

A Tribute to William C. Morris

When William C. Morris, vice president and director of library promotion for HarperCollins Children's Books, died on September 29th at his New York home, ALAN lost a singular friend, while the publishing world lost a legend.

Bill Morris, quiet and soft-spoken, may have seemed an unlikely revolutionary and, certainly, he was never heard to call citizens to the barricades, but in fact, he did revolutionize the way publishers brought books together with librarians and educators.

Born in Eagle Pass, Texas, Bill graduated from Rice University and subsequently earned a masters degree in American Literature from Duke University. Moving to New York, he began a 48-year-long career with HarperCollins as a salesman of both adult and children's books in 1955. He quickly came to focus on his first love, though, promoting literature for young readers. Over the years he developed an encyclopedic knowledge of this literature and an uncanny knack for introducing the right book to the right reader at the right time. ALAN members quickly learned to value his judgments and recommendations, since his literary taste was more than discerning; it was impeccable.

He was a fixture at ALAN conferences, where he introduced generations of conference-goers to Harper

authors, making it possible for countless numbers of these writers to attend and speak. For these and many other services to the Assembly, Bill received the ALAN Award in 1996, becoming only the second publisher ever to win this prestigious honor (Margaret

McElderry was the first in 1976). He was also the very first recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of ALA's Association for Library Service to Children. Though he modestly referred to himself as "a simple middleman," the professional world clearly knew he was vastly more.

His great good friend, Charlotte Zolotow, another legend who was, for many years, publisher of the Children's Division at Harper's, once called him "the soul of publishing." He was that and more: he was also its heart. Bill loved good books; he loved their readers; he loved his work, and he loved HarperCollins. In return he was, himself, universally loved.

His friends in ALAN and everywhere mourn his passing but celebrate the extraordinarily rich legacy he left and find comfort in the truth that legends never die.

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