



**The Christy Award® Program Winners Webcast Gala
Keynote by Amanda Dykes
October 28, 2021**



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Speech Transcript:

It's truly a privilege to be here today. Thank you, everyone for the chance to share a few thoughts on a beautiful theme suggested by the wonderful people at the Christy Award.

You might be looking at me and thinking, "Who are you, anyway?" ...and, honestly, that would make two of us. Because I have often thought, when preparing for tonight-- "Who am I, among people like you, whose talent and dedication truly take my breath away.

When it was suggested that one theme to explore tonight was “the power of story”, in the context of a debut novel finding itself as the book of the year, I thought-- ah. *The Power of Story*. Perfect. Because the power of story has nothing to do with me. And I’ll tell you why.

It begins with a story.

When I was about eight years old, I signed up for softball, an ill-fated venture for me from the start: shy of any spotlight, fearful of very public failure at bat, I remember thinking something along the lines of, “well, if you’re going to go down, you might as well go down.... bunting.”

I had heard the word “bunting” somewhere on the field, and had no idea what it was, except that it sounded a little bit magical, and that it was apparently a different way to hit the ball. . So, knowing nothing of bunting, naturally I purposed... to bunt.

I stepped up to the plate. They had taken the tee away and were going to *pitch*, of all things. I took a deep breath, watched that larger-than-life ball come at me even larger than usual, envisioned bunting. .

.And then-- *I did it*. I stood at bat, ready to pull my trick out of my sleeve.

At the last second, gathering all the courage I could muster to do this thing, I contorted my hands into an impossible arrangement on the bat, pointed its end at the ball like a pool stick at the cue ball, and....

Poked it.

Mid-air.

Needless to say, I missed.

One of my coaches tried valiantly not to laugh but couldn’t help asking, in a kind way, “what was *that?*”

It was at that moment that I realized I had not bunted, that I still had no clue what *bunting* was, and that poking the ball mid-air like a pool ball may have never been done before... with good reason.

Thirty-ish year later, once again a rookie, I finished writing *Whose Waves These Are*. I remember feeling completely spent, looking at my computer, and thinking -- much like that coach-- what was *that?*

At a difficult time when I thought my words had all run out, The story had come at me, larger-than-life, definitely larger than me, and for most of the ride, it was all I could do to set pen to paper. It did not come out as I'd planned, it was in a verb tense and voicing I had never used before, we didn't know what genre to put it in.

I truly had no idea if anyone would ever read it, let alone like it.

When a writing friend read an advanced copy shortly before it released, she very generously, perhaps unwarrantedly, said, "thanks for knocking it out of the park," I was beyond grateful for her kindness, but as for her baseball metaphor, I thought-- *If you only knew my baseball history...*

The truth is, despite my friend's incredible kindness-- I didn't knock it out of the park. I only stepped up to the plate. With much fear and trembling...and then-- someone's arms came around me, held my hands fast, and helped me swing.

In the months since we first talked about the tonight's theme of ***the power of story***, I've thought often of that beautiful phrase-- and there is truly only one small -- but very big-- thing I can speak into that:

And that is,

The Power of Story is the Power of the Storyteller. And I'm not talking about me. We're talking about you. . . and about the Storyteller who spoke our very souls into being.

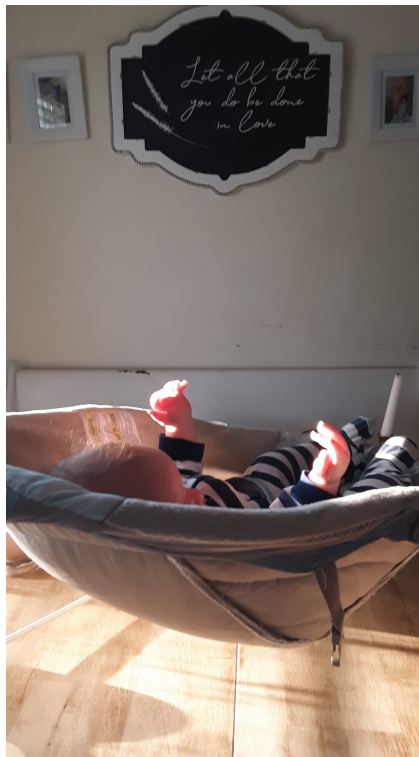
Tonight, in this gathering, we are honored and blessed to be in the company of so many different people who bring books to life: Authors. Publishers. Editors. Designers. Marketers. Readers. The families and friends of each of these people-- and every single soul here... is a story. A breathtakingly true, incredibly unique, full-of-purpose story.

G.K. Chesterton said, "I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller."

So again, I'll say it-- *the power of story, is the power of the storyteller.*

But what does that power look like?

When my son was four months old, he was sitting in his baby seat while I cleaned the kitchen. There I was, just scrubbing food off of plates when I looked over and caught a sight that stopped me in my tracks. It was this:



You might think-- there's a baby in a sunny spot; so what? what's so extraordinary about that?

Well, there's this light in his hands.

Again, so what? light comes through windows all the time.

But where did it come from?

Stick with me here, because I promise this has a whole lot to do with *you*.

Eight minutes and 20 seconds before this picture was taken-- that light was emitted from the surface of a star so big that one million earths could fit inside of it. And now that light is sitting in his tiny hands.

