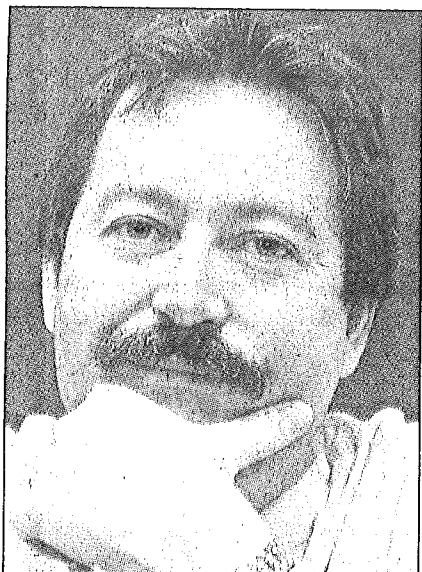


Children's author wins Silver Birch Award

By ALYSSA STUART *June 25/97*
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Mississauga author Eric Walters was recently awarded the Ontario Silver Birch Award for his novel, *Stars*.

A Mississauga man is decidedly the best children's author in Ontario.

That's according to 40,000 students who voted to award him with the prestigious Silver Birch Award for having penned Ontario's best children's fiction book.

Eric Walters, a teacher in Brampton, won first place for his novel, *Stars*, a tale about a 14-year-old's experiences at a youth camp, where he was sent after he got caught stealing cars.

"There was a bit of an adrenaline rush," Walters said.

"There was some pretty stiff competition. Mordecai Richler was one of my favorites growing up and Monica Hughes is just the best children's writer going."

Students across Ontario in Grades 4-6 chose *Stars* from among 10 works select-

ed by the Ontario Library Association. To vote, students must have read at least five books from that category.

"It's like the Academy Awards. You don't know who's going to win until they open the envelope."

But winning isn't unfamiliar to Walters. He placed second in last year's Silver Birch Awards, and recently won Durham Region's Blue Heron Award, chosen by Grade 7-8 students.

"I love writing. It's just a hoot. It's like watching television but I get to decide what I watch, who the characters are and what they're doing," he said

"I try to write visually. Probably the best compliment I ever get from the kids is that they can see it happening."

Walters said one of the things he appreciated about the Silver Birch Award is that the students got to choose who they liked best.

"It's crazy that adults get to choose what kids like. You can't argue with kids," he said of placing first in the running for Canada's biggest student selected award.

Walters started writing children's novels for his Grade 2-3 students about six years ago, as a learning tool.

"The best way to show kids how to do it is to do it with them. It has a lot more power and impact," Walters said.

He writes one or two novels a year that tie into the unit his class is studying, which he shares with his students along the way. Past experiences are often the basis for the author's story ideas, he said.

Some are inspired by the experiences of troubled kids he works with at Credit Valley hospital, where he's a social worker.

Walters wrote his first story in Grade 5, about wolves growing up in the wilderness after their mother was killed. His teacher gave him an A, and Walters' writing career began.

At the June 13 ceremony when he was awarded the Silver Birch, he read the first few lines of that story to his former teacher, who was in the audience, and thanked her for showing him his potential as not just a writer, but as a good person.