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Saturday, October 4, 2014
The Daily Republic

LIFE D SECTION

Once upon a fish

Mitchell woman reaches dream, is now published children's author

By KELLA RODEK
The Daily Republic

Kathy Gebel, of Mitchell, can finally, after 15 years, see her book on the shelves of stores.

She originally wrote and illustrated "Adventures with T.J.: Treasure Surprise," a children's book about a fish, in 1999. So I started these little rough drafts of my writings and drawings," Gebel said.

During the day, Gebel works as a mail clerk at the Mitchell Post Office. She had always considered writing a book, and since she hadn't seen many children's stories about fish, she figured it might be something new and exciting.

In her book, T.J. the fish is the main character, and his name was created using the first initials of her two children, Tina and Jesse. The story is about T.J. and his friend, Sam, who discover a treasure chest with a map that leads them to a wishing well, of which T.J. says, "I believe the map, it seems, is telling us a wish is like making your dreams."

And although Gebel likely didn't wish for the book to take a decade and a half to reach the stores, she finally reached her dreams.

When she first completed the story, she said it only seemed natural that it be made into a book. The grade school that her children attended had the kids writing and illustrating stories in blank hardcover books, so she purchased an extra. She then copied her story and pictures into that book by hand. From there she began the journey to have her story accepted and printed by a publishing company.

As a novice author, Gebel said she didn't know who or where to write to get published, so she looked at books she had in her home for reference and chose a few publishers from there.

"I probably worked on it for about a year without any luck," Gebel said. "I kept all the letters they sent back, and I think half of them just didn't do kids' books, or just weren't interested."

Not finding success in the book industry, she looked to magazines as her next option. Gebel condensed the story — which she says is essentially a poem — to one page and drew fish pictures around the border.

"I didn't hear anything from them," she said. "So I put it upstairs and kind of forgot about it in a way."

Turn the page 12 years to this past spring. Gebel was browsing a section in Guideposts magazine featuring books when she made note of one that interested her. She then visited the book's publishing website, inspiringvoices.com.

"I'm scrolling down the page and there it said, 'Have you written a book? We publish books.' So I'm thinking, 'Do I take a chance and send it to again or not?'" Gebel was elated.

She was expecting to get her book and envelope back in the mail, but a week later instead received a message on the phone from the senior editor of Inspiring Voices that said the company was interested in her book. After going over the details of publishing processes with the editor, Gebel was connected with a checking coordinator to take the next steps.

"I had to do a manuscript separate from the pictures and fill that out, and then to illustrate for a third time," she said. The illustrations are done in colored pencil, which Gebel opted for over marker because they allow for finer detailing. She drew the page art and scanned her drawings to the computer during her free time.

The design team at Inspiring Voices coordinated with Gebel for the format and appearance of the book. She was allowed time to make any changes to the text and content, and then to proof the book after it was put together.

"After I had all my material from them and got to see the proof from the email was the most exciting part," Gebel said. "They were really good about getting back to me, answering my questions and giving advice. I'm very pleased with how it turned out."

By September, the finished product was ready to be sold and Gebel was able to call herself a published author. She worked with a promotional department to facilitate the sales of her book and bought a supply of her own books to sell to co-workers, friends and family. She also took several to Readers Den and to Andy Anvil's Gift Shop, both in Mitchell. "Adventures with T.J." is also available online at inspiringvoices.com, barnesandnoble.com and amazon.com.

Gebel plans a second book, which she might begin after Christmas when things at work slow down. She ended the "T.J. and Sam, who are in a fishy school, might take a tour of a post office. I thought that would be cool if I can make that work," Gebel, the mail clerk, said.

ADVENTURES with T.J.
TREASURE SURPRISE!
WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY KATHY GEBEL

About the author:
• Kathy Gebel resides in Mitchell.
• She is a mail clerk at the Mitchell Post Office.
• She has been married to her husband, Larry, for 33 years.
• Kathy has two children, Tina and Jesse.
•She also has three grandchildren.
• She enjoys growing flowers, reading and visiting her children.

Kathy Gebel proudly displays her first children's book "Adventures with T.J.: Treasure Surprise."

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