

Pets >>>

Akron attorney pens children's book to help when pet dies

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By Kathleen Folkert

HIGHLAND SQUARE — A trying experience with her beloved dog led Highland Square resident Joy Chicatelli to create a book to help families who have experienced the death of a pet.

Chicatelli, an attorney whose office is also in Highland Square, is the author of "Bailey's Heartstrings," an illustrated storybook that tells the story of a dog and his family and how he helps them cope with their loss after his death.

"I hoped to create a comforting, positive work for parents to explain this transition to children," said Chicatelli, who grew up on a small farm in Holmes County.

Almost two years ago, Chicatelli's dog Louis, a Dogue de Bordeaux breed, died after battling cancer.

"He was in chemotherapy for 20 weeks," she said. "I got to know some of the other families, and we formed an impromptu support group in the lobby."

From that experience, Chicatelli saw that the loss of a pet was often devastating to families.

"It seems that people had such a tough time with the loss of a pet, and when trying to explain it to a child, they would just break down," she said.



Local author Joy Chicatelli is shown at near left, at middle, with her Dogue de Bordeaux Storm during an American Kennel Club (AKC) show in Indiana in March. Storm won Best of Breed at the show. Shown at left is AKC Judge Victoria Jordan, and at right is professional dog handler Tracie Zeitz, who is showing Chicatelli's dog Uszula. The Dogue de Bordeaux won Best of Opposite Sex at the show, but she is now an AKC champion, according to Chicatelli.

Photo courtesy of Joy Chicatelli

Over the next few months, she began coming up with a story about Bailey, a dog that wakes up in a flower-filled meadow to find that her aches and pains are gone. But when she finds her grieving family, they can't see her.

Chicatelli scribbled ideas on Post-It Notes and the backs of envelopes whenever they came to her. She eventually worked on a manuscript and talked to representatives at Halo Publishing in Valley View about publishing the book.

After sending them the manuscript, they returned it and suggested it be shortened by half and simplified to better appeal to children, Chicatelli said.

The company also sent her a list of illustrators available for the project, and Chicatelli selected Amy Rottinger.

"It was perfect," she said of Rottinger's illustrations.

Just a few weeks ago, Chicatelli received her first copy of the published book.

"It was really exciting," she said. "It was absolutely surreal to see the project go from Post-It Notes and napkins to a finished product."

Within two weeks, her publicist at Halo said the book was No. 4 on the company's list of best-selling books.

Chicatelli hopes the book will do more than help families deal with the loss of a pet. She's also using the proceeds to help rescue organizations.

She'd also like to be able to help spread the word about rescues and the work they do. In the book, Bailey finds a new dog for her family at an animal shelter.

"There's so much people can do to help rescues," she said. "Not everyone is in a position to adopt, but you can foster a dog for a month to teach basic manners, or get a dog vetted or work in transport."

Chicatelli herself is part of a network of volunteers that often spends weekends in their car taking a dog to a drop-off site 100 miles or so away.

Chicatelli and her husband, Paul Lebold, are the owners of three Dogue de Bordeaux breeds and one bullmastiff dog.

"Bailey's Heartstrings" costs \$12.95. To purchase the book, go to www.halopublishing.com.



Joy Chicatelli wrote "Bailey's Heartstrings" to help families cope with the loss of a pet.
Photo: Kathleen Folkert

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