

Speech to NAPRA Nautilus Award Breakfast
by T. A. Barron – June 16, 2001

- Thank you: NAPRA, Marilyn, Antoinette. Great honor!
- And thank you to Patricia Lee Gauch, my wizardly editor, who deserves this award as much as I do.
- And, of course, I must thank Merlin, who chose me to be his scribe.
- It doesn't seem so long ago that I sent my first novel around to publishers—and received a stack of rejection letters. One I remember well: “Dear Sir/Madam.”
- Indeed, being a published writer is still a humbling profession. Now I get letters like: “If you are still alive”; “Not very smart after all.”
- But greatest humbling, and learning, from my kids. They often ask: “Is that true?” Profound.
- The moment I knew these five books about Merlin were really true might surprise you.
- Not when, on page 1 of LYM, a half-drowned boy washes ashore—no memory at all, not even his own name.
 - Not when, in SSM, Merlin saves the life of his sister by taking into himself her very spirit...a metaphor for his growing wisdom that includes both male and female, nature and culture, dark and light.
 - Not even when, in FOM, he discovers that rather than slay a terrible dragon—as everyone expects—he must do something more difficult: He must somehow make that dragon his friend.
- The moment of truth came, for me, in MOM, when young Merlin's mastery has grown to the point where he can travel through the mists of time. He goes to the future, and to the land of mortal Earth—and meets there his elder self. They share a moment, across the wide gulf of time: old man and young man, ancient sorrows and youthful ideals, centuries-old wisdom and teen-age yearnings.

—After the elder Merlin shares the wonders of his—no, *their*—crystal cave, and gives young Merlin a lesson in poetry, and geologic time—and also that great modern invention, ice cream sundaes... Young Merlin suddenly realizes that his elder’s great dream—Camelot—will in the end be destroyed! That the Round Table, full of so many high ideals, will be lost. That his student, young King Arthur, will ultimately fail.

—Here is young Merlin’s description of that scene:

I shrugged. “It’s hopeless, then. All your good intentions—all your years of effort—are worth nothing more than a handful of dust.”

“Here me out,” the old man declared, his eyes aglow like shooting stars. “There is still this: A kingdom that is banished from the land may yet find a home in the heart.” His back straightened, and he seemed to grow larger as I watched. “And a life—whether wizard or king, poet or gardener, seamstress or smith—is measured not by its length, but by the worth of its deeds, and the power of its dreams.”

Absently, I scanned the glittering facets of the cave. “Dreams can’t make you free.”

His hand, so deeply wrinkled, reached over and clasped my forearm. “Ah, dear lad, but they can.” He looked not at me but through me, at something far distant. “Most surely, they can.”

I studied his face: the dark eyes, almost laughing while at the same time almost crying; the wide mouth, so old and yet so young; the wrinkled brow, marked by ideas and experiences I couldn’t begin to fathom; and, of course, the great beard—tangled in places, luminous throughout. Yet for all that face made me want to hope, I still felt defeated.

“Know this as well, young wizard,” he said kindly. “Everything I have taught you boils down to this: Find your true self and you shall find the higher power that breathes life into all things. Most assuredly! And while you may not prevail in your own time and place, your efforts will flow outward as ripples in a pond. Aye, and those ripples will someday touch faraway shores, changing their destinies—long after you have gone.”

“But my efforts—my choices—don’t mean that much! Never have...and never will.”

“Really now?” He twirled his beard hairs between his long fingers. “Think what your choices have already done, on that other world, Fincayra. Just think of it, lad! In your brief time there—you have roused sleeping giants, found a new way of seeing, taken your sister’s spirit into yourself, and healed a wounded dragon. And more: You have become a deer, a tree, a stone, a puff of wind—and even a fish.”

He paused, chewing his lip. “A fish,” he muttered to himself. “Yes, yes...that might be just the right thing for Arthur’s next lesson.”

His bright eyes swung back to me. “Oh, you have choices, my lad! And with choices, power. Colossal, wondrous power.”

—So what would Merlin say to us all, if he were here—right now, today? Let me guess:

- **First, remember the Earth, whose child we are.**
- **Second, remember our own children—our own future.**
- **And third, remember that we are, each of us, the author of our own stories—our own destinies.**

—So tell your story well. And tell it true!

- **Let’s not be consumers. Instead, be creators!**
- **Let’s not be corks, bobbing down the river of life. Grab our paddles, choose our directions.**
- **Let’s not be victims, but be actors—indeed, be wizards! With magic...of our own!**

—For in that magic is power. Yes, indeed: wondrous, enduring power.