

Canmore's Hutchins wins literary award

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By Pam Doyle

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Canmore author Hazel Hutchins' ability to see through the eyes of a child has won her a prestigious literary award.

In November, Hutchins, her co-author Gail Herbert and book illustrator Dusan Petricic were honoured with the Marilyn Baillie Picture Book award for their book 'Mattland'. With the award, came \$20,000 prize money, which they split three ways.

"If I was ever lucky enough to win an award," Hutchins said. "This is the one I would want to win. It is a picture book that is a wonderful balance of meaningful text and wonderful pictures; a balance of the two. They compliment each other, and that's when the magic happens."

'Mattland' is about a boy who uses his imagination to build an imaginary world.

"He builds instead of tearing apart," Hutchins said. "He ends up getting help from some friends."

The boy in the book has moved many times and is fed up with moving, so he delves into his imagination. The illustrations are all seen from the character Matt's point of view, drawn by Petricic, who is also a political cartoonist.

"You never see Matt's face," Hutchins said. "You see it all through his eyes, because you are looking through the eyes of a child."

Hutchins and Herbert put their heads together during a shared holiday and came up with the idea for the book.

"Gail's dad helped to build roads in Northern Ontario," Hutchins said. "There was nothing but mud. They used to name things. We all have names for things. When a child builds with Lego, they don't see Lego, they see this fantastic rocket launcher, (for example). It becomes more and more real."

The book is aimed at children aged three to eight, and it is available at Café Books in Canmore and Chapters Indigo in Banff. It has been selling quickly.

The judges said 'Hazel Hutchins and Gail Herbert's crisp language combine with Dusan Petricic's superb illustrations to create a compelling story of transformative power of the imagination. Words and pictures unfold, build and resolve a layered tale with marvelous subtlety and an authentic voice'.

"I have been in the business for 20 years, and I am very proud of this book," Hutchins said. "It was a really strong story and I was really pleased by it."

Hutchins, who has written 40 books, and counting, said the book also won the Alberta Writers Guild award for text and illustration.

Hutchins attended a ceremony in Toronto to accept the award. She had to take time off work, but was unable to tell her part time employer, Cornerstone Theatre, why she needed time off.

"I couldn't tell anyone at the box office at the Cornerstone that I was going to win an award," Hutchins said. "Because if you let the cat out of the bag, they don't give you the award. But they let me have the time off without question."

Hutchins is a prolific writer and several of her books have been published in languages other than English. Most recently, her book, 'A Second is a Hiccup', was published in Arabic.

"My books have been printed in Korean, Mandarin and German," Hutchins said. "It's fun because you never know where they end up."

For more on Hutchins, visit her website at www.hazelhutchins.net.

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