

Shawnee teachers pen children's books

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By Thomas Franz✉

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Shawnee Elementary School teachers Julie Rouse and William Bower recently published a series of children's books. (Photo provided by Julie Rouse)



MACOMB TOWNSHIP — The stories of what pets are up to when their human friends are out of the house are coming to life thanks to a pair of authors who are also teachers at Shawnee Elementary School in Macomb Township.

Authors William Bower and Julie Rouse recently released a pair of books to continue their children's book series, "Pet Tales."

Bower and Rouse released their first book, "Pet Tales: Back to School," in 2014, and have released a pair of holiday-themed books for the series over the past month.

"Pet Tales: Happy Holidays" was released in early March, and "Pet Tales: Halloween Party" was released March 23.

The books are told from the point of view of five pets: Blu, a great dane; Ginger, a yorkie terrier; Penelope, an orange striped cat; Einstein, a green iguana; and Zeus, a parrot, who is the family's oldest pet.

"The real thing about these books is we don't even try to involve the faces of the actual people — they're secondary characters," Bower said. "It was always meant to be the perspective of the pets and what the humans are doing around them."

The idea to begin writing a children's book series came to Bower during a snow day in 2013. Knowing that Rouse already had experience in publishing a book, he brought his idea of pet stories to her.

"Pets don't understand that: The kids in the house play with them all summer, (and) all of a sudden (they) are gone, so that was the inspiration for the first book," Bower said.

The holiday book focuses on the confusion that pets may have while decorations in homes are constantly changing between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

In the most recent Halloween book, the pets host a party as a fundraiser for a wheelchair-bound neighbor girl.

Each of the first three stories is told from a different pet's point of view, and the Halloween book is told from the perspective of Penelope, the cat.

“Being teachers, one of the things we find that kids struggle with is inferencing and point of view. This way, we can explore different points of view from the animals, and we also use language in the book where we don’t say exactly it was a school bus; we kind of infer that it’s a school bus,” Rouse said. “We give clues or describe things, so as a teacher when we read these books to kids, they can kind of talk about what that might be.”

Both authors are fourth-grade teachers at Shawnee, and they said the books are primarily geared for first- or second-graders, but are appropriate up to fourth grade.

They added that they are investigating the possibility of launching a line of stuffed animals or little puppets that could be used along with the story.

Bower, who has taught for 31 years in Chippewa Valley Schools, said the experience of publishing the series with his teaching partner has been a blast.

“To see your name and your best friend’s name on a set of books like this is very rewarding to know that we found the time to just go ahead and take a chance to do it,” Bower said. “We’ve been laughing so many times as we’re throwing ideas back and forth. It’s been really fun that way.”

Rouse, who has been with Chippewa since 2002, said that she and Bower have incorporated the books into classroom readings while also bringing animals like guinea pigs and turtles in as class pets.

“It’s fun to see kids’ reactions as we read the books. It’s interesting to see they get the jokes in the book and understand the book, and they appear to have a great time listening to it,” Rouse said.

“Pet Tales: Halloween Party” is available at www.tatepublishing.com/bookstore, or by visiting barnesandnoble.com or amazon.com.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Staff Writer Thomas Franz covers Macomb Township, Chippewa Valley Schools and the Macomb County Board of Commissioners for the Macomb Township Chronicle. He also covers sports primarily for the Shelby-Utica News. He has worked for C & G Newspapers since 2013 and attended Michigan State University.
