

The Branford Boase Award



STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 18.30 WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

“Original and unforgettable” Liz Hyder wins the 2020 Branford Boase Award for *Bearmouth*

- **Liz Hyder and her editor Sarah Odedina of Pushkin Children’s Books win the 2020 BRANFORD BOASE AWARD awarded to the author and editor of the outstanding debut novel for children**
- **Seventh time lucky: though *Bearmouth* is her first published book, Hyder completed six earlier novels before finding a publisher**
- **In an exceptional year for debuts, Katya Balen and her editor Lucy Mackay-Sim are awarded Highly Commended for *The Space We’re In***
- **Winners announced in live online ceremony by 2019 winner Muhammad Khan**

Liz Hyder is the winner of the **2020 Branford Boase Award** for the year’s outstanding debut novel for children for her powerful dystopia **Bearmouth**. Based on real-life stories of nineteenth century child miners, **Bearmouth** is set in a deep underground mine, and told in a distinctive dialect, invented by Hyder and maintained throughout. The award is shared with her editor, Sarah Odedina, editor-at-large, Pushkin Children’s Books.

Now in its twenty-first year the **Branford Boase Award** was set up in memory of award-winning author Henrietta Branford and her editor Wendy Boase of Walker Books, who both died in 1999, and is unique in honouring editor as well as author. It is regarded as one of the most important awards in children’s books

and has an impressive record in picking out star authors at the start of their careers. Previous winners include Meg Rosoff, Mal Peet, Siobhan Dowd, Marcus Sedgwick and Frances Hardinge.

Past winning editors continue to shape contemporary children's literature and include J K Rowling's editor Barry Cunningham and Philip Pullman's editor David Fickling. 2020 winner Sarah Odedina has worked with Neil Gaiman, Louis Sachar and Sally Gardner.

The submissions in 2020 were particularly strong, and the judges chose to award Highly Commended to Katya Balen and her editor Lucy Mackay-Smith for **The Space We're In**, a moving story about a boy and his relationship with his younger brother, who is autistic.

Muhammad Khan, last year's **Branford Boase Award** winner says of **Bearmouth**: "**Bearmouth** is a tour de force of a page turner with an intricate and stylised plot. Liz Hyder has created a gritty world for her hugely likeable protagonist, Newt, and a unique language which evolves as the exciting story unfolds. Original and unforgettable."

Liz Hyder says: "The **Branford Boase Award** is such a prestigious award and I love that it celebrates both editor and author. It was a true partnership to work with Sarah on **Bearmouth**. I learnt so much from her and can honestly say that the experience changed my life in so many ways. To be shortlisted felt like prize enough but to win feels utterly incredible! It means the world to me not only because I'm following in the footsteps of so many authors who I admire and cherish but also because I share it with Sarah who is the best, most inspiring, wonderful editor. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

Sarah Odedina said: "What marks Liz out for me is her courage and originality and her faultless ability to create a story that holds the reader's attention by its sheer power. As an editor there cannot be many higher accolades than to be on the **Branford Boase Award** shortlist. To win the award in partnership with an author confirms that this task of bringing stories to young readers is a work of collaboration and one that is most successful when author and editor listen to one another and enjoy the process of creating a novel."

Katya Balen and Lucy Mackay-Sim, Highly Commended, said: "We're thrilled to have received this commendation from such a prestigious award, and to be recognised among a shortlist of such brilliant books – including a truly extraordinary winner. It's also a delight to receive this accolade together on a book we both care about so much."

Muhammad Khan says: "The **Space We're In** is a challenging story about neurodivergent siblings and what 'family' and 'home' means to them. Katya Balen writes with an assuredness that takes you directly into the characters' lives and makes you feel every beat of their joys, woes and frustrations. An incredible first novel."

This year the judges are Sue Bastone, vice-chair **SLA**; Victoria Dilly, creator of the **Book Activist** blog; Layla Hudson of **Round Table Books**, Brixton; and Muhammad Khan, author of **I Am Thunder**, winner of the 2019 **Branford Boase Award**. The panel is chaired by Julia Eccleshare, children's director of the **Hay Festival** and **Branford Boase Award** founder.

