

# Jennifer A. Nielsen, Author

To the Young Readers of Massachusetts;

How thrilled I am to accept the Massachusetts Children's Book Award for *A NIGHT DIVIDED*! You had many wonderful books to choose from this year, and any of them would have deserved this honor.

The book's origin came from Ilona, a friend of our family's. She was born into East Germany and at age five, her family made the decision to escape. Ilona's parents planned to escape through the countryside. However, they didn't want to take a five-year-old running through the countryside, so a different plan had to be put in place for Ilona.

Her grandparents in the west would come over by train, and then return by train with Ilona – not on the seat beside them, because she had no papers. Instead, Ilona was drugged, put to sleep, and hidden in the baggage car of the train beneath a pile of hay. They knew the car would be searched at the border, and if Ilona even rolled over in her sleep, she would be sent back to East Germany alone and her grandparents would be arrested, or worse.

In the end, all of Ilona's family successfully escaped, but when I heard her story, I knew I wanted to tell the story of the people of East Germany. It means so much to me that you then read this book, and loved it.

But here is the great secret of this award: really, *you* are the winner.

Books are powerful things. They influence our minds and expand our imaginations. They take us new places, introduce new ideas, and touch our hearts. Books will change us. And if *A NIGHT DIVIDED* had any impact on you whatsoever, I hope it's this.

At some point in your life, someone will put a wall in front of you and say, "This is as far as you go." Whatever your hopes or dreams or wishes for yourself, they will say that you're not smart enough to get past that wall, or fast enough or strong enough, or that you're not good-looking enough, wealthy enough, popular enough – that you are not *enough*.

And in that moment, I hope you will remember Gerta and her courage. I hope you will remember that you do not have to live behind the walls others build for us. So you go over it or around it, or under it, or you build a door and you walk straight through it, but do not *live* within anyone else's limits.

Instead, you walk into this great and wonderful world of ours, and you make it a better place, because you were here. Do that, and then we all share in this great award.

My warmest thanks to you all!



Jennifer A. Nielsen

*"Books have a unique power to change a reader's life."*