



**Finalist speech for *Paper Covers Rock*  
Jenny Hubbard**

Thank you for this dazzling honor. Thank you for welcoming me into the fold. It feels strange to reach out so happily from such a distance. I don't even know who you are. But then again, I do.

You are Mrs. Detty, the decades-long Keeper of the Overton Elementary School library in Salisbury, NC. She showed a shy, skinny child that books could feed and embolden her.

I can still see that library where I first held books created for girls just like me, books by Lois Lenski and Maud Hart Lovelace and and Laura Ingalls Wilder. How many times did I check out *Caddie Woodlawn* and the worn biography of Maria Mitchell, Mother of Astronomy? How many times at age 46 have I tried but failed to recall the names of books whose illustrations still burn in my head?

Elizabeth Bishop got it exactly right: "The art of losing isn't hard to master." To have to graduate to junior high and lose the librarian who entrusted me with her best secrets--that is to say, the books she loved that she'd knew I'd love, too--this is a loss that I will feel for the rest of my life. Something about the way the light made a tapestry out of the library at Overton School: that is the seed. The fact that Alex, the protagonist in *Paper Covers Rock*, finds refuge in the library of his high school--well, there's something in him that goes way back in me. Now that I think about it, I will be very surprised if a library doesn't factor somehow into every book I write.

I visited my hometown public library a couple of months ago and roamed the shelves of children's books. There it was, *Ginger Pye*, the exact same copy I had checked nearly forty years ago. I don't know what kind of sign this was, but surely it was some kind of sign. It would be wonderful if *Paper Covers Rock* attained the longevity of a book by Eleanor Estes, but that wasn't my goal when I sat down to write it. Although I didn't realize it until now, I wrote this book out of utmost respect for the

power of words to shape a child's future. I wrote this book out of undying devotion to the light-filled places and to you who watch over them, saying, "Book, Meet Reader. Reader, Meet Book."