004.

You are the ones who let the words sink into your hearts and souls. How you do this surprises me. You absorbed something that I felt strongly about so many years ago when I taught fourth graders in my class about slavery and somehow, somehow, made it yours.

That is the most wonderful gift of all for me and all the authors speaking before you today. If you weren't willing to allow the spell of a book to carry you somewhere magical, authors would not be able to do their work. Books need readers like you. For you are the ones who will shape and change the future of the world with your thoughts, opinions, and desires.

Thank you for reading with open hearts and open minds.