

Bay Area

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Lifestyles

“Superheroes on Mt. Burdell?”

By Mike Blane

The Case of the Poisoned Lake is the first action-packed book from the Earth-Guards Adventure Team; a new generation of young superheroes “dedicated to righting the environmental toxic wrongs...one dirty guy at a time.” The story is filled with narrow escapes, tense encounters with dastardly villains, underground passageways, new inventions, a mermaid and a speeding horse.

It is the creation of Novato residents Joy Evans and Kayla Gold. Evans grew up in Novato spending most of her time riding her horse on Mt. Burdell. Gold, new to Novato, is an avid hiker and also fell in love with the Mt. Burdell’s trails and hillsides. They both saw the mountain as the perfect magical home base for The Earth-Guards. In the book, Mt. Burdell becomes “Earth-Guards Mountain” Imaginary locales like “Old Man Log”, “Dancing Oak”, and “Skinned Knee Path” are inspired by real places on the mountain. The “Town Below the Mountain” is Novato.

The idea for the new superheroes first arose when Evans, who is a talented seamstress, became excited by the idea of starting a business to make and sell superhero capes. After all, kids love capes. However, you can’t sell superhero capes without the superheroes to go with



Catie Vercammen-Grandjean, Joy Evans and Kayla Gold Show off their Superheros.

them. The task that lay ahead of her was to create these superheroes. Ideas exploded in her mind. That was when she called her friend, songwriter and voice coach, Kayla Gold, and asked her if she would write the book.

Joy and Kayla bandied about ideas for their new superheroes knowing only that they wanted them to have an environmental theme. Through many brainstorming sessions, they built characters who possessed superpowers based in technology, engineering, medicine, music, and intuition, and who also held a deep respect for nature. Prototypes of the capes were made. Manufacturing costs and processes were researched. It soon became

clear that the idea to market the capes was complicated and unwieldy, and the plan was abandoned. The new plan: To focus on creating a vibrant life for this new generation of superheroes complete with a 16-book series, T-shirts, buttons, an Earth-Guards’ pledge and a fan club. Their mission: To inspire kids to think outside the box in solving environmental problems. Evans and Gold want to motivate kids to develop innovative thinking, imaginative problem solving skills and a can-do spirit. Next, an illustrator was needed. Evans was referred to Novato-born, Catie Vercammen-Grandjean, who was finishing her Masters Degree at Ex’pression College in Emeryville. Her illustrations embody the sincer-

ity and vivacity that Evans and Gold had envisioned for their characters. Catie brilliantly gives every character a rich humanity and an animated sparkle in their eye.

Once the basic draft of the book was completed, focus groups were held with the children of friends and with schools. The 6th grade class of Miss Dunleavy at Sinaloa Middle School provided valuable assistance and opinions. Professional writers and produc-

ers acquainted with Evans and Gold contributed their time to edit and offer guidance. Evans studied computer visual arts and design with Derek Wilson at Indian Valley College, and became proficient in “Indesign” layout, “Photoshop”, printing, packaging, and computer set-up to make the book printer ready. She also learned the ins-and-outs of self-publishing. Armed with this knowledge, she and Gold began their own publishing company, Pockets Productions and Publications.

The book is accompanied by The Earth-Guards theme song, “We Are Earth-Guards”. Marin musicians Michael Whiteley, the late Jim Rothermel, Randy Phillippe/Catsville Recording and Neal Harris helped create and record the track. The vocalists are all local teens including Chloe Gasparini of Novato, Christina Euphrat of

San Rafael, David Kim of Santa Rosa and Riley O’Flynn of Kentfield. Each of the subsequent books in the Earth-Guards series will be accompanied by original music.

Now, after three years and many incarnations, The Case of the Poisoned Lake is here. The project required Evans’ focused creative vision and computer savvy, Gold’s imagination and tireless re-writes, and Vercammen-Grandjean’s fresh and inspired artwork. “It’s an incredible creative team,” says Evans, who adds that the project is often met with remarks such as, “This is going to be big,” Evans adds, “It is USA made and no one is doing what we are doing...putting music and a book together, not even Disney”.

The Earth-Guards Adventure Team’s first book, The Case of the Poisoned Lake, is currently available at Barnes & Noble in the Corte Madera Town Center, at Solaria’s Toy World, and at www.earth-guards.com. A book release party will be held at Barnes & Noble on Saturday, September 3rd, at 2:00pm. Come and win a poster of the Earth-Guards, hear the theme song and be treated to an excerpt from the book. Let your kids take part in the Earth-Guards Adventure Challenge Game and win prizes. Evans, Gold and Vercammen-Grandjean will be on-hand to sign books, and they invite you to help launch this exciting adventure series born in the backyard of our own Marin County.