



# Celebrating Jan Pie?kowski

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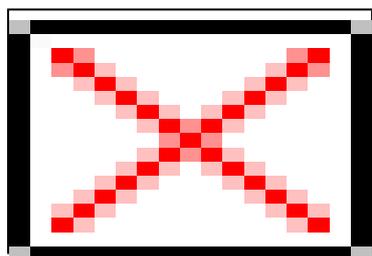
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## Jan Pie?kowski awarded the **Book Trust Lifetime Achievement Award**



The **Book Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award**, founded in 2015, has previously been won by Shirley Hughes, Judith Kerr, Raymond Briggs and was jointly given to Helen Oxenbury and her husband, the late John Burningham. This year it goes to Jan Pie?kowski, an illustrator of equal brilliance. With 150 books under his belt, Jan brought paper-engineering back into fashion with his wonderful **Haunted House** winner of the **Kate Greenaway Medal** for 1980 and still happily in print today. He also re-introduced cut-out black silhouettes into pictures otherwise blazing with colour specifically crafted by himself. His [Meg and Mog](#) [3] series, texts written by his close friend Helen Nicoll, also brought new energy into small format picture books. The most amiable of witches, Meg and her striped cat have now appeared in eighteen separate stories.

For years spending time working alongside children on giant murals sometimes decorating boats, buses, caravans and once even a train, Jan spread good humour wherever he went. Many messages of appreciation and support came flooding in on May 9, the day of the Award presentation held at London?s Barbican Centre. Lauren Child, the current Children?s Laureate, remembered how when young his ?exciting and vibrant books were completely different from anything I had seen before.? For Chris Riddell, Jan was ?a visual magician. His work bewitches, enchants and holds me spellbound.? Michael Morpurgo, another huge admirer, also liked him ?because he has an unspellable name, like mine.?

Jan?s own childhood was almost as dramatic as the fairy tales he illustrated, many of which came from Eastern Europe. These too were not short on odd moments of fear, which he always thought were an essential part of their overall appeal to children. Born in 1936 in a very traditional corner of East Poland, now Belarus, he remembered the custom every Whitsun whereby a local paper-cutter would come into the house to make new paper curtains for the kitchen. He later fled with his family three years later to Western Poland in a horse-drawn carriage in order to escape the advancing Russian armies. Life under the Nazis there was tough. There was no electricity and Jan was taught at home by his scientist mother as Polish children were no longer allowed to go to school.

The family returned to Warsaw just before the ill-fated 1944 uprising. Taking cover in an air-raid shelter, Jan heard bombs falling on the hospital opposite. Ever after that he could never bear noises that sounded anything like screaming. Escaping once again, the family moved to Bavaria and then Italy before arriving in the UK in 1946. Aged ten and speaking no English, he still managed to pass his eleven plus exam a year later. In 1955 he went to Cambridge University, where I first met him. Reading Classics and then English, he spent more time designing posters, for which

he was much in demand. Converting one of them into a Christmas card, he and his life-time friend Angela Holder took this idea further when they founded their own London company Gallery 5. Jan's revolutionary greeting cards, breaking with all previous traditions, proved immensely popular. He then moved into picture books with equal success.

Living in a large, rambling house in Barnes overlooking the Thames, Jan and his partner of over fifty years David Walser went on to produce many books together. Reflecting his enduring Roman Catholic faith, his picture books **Easter** and **Christmas**, adapted by David from the King James Bible, each took him half a year to complete and remained his favourites. **A River of Stories**, from a text written by Alice Curry, included tales illustrated by Jan taken from each Commonwealth country. He was invited to present five copies to the Queen in Buckingham Palace, who particularly liked his picture of hermit crabs.

Walking his dog every day, he started picking up articles of clothing carelessly left behind by others and sometimes wearing them himself. He would often drop in to his local coffee shop to chat to its Italian owner in his native language. His last book written by David, a cut-down and illustrated version of **The Odyssey**, came out this year.

There won't be any more. Seven years ago Jan showed signs of Alzheimer's, and today he has no real idea what is going on any more. David is now his devoted carer. He told the **Book Trust** audience that he frequently had to remind Jan that this Award was going to happen and each time 'It comes as a lovely surprise.' As waves of applause broke out a beaming Jan bowed to his many admirers before retreating once again into the private world in which he now lives. This was an occasion no-one there will ever forget.

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