Jella Lepman
Medals

In 1991 International Board on
Books for Young People is
celebrating the centennial of the
birth of Jella Lepman, who
founded IBBY in 1953. To mark
this occasion IBBY will present
specially created Jella Lepman
Medals to individuals and
organizations that have made an
extraordinary contribution to the
development of IBBY. These
medals will be given at a ceremony
during the opening day of the
Children's Book Fair in Bologna,
4 April 1991. The recipients will be

- Richard Bamberger, Vienna,
founding member and Past
President of IBBY
- Jo Tønfeldt, Oslo, founding
member and Past Vice President
of IBBY
- Fritz Brunner, Zurich,
founding member and Past
Treasurer of IBBY
(posthumously)
- John Donovan, New York,
Past Treasurer of IBBY
- Pro Juventute Organization,
Zurich
- International Youth Library,
Munich
- Biennale of Illustrations,
Bratislava
- Children's Book Fair,
Bologna
- Asahi Shim bun Newspaper
Company, Tokyo
- IBBY Documentation Centre of
Books for Disabled Young
People, Oslo

Their horizon is still
without limits

Jella Lepman, the Founder
of IBBY

Jella Lepman was born in
Stuttgart, Germany, 15 May 1891,
and she died in Zurich,
Switzerland, 5 October 1970. After
the early death of her husband she
became a journalist and was
politically active. In 1936 she
emigrated with her son and
daughter from Nazi Germany to
London and became a British
citizen, working for the Foreign
Office and the BBC during World
War II and from 1941 for the
American Broadcasting Station in
Europe. She was engaged as
advisor for questions relating to
children and young people at the
American headquarters in post-
war Germany. Even without funds
she went ahead and made an
exhibit of children's illustrations
and children's books from 20
countries in Munich, with initial
funding from the Rockefeller
Foundation, directing the library
from 1948 to 1957. In 1952 Jella
Lepman launched another major
international idea. It was her belief
that all those concerned with the
creation, selection and distribution
of children's books – not only
authors and artists, librarians and
teachers, but also editors,
publishers and booksellers -
should know each other and work
together. From this vision
emerged International Board on
Books for Young People (IBBY),
founded in Zurich, Switzerland, in
October 1953. The Hans Christian
Andersen Award was also created
on the initiative of Jella Lepman
and it was she who received the
first medal, given at the IBBY
Congress in Stockholm, 1956, for
her contribution to international
understanding through children's
books. And it was also Jella
Lepman's idea to start celebrating
2 April – the birthday of Hans
Christian Andersen - as
International Children's Book
Day. Her firm conviction was that
international understanding must
be started with children and that
children's books are the best
means to achieve this. "We can
place our hope in the children
themselves", she said, "in their
miraculous, barely erring instinct.
Their horizon is still without
limits. They will find the
solution."

Leena Maisen

Focus IBBY 1/1991

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