

**VERLEIHUNG DES
KATHOLISCHEN KINDER- UND JUGENDBUCHPREISES 2008
AM 2. JUNI 2008 IN MAINZ**

DANKWORT VON MICHAEL GERARD BAUER

– Es gilt das gesprochene Wort –

I am both thrilled and honoured to be receiving the 2008 Catholic Children's and Young People's Book Award for my novel *Running Man*.

At the outset I would like to express my immense gratitude to the German Bishops Conference for their encouragement and support of Children's Literature for nearly 30 years that they have sponsored this prestigious award and for their generosity in making it possible for me to travel all the way from Australia to be here tonight in the beautiful city of Mainz.

Thank you as well, to all those involved in the running and organisation of the award. In particular I would like to acknowledge the work of the judges who were faced with the challenging task of reading and somehow choosing between over two hundred entries.

Also, particularly on behalf of my wife Adriana, who runs our family budget and who continued to work full-time supporting the family when I quit my job to stay at home and pursue my crazy dream of being a writer, I offer a very sincere and heartfelt thank you to the Conference for the 5000 euro prize.

As no writer gets to see their book in print without the support and effort of many people, I would firstly like to acknowledge the huge debt I owe to my original publishers Omnibus Books and Scholastic Australia for showing faith in an unproven writer.

I certainly wouldn't be here tonight if it weren't for the hard work of my German publishers Carl Hanser and Nagel & Kimche. It is a privilege and a joy to be published by these companies. Thank you for the confidence you have shown in the book and for the beautiful edition you have produced. Of course, when your novel is published in a language that is foreign to

you, your fate is very much in the hands of the person responsible for translating your words. So finally, my thanks and appreciation goes to Birgitt Kollmann. I am very grateful that my novel was placed into such safe and skilful hands.

The story of *Running Man* itself really grew from two childhood memories.

The first involved searching for silkworms in a mulberry tree that grew in the backyard of our family home. After hours of searching with no success, I finally said a prayer that I would find some silkworms. When I finished my prayer, I closed my eyes and reached out to the mulberry tree and pulled off the first leaf that I touched. I drew the leaf back, held it in front of me and slowly opened my eyes. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. The leaf was bare. There were no silkworms on it. Frustrated, I searched the entire tree again and still found nothing. My prayers had failed and I felt cheated and bitter.

Why I remember that day so well is because that same afternoon my big brother came home carrying a shoebox. He told me that some stranger on the street had given it to him. He removed the lid and I saw that it was filled with silkworms. My prayers were answered in a way that I could never have imagined. I thought it was a miracle.

The second memory was of a strange and wild looking man who used to shuffle frantically around the streets of my neighbourhood when I was a boy. I always wondered why he was that way. I didn't know his name or where he lived or anything about him, but his appearance and unusual manner frightened me. I called him the running man.

Somehow those simple childhood memories grew into the story of a shy fourteen-year-old boy named Joseph and his tangled relationships with three men - his absent father, a reclusive and damaged Vietnam War veteran called Tom Leyton and Joseph's own version of the running man.

The award that I am privileged to receive tonight acknowledges books that exemplify Christian values and as such I am very proud and honoured to be the recipient. I would hope that *Running Man* has something to say about the values of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. I would hope it speaks of the resilience and courage of the human spirit and the healing power of love. I would hope that it is a story that raises questions about the way we judge and label others - a story that at its heart says that the only label we should place upon another person is one that simply reads, 'human being – just like me.'

In closing, I would like to say something about miracles.

In *Running Man*, one of the questions that Tom Leyton asks the young boy Joseph and that later Joseph asks of Tom in return is, ‘Do you believe in miracles?’ These days when I give talks at schools or writers’ festivals, it is a question that is sometimes asked of me. Do *I* believe in miracles? It’s an interesting question. I know that back when I was that very young boy whose prayer had yielded a box full of silkworms, the answer would have been easy. I wonder though what my answer might have been at other times in my life.

These days when I’m asked that question I think back to the year 2000 when I had only recently resigned from my teaching job and I was alone at home in front of my computer struggling to write my very first novel. Back then all I really dared to hope for was to be able to somehow finish the manuscript – just to be able to write down the story that had filled my head for so long. Back then, the thought of it ever being published and of me achieving my lifetime dream of becoming a writer, was certainly the stuff of miracles.

But amazingly, not only was my manuscript published in 2004, the next year it won Australia’s top award for young adult literature. Then it was published in other countries and other languages. And now I find myself on the other side of the world in the country of some of my ancestors, receiving this wonderful award.

So, do I believe in miracles?

Today there is really only one answer I can give.

‘How could I not?’