Julia Eccleshare said: "The **Branford Boase Award** is now in its 21st year, and it has really come of age. Each year we look for exceptional books, stories we haven't read before, told in new and original ways. Both **Bearmouth** and **The Space We're In** do this, and both Liz and Katya have extraordinarily memorable voices even amongst a shortlist of such exciting debut authors. We all agreed that **Bearmouth** is the outstanding novel on the list, a hugely brave and impressive piece of writing, testament to the skill of both author and editor in successfully creating such characters and such a narrative. It's a book that sends shivers down the spine, truly astounding. As always, we can't wait to read what the shortlisted authors will write next."

The **Branford Boase Award** is supported by **Walker Books**.

The 2020 winners of the **Branford Boase Award** were announced on Wednesday 9 September as part of an online event which was watched by previous winning authors and editors as well as would-be writers, and featured a discussion with Muhammad Khan and his editor Lucy Pearse. Liz Hyder receives a cheque for £1,000 and Liz and Sarah both receive engraved trophies.

For further information please contact Andrea Reece on 07807893369 or andrea.reece@zen.co.uk

Notes to Editors:

Now in its 21st year, the annual Branford Boase Award celebrates the most promising book for seven-year-olds and upwards written by a first-time novelist. It also highlights the importance of the editor in the development of new authors. The shortlisted authors may have published other books in another genre – e.g. poetry or a picture book – but eligibility for the prize requires that this is their first children's novel.

As well as encouraging publishers to find and promote new writers, the Award sets out to alert readers of all ages to the work of interesting newcomers.

Liz Hyder studied Drama at the **University of Bristol** and later trained with **Spread the Word** in London to run creative writing workshops. She also works as an arts PR consultant and worked for BBC publicity for six years on everything from **EastEnders**, **Holby** and **Casualty** to **Radio 4** and arts TV. She has been part of **Writing West Midlands' Room 204** writer development programme since 2016. In early 2018, she won **The Bridge Award/Moniack Mhor's Emerging Writer Award**. **Bearmouth** was named winner of the **Waterstones Children's Book Prize Older Readers Category** in July. Originally from North-East London, Liz has lived in South Shropshire for nearly a decade.

Sarah Odedina is a leading figure in children's fiction. She has worked at **Penguin Books**, **Orchard Books**, **Bloomsbury** and was instrumental in establishing **Hot Key Books** before joining **Pushkin Press** to build their children's list. Sarah has published authors such as Neil Gaiman (**The Graveyard Book**), Louis Sachar (**Holes**) and Sally Gardner (**Maggot Moon**). She oversaw the huge worldwide publication operation of J.K. Rowling's entire **Harry Potter** series.

The complete list of titles on the 2020 shortlist are:

Little Badman and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties by Humza Arshad and Henry White, edited by Holly Harris and Sharan Matharu, illus Aleksei Bitskoff (Puffin)

The Space We're In by Katya Balen, edited by Lucy Mackay-Sim, illus Laura Carlin (Bloomsbury)

A Pocketful of Stars by Aisha Bushby, edited by Liz Bankes and Sarah Levison (Egmont)

Bearmouth by Liz Hyder, edited by Sarah Odedina (Pushkin Press)

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson, edited by Lindsey Heaven (Electric Monkey)

Frostheart by Jamie Littler, edited by Naomi Colthurst (Puffin)

The Million Pieces of Neena Gill by Emma Smith-Barton, edited by Naomi Colthurst (Penguin)

The Branford Boase Award was set up in memory of the prize-winning author **Henrietta Branford** and **Wendy Boase**, editorial director and one of the founders of Walker Books. They worked together on a number of Henrietta's novels, a partnership they greatly enjoyed. Both Henrietta and Wendy died of cancer in 1999.

Running alongside the Branford Boase Award, the **Henrietta Branford Writing Competition** encourages writing talent in under 18s.

The Award is the joint idea of **Julia Eccleshare MBE** and **Anne Marley MBE**. Julia is the director of the Hay Festival children's programme. Anne was Head of Children's, Youth & Schools Services for Hampshire Library & Information Service for many years and helped to found Authors Aloud UK, an author booking agency. She has served on many children's book award panels, including the **CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenaway Awards**.

For more information about the award and the Henrietta Branford Writing Competition visit www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk .

Images are also available on www.branfordboaseaward.org.uk/bbapress.html

Or contact Andrea Reece on 07807893369 or andrea.reece@zen.co.uk

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