



## ***THE ARTS***

### **Check it Art!**

3/24/08

#### **'Sargeant's heaven'**

Family's loss is theme of hope in children's book

The death of a child is an incomprehensible situation, no matter the circumstances.

As parents try to cope with the loss, they also need to help surviving siblings understand what is occurring around them and why. Even though this is the age of self-help books, there sometimes isn't the right publication to help the situation. Greenwich residents Icy Frantz and her husband Scott know. In 2002, their son Sargeant passed away after a prolonged illness, just shy of his second birthday. To help Sargeant's three older brothers cope with the loss of their baby brother, Frantz searched for books on the topic.

She didn't find any.

"We'd be driving along and the boys would ask a question about Sargeant," Frantz recalls. She and her children openly discussed what Sargeant might have been thinking, if he could see them from his perch in heaven and what heaven is like for Sarge, as he was affectionately called.

From those experiences and the dearth of children's books on the topic, Frantz decided to write a children's book dealing with loss and grief.

The result is "Sargeant's heaven."

"It really is a tool to help parents talk to their kids about a sibling, a parent, grandparent who has died," explains Frantz. "It's really a tool to help the child with the grieving process."

Friends share in the grieving process and Nina Weld is one of many who consoled Frantz. Weld understood the loss Frantz was experiencing as her father passed away at about the same time.

The two women have known one another for years as their children all attend Greenwich Country Day School.

Weld's artistic abilities are known to her friends who receive whimsical hand-drawn cards and notes from her.

So when Frantz was considering the idea of writing the book, she says Weld was the only person she thought would be able to create the illustrations to accompany her words.

The book will be released nationally on April 3. And both Frantz and Weld are hosting a benefit book launching party that evening. From 5 to 7 p.m. at the Arch Street teen center, they will host a family-friendly party that will include a booksigning, children's activities and refreshments. All proceeds from book sales will benefit The Den for Grieving Children and The Center for Hope. Both organizations help children and their families cope with the loss of loved ones. "We wanted to pinpoint organizations that help families," explains Frantz.

The delightfully illustrated book takes the reader through one day in heaven with Sarge. Sarge in heaven playing cards with his great-, great-, great-, great-grandfather; watching fireworks, roasting marshmallows. In a tribute to Sarge's love of birds, each illustration includes a small bird.

Frantz says the book was cathartic ◊ it helped her cope with her family's loss.

"This is a niche book but it is good for everyone who has a natural curiosity, especially kids," says Frantz. "Sargeant's life was short and the community rallied around us through his illness, his death, his grieving. I hope (the book) will bring help and hope to a family going through this."

Weld says they began working on "Sargeant's heaven" in 2003. The women continued tinkering with ideas. "It's like fine wine, it's gotten better with time," says Weld, who's been pursuing her artistic interests in earnest the last couple years after a career in marketing and real estate sales.

"It's been a great relationship," Weld says of the women's literary partnership.

"I would read the words and I would draw what I thought would work. This is a mission out of such tragedy ... to make something so powerful," Weld explains. "It's a work from the heart. ... In the book you can see that he (Sarge) is still in their life."

The book also includes interactive activities to help children and their families cope with the loss of a loved one.

At next week's book launch there will be balloons ◊ another tribute to Sarge. Each year on the anniversary of his death, the Frantz family gathers to release balloons containing messages they've written for Sarge.

"The kids often still wonder if he still thinks of us and I honestly believe yes, he does on special occasions," Frantz says. "This is a celebration. It's a hope-filled solution for our family ... life continues."

For more information about the book launch benefit and "Sargeant's heaven" (\$16.99). log onto the Web site [www.sargeantsheaven.com](http://www.sargeantsheaven.com).

\*\*\*

Check It Art! highlights the members of the visual and performing arts scenes that help to make Greenwich the vibrant arts community it is, as well as news in the arts community. It appears on the second and fourth Monday of each month. To submit suggestions or information for Check It Art!, e-mail [barbara.heins@scni.com](mailto:barbara.heins@scni.com).