

Jack Gantos Wins Newbery

Author Jack Gantos has been writing since he was a boy, so it seems fitting that he used his real hometown of Norvelt, Pennsylvania, as the setting for his latest book, “Dead End in Norvelt,” which was awarded the Newbery Medal on Monday. The Newbery award recognizes the best-written book for young readers. The awards announcement is always made on a Monday morning in January.

Jack, who has published 18 books for readers of all ages, is honored and excited to win the biggest award in children’s literature. “I haven’t really had time to think about it much yet,” says Jack. “It’s just a lovely little cloud that I’m on right now.”

Jack got the good news early Monday morning, around 7:30 a.m., when the American Library Association’s Newbery committee called him at his home in Boston, Massachusetts. Jack often drives his daughter, Mabel, who is 15, to school, but this morning he gave her a lift to the train station so he could be home just in case he got the call from the library group’s meeting in Dallas. He said, “I was just feeding the cats and I was thinking ‘What am I going to have for breakfast,’ and then poof, the phone rang – and I looked at the phone and I thought ‘OK, take a deep breath.’”

Jack said the conversation was quick and to the point; they were calling to let him know he had won the Newbery. The cats, Nacho and Scootch, have been getting lots of treats in celebration, Jack said with a laugh, as they keep him company during a day booked full of interviews with reporters from across the country, including the Yak.

Jack lives in downtown Boston, close to the Boston Public Library, where he sometimes goes to write. But his favorite place to work is another library, the historic Boston Athenaeum, a library near the Boston Commons. “I’m always at the library,” says Jack. He says he

just likes to get out of the house and get in a few hours at the library to do reading, thinking, researching – and of course, writing. Then later he can print out his day’s writings and re-read and edit his work.

Now back to Jack’s award-winning book, inspired by his growing up years. “I was born in the town next door, Mount Pleasant, because they had the hospital. Norvelt was really just a community,” says Jack. He lived in the small Pennsylvania town through part of his elementary years, and then the family moved to Barbados (an island south of Florida) because of his dad’s construction work

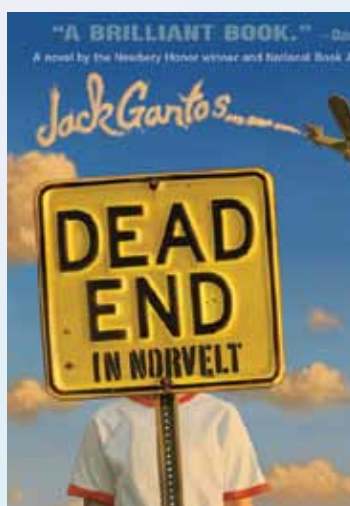
with the Navy. But the town remained an important fixture of his childhood because he had grandparents and other relatives living there. “I spent a lot of time there growing up, but mostly in the summers,” remembers Jack. He draws heavily on the town’s unique history, and mixes in a large dose of his humor and imagination.

The schools in Barbados were British schools and very good ones, says Jack. “We had good teachers and a lot of reading and a lot of history so

the reading bug really got me down there.” He also slowly developed his writing skills, in part because his big sister kept a diary and he wanted to be exactly like her. She was the star student and the great reader in the family, and as Jack thinks about it now, he says she was really his first mentor. “I started to copy what she did. I’m sure it was annoying to her, but in a way, it ended up being a path for me.”

Jack is on the road visiting schools and conferences 40 or 50 days a year – even traveling to places like Hong Kong, Dubai and Jakarta. Jack loves to travel, but he also loves to be home – and at the library – writing.

By Janis Campbell



CHECK OUT MORE WINNERS

Other ALA award-winners are:

- The Caldecott Award for best-illustrated book: “A Ball for Daisy” by Chris Raschka (Random House).
- The Coretta Scott King Award for best-written African American story: “Heart and Soul,” by Kadir Nelson. (Balzar & Bray).
- The Coretta Scott King Award for best-illustrated book: “Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom” by Shane W. Evans. (Roaring Book Press).
- The Michael L. Printz Award for young adult books: “Where Things Come Back” by John Corey Whaley (Atheneum Books). To see more winners, you can visit www.ala.org/yma.

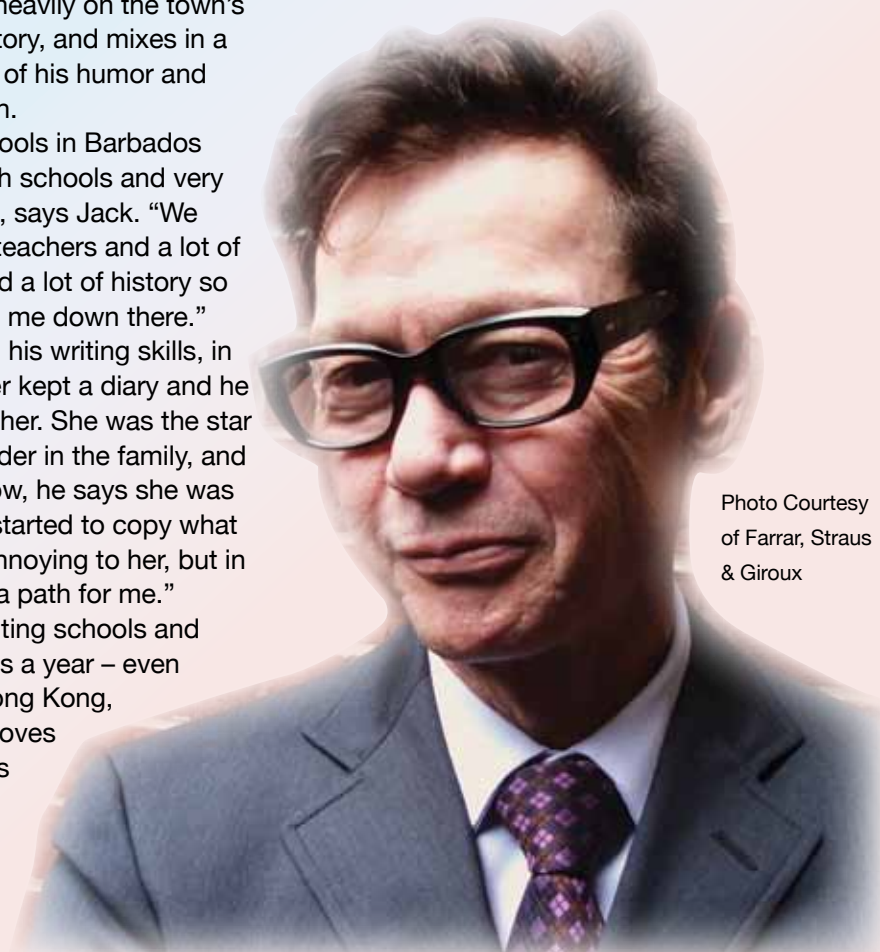


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