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News

Niles pair team up for children's book

By ANDY HAMILTON / Niles Daily Star
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NILES - Cheri Hallwood was a first-time author in need of an illustrator.

Since a sleepless night in November 2003, Hallwood had an idea for a children's book.

The words to the book were written and the lifelong Niles resident said she had a vision of what she wanted the pictures to be. But, she needed an artist to transform her ideas onto paper.

"I was frustrated and I went back to the internet. Then, a light came on and I said, 'I'm going to the art gallery downtown,'" Hallwood said.



Cheri L. Hallwood, left, and Patricia M. Rose discuss the children's book, 'Winter's First Snowflake'. The book was written by Hallwood and illustrated by Rose. Both women are long-time residents of Niles.

So she headed to the Fisher Art Gallery in Niles. While roaming the room, Hallwood said she spotted a business card with a painting of a rose on it.

The card belonged to the President of the Niles Area Association Patricia M. Rose. Born in South Bend, Ind., Rose said she has lived in Niles for the last 28 years, and, said she has been painting since middle school. Her artistic talent may have been passed down to her from her father, who used to paint murals.

Rose said the opportunity to illustrate a children's book was just the spark she needed to put some more time into her artwork.

"It was a good boost, a shot in the arm," she said.

Hallwood made the call and the two met on a chilly day in February 2005.

"It was snowing that day. We were wearing scarves, coats, gloves and hats. I said, 'this was meant to be,'" Hallwood remembered.

The weather that day seemed fitting because of the book's title - 'Winter's First

Snowflake.'

Hallwood said the decision to write the story came to her on that night in November. But, the idea was from memories of looking out the window with her mother and grandmother and watching the snowflakes float to the ground outside.

In the book, Hallwood takes readers on a whimsical trip as the season's first snowflake. The snowflake travels past birds and mice and through a village glowing with window lights. It is blown along by the fierce north wind and eventually lands on the nose of a surprised little child.

The style Hallwood writes in is called rhythmical rhyme.

"It's almost like a song. It's realism but with a bit of fantasy in it," she said.

Hallwood also said she intentionally designed the layout so only a few words appear on each page so children can get a sense of accomplishment after turning every page.

Each part of the snowflake's trip is illustrated in detailed pastel pictures by Rose that lay over a cool blue and purple blotted background. The words of the story seem to float along with the equally wispy pictures.

Hallwood said her grandchildren were the inspiration for the young girl in the book. But, the actual character is not modeled after any one youngster in particular.

"I wanted to encourage kids to go back to their imagination in this age of computers," Hallwood said. "The greatest thrill I got was seeing a child that wasn't my grandchild pick it up and smile."

Rose said her first experience as a children's book illustrator was gratifying in many ways.

"It's such a good feeling when you get done and have something for people to enjoy. And this is something the kids will get to enjoy," she said.

The pair published the book under Hallwood's company, Forever Young Publishers, which she said she started "with some personal money, a small business loan and a dream."

Hallwood said she is already receiving reviews back on 'Winter's First Snowflake' and has also been notified 11 copies are being placed in the Caroline Kennedy Library in Dearborn Heights and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston. Hallwood and Rose are also in the working stages on their next children's book.

Hallwood's first book signing is July 1 at Country Mates Gift and Christmas Shop in New Buffalo. The first signing in Niles is at Majerek's Hallmark on November 10.

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