

# Freedom to Read Foundation Announces 2021 Roll of Honor Award

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The Freedom to Read Foundation (FTRF) Roll of Honor Committee is excited to announce author Robie H. Harris as the 2021 Roll of Honor recipient. She will be honored at the June 24, 2021 virtual Intellectual Freedom Awards Celebration for her decades of writing books for children and young people that are comprehensive, truthful, and accessible whether the topic is sexuality, how to make good decisions and stay healthy, how babies are made, or about strong emotions, most of which are healthy and normal.

Harris began her career as an author in kindergarten. She attended a lab school at a teacher's college in Buffalo, NY, where the students dictated their stories, created the art, and shared their books with their classmates. After that, she just kept writing. Her first book, "Before You were Three," was published in 1976.

Harris talks a lot about "writing honest." "If we're not honest with kids, they will stop listening to us, stop reading the books we create," said Harris. She spends time jotting down what children say, and noting their body language. She also writes about children's range of emotions, including love, joy, fear, anger, jealousy and loss. In "Who We Are" (2016) she writes about ways we are different and the same and that by telling others how we want to be treated and knowing how others want to be treated, new friendships can form.

Because Harris writes about timeless themes, both currently and in the past, her books have had many challenges and bannings and therefore she has had many opportunities to work with FTRF. She has been a long-time supporter and recalls periods of time when she spoke with FTRF founder and long-time director Judith Krug frequently. In 1988, while writing a book on sexual health for teens and preteens, she was told that if she wrote a book on that topic publishers would never publish her work again. Thankfully, that wasn't true.

"I don't choose what to write to be controversial, I choose to write what children are thinking about or have questions or worries and want to know about. They have the right to have accurate and honest information," said Harris. "If it is in the best interest of children, then it goes in the book no matter what anyone says to me."

Regarding censorship she added, "I would never say that every teacher, parent, or publisher needs to buy the books I write," but notes that, "anybody who chooses to have a book of mine or anyone else's should have the right to have that book." She also shared her conviction that librarians, teachers and booksellers are the guardians of our democracy by having books with different points of view available to all.

On May 18, 2021, Harris celebrated the release of the completely updated edition of her book "It's Perfectly Normal," which was first published in 1994. Her conversations, research, writing, and speaking have continued from then through now, and she has published numerous books. Her books have kept up with the times and technology. Some of the updates in this fully revised edition highlight topics such as gender-inclusive information;

LGBTQ+ information, gender identity, sexual orientation, making the book a sexual health book for all preteens and teens; including ways to stay safe when searching online for information on sexual health.

Phoebe Kosman, who works with Harris at Candlewick Press, expressed that “Robie is beloved by pediatricians, librarians, teachers, and advocates for free speech because of her accurate, sensitive, and thoughtful work.”

The FTRF Roll of Honor was established in 1987 to recognize and honor individuals who have contributed substantially to the foundation through adherence to its principles and/or substantial monetary support. For more information about the Roll of Honor and other FTRF grants, awards, and scholarships, visit [www.ftrf.org](http://www.ftrf.org).