

INDIE BOOK AWARDS

Statement

HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural) [9.55 pm]: I rise tonight just to mention the national book awards this year called the Indie Book Awards. I would not normally talk about a national book award, but this year WA has excelled in the book awards. There are seven categories in those awards and they are chosen by independent booksellers, so they are particularly important. They are probably the equivalent, if you are a schoolteacher, of a librarian at a school; they are some of the most important people you will encounter because they influence what we read, and what we read has a powerful impact on how we think and operate in society.

WA won three of the seven categories in the Indie Book Awards this year. Once again, WA is showing that it has excellent talent, particularly in the arts here in Western Australia, and I think that is something we should be shouting from the rooftops and celebrating. I will talk about the winners of those book awards briefly. One of the winners for young adult fiction was a writer from Geraldton, which is my home town and the electorate of the member for Geraldton, Lara Dalton. It is a book called *The Brink* by a writer named Holden Sheppard, who is a fantastic character and great speaker. I have had the pleasure of hearing him present at some writing events. He was also very kind and generous with his time and was the keynote speaker at the Big Sky Readers and Writers festival in Geraldton last year. He shared his knowledge and experience of writing really generously with the community there. It is great to listen to him speak. He speaks very much from the heart and from his really unique perspective and persona out in the world. His debut novel, *Invisible Boys*, dealt with some really complex terms about young men growing up in country towns and dealing with their sexuality in small regional towns and some of the really complicated aspects of anyone dealing with their sexuality, but, in particular, in a small regional town where there is nowhere to hide, and people are far more judgemental and rigid in their thinking. He explores those issues in a really beautiful way. He is a really great writer and I highly recommend reading his novel, *Invisible Boys*. The novel he won for young adult fiction this year shows some real growth, development and confidence in his writing. It is called *The Brink*. I am going to let him describe it, because he wrote a beautiful Facebook post announcing that he won. It is beautiful, honest and very Holden. It says —

THE BRINK is about teenagers who don't always fit in or know their place in the world, and I know intensely how that feels—as a teenager but even now I still feel like a giant misfit stumbling through life. So I want to dedicate this award to all my fellow loose units: the oddballs and the curious and the deeply sensitive and the boofheaded and the unconfident and the too-much. Do what you love, read what you love, write what you love, be yourself, even if you don't always fit properly into any one category—eventually you find your place in the world.

I thought those were really beautiful and highly relatable words from Holden. I am sure that in some of those adjectives describing the various personality types, we all heard ourselves described in one way or another!

The other winner was an incredibly successful writer who I believe resides in Fremantle, but I will not give his specific address because that probably would not be very helpful for him. It was Craig Silvey. People have probably heard of Craig Silvey. He won two categories this year for his children's novel *Runt*, and they were well deserved. Do not be fooled, though. It is a book for everyone. The genius of Craig Silvey is that he writes for everyone. People will love reading this book to their children. It is a book just like him—full of heart, soul, compassion and generosity. He is a beautiful writer. As an English teacher, I used to teach his novel *Jasper Jones* every year because it is so relatable to young people. It has this beautiful cast of characters. It teaches young people about coming of age, how flawed our parents are, how racism impacts people and about the Australian experience of the Vietnam War. It touches on so many issues in such a beautifully told way, as does *Runt* but in a very different way. That book won the children's category and it also won the Indie Book of the Year. It is really beautiful to see a children's book being named book of the year. It is a book destined to become an Australian classic. It is set in regional Australia. It has this beautiful protagonist, Annie, who is an inspirational, unrelenting character who inspires people around her and makes all sorts of amazing efforts to raise people up around her. She is definitely a role model for me now. It is a beautiful book and I highly recommend reading that or anything Craig Silvey has written. He is a lovely writer.

I want to thank those writers for their contributions to Western Australia and for flying the flag for WA again not just with their writing, but because they advocate for the ideas of compassion and empathy in our community. They are really strong advocates for tolerance, acceptance and understanding, and they communicate a lot of that through the work they do in public and also in their writing. It is such a beautiful, generous thing to put out in the world through the art and the work they do. It is really fantastic to see them being recognised by the Indie Book Awards and I congratulate both those writers.

House adjourned at 9.57 pm