It travelled 93 million miles from that star just to -- 8 minutes and 20 second later-- slip into those little fingers. When I saw it, I wrote for this child-- *Hold onto that light, and know: the God who delivered light from a molten star, all the way past meteors and planets, through space and time, breathing it into the world to vanish shadows and chase off cold, tucking it all the way into your tiny miracle fingers...He holds you in His heart, He holds you safe in His hands, and He can do anything.*

This is our Storyteller, friends. This is our God. And those words for my son-- they are true for you.

Many of you have travelled turbulent roads yourself these past months and years. You've faced so many things-- loss in so many forms.

In the darkness, in the hard places, in the doubt and discouragement and questioning and fear-- God sees you. He knows the shadows, too, and enters into them right along with you. And like little Liam in that picture-- He is holding you. He holds you in His heart, He holds you safe in His hands. . . and He can do anything.

This is our Storyteller. This is our God.

You may have found yourself wondering, even-- what now? What can I say, what can I write, what can we do, what can we publish-- what, in the face of this broken world, could begin to help or heal? It's too much.

I wondered this, too. We deal in words-- and sometimes, we feel it to our very bones-- words just aren't enough.

But the power of story is the power of the Storyteller.

And he, too, deals in words.

When the world was without form and void-- he brought words. The very first words ever recorded to be spoken on earth were:

Let there be light.

In a time when all there was, was darkness-- he brought light, through his words, through His power.

THAT is the power working in us.

That same sun, which God uses to send light buzzing past meteors and asteroids and planets - it lands here on earth and allows things to grow, like the flax plant, like walnut trees, like the soybean plant-- which, by the way, were the plants first used, and often *still* used, to create ink.

So you see, yes, we deal in words, in ink, but we quite literally also deal in the realm of light.

When you sit down to work-- anybody here, not just the writers-- when you sit down to draft a scene, or create a campaign to help stories find their readers, or when you compose the cover

that is going to reach right into someone's heart and say "this one is for you"-- when you write synopses and email pitches and put a card in the mail to a friend or whatever you are setting your hand to in YOUR work-- you are dealing in the realm of light.

Because-- all together now-- the power of story is the power of the Storyteller.

You might think I'm a tad melodramatic, and you might think it's time to get back to the program to hear from the other speakers and winner announcements, and you might be extremely right on all those counts. But if I could beg just a minute more from you, it would be to say this:

It is so tempting, watching news headlines, travelling through days marked with very difficult terrain,, to wonder--

Is the season for our words...over? Do they matter? Where will they land? Should we now no longer speak? No longer write?

We might be asking the wrong questions.

How about these ones:

Is God still here? *Yes.*

Did he create the light bursting forth for you 93 million miles away--and did he bounce it off of moons and shimmer it over the sea to light the path just for you? *Yes.*

Did he also set this story before you to write? *Yes.*

Is he able to use that same power to give you what you need? *Yes.*

Can He hold you in the broken places? *Yes.*

Can He carry you when it's just too hard? *Yes.*

Can He give you strength, give you words, give you ideas, give you anything you need to accomplish this beautiful work He has invited you into? *Yes.*

Can He also call you to lie down in green pastures and rest? *Yes.*

And perhaps above all-- Does He love you? *Yes, yes, 93 million times, yes.*

When it's all said and one. . . the power of story is the power of the storyteller, and the power of the storyteller? Is the power of-- as Sally Lloyd Jones puts it-- his "Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love."

Because when comes down to it, why are we called to write, if not to love the people who will read these words?

We love, because he first loved us.
We write, because he first loved us.
We create, because we were first created.

He does not give gifts haphazardly. Those words in your heart-- *they are not an accident*. In fact-- James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

He does not change like shifting shadows, and whatever change or shadows have rumbled through your life in waves and aftershocks, you can be sure of this-- He made you on purpose. He called you, on purpose. He has good, good purpose for your words, if you will press on, write on, steady on.

So what does this have to do with the 8 year old rookie poking a bat at big old ball?
I suppose it's just to say that if ever you feel pressure stepping up to the plate, or fear, intimidation, weariness, doubt, insufficiency, -- can that eight year old girl beg a moment of your time? I think she would just say--. Let all of that fall away. Root yourself in a place of being loved by the Creator. Hold that bat-- or pen. Invite the author of light itself to hold you, to hold your hands, to love through your words, and then. . . swing away.
Because You were made for this.

That. . . was quite a lot of words to say simply: the power of story-- YOUR story-- is the power of the storyteller whose heart beats for you.

If we feel like we aren't enough for these stories...it's because we aren't. The stories are almost always bigger than us. And that is amazing news. Because *he* is enough. He is just inviting us into the work-- into the realm of words and light.

He, who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or *imagine*--
he, who formed that 93-million-miles-away light and brings it across your desk to make your work possible...

He, his Given self, who loved you to the end, from the beginning, and everywhere outside of time-- He's wrapping his hands around yours as you pick up that pen.

And you're going to do something amazing.

And it won't be "bunting."

I'll close with a small line from the book I was maybe supposed to talk about tonight. (hold up book) The character of Roy, upon whom the whole story arguably hinges, is perhaps known best for six little words.

"There's a whole lot of light."

Take it up, writers. Take up the light--*there are so many who are aching for it.*

God is still here. The sun is still shining. And as long as we have hands to write, minds to think, lessons to learn, hearts to encourage...it is the time to speak.

So. . .and I say this with all the joy, all the wonder, all the dumbfounded, awe-struck, wide-eyed disbelief in the world that we . get. To. do. This:

Let's get to work.
Speak on, friends.

And let there be light.