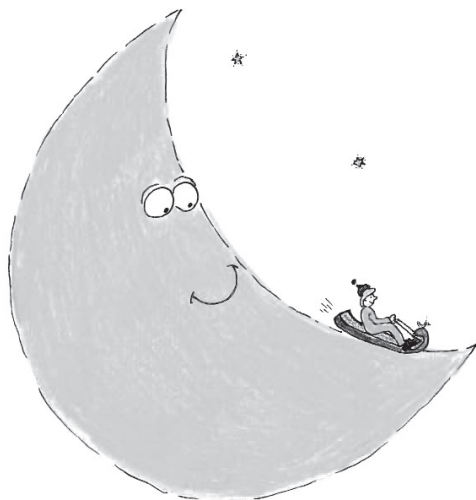




Nina Weld, left, and Icy Frantz collaborated on 'Sargeant's Heaven,' a book about hope, inspired by drawings Ms. Frantz's children did following the death of their brother, Sargeant. — ChiChi Ubiña photo



Sargeant's Heaven

Book about loss offers families hope about loved one's life after death

By Sara Poirier
Assistant Editor

When William Sargeant Frantz died in 2002, just before his second birthday, his three older brothers, mother and father survived him but were left to find a way to remember the young life that touched them all.

Sargeant's Heaven, a new book designed to help families deal with loss of a loved one, is Riverside resident Icy Frantz's way of doing just that.

Inspired by her children's drawings about what heaven means to them, the book uses colorful illustrations by Greenwich resident Nina Weld to show how Sargeant, who died of an undiagnosed mitochondrial disease, is still a part of the Frantz's lives. The book targets the hearts of young children.

The message can translate to anyone who has lost a person close to them, Ms. Frantz said.

"It's a sweet story," she recently told the *Post*, adding that she had a hard time finding materials to help the family deal with their grief after Sargeant died. "In that sense, it's not about Sargeant, it's about what we do when people that we love die, and with all ages, how do we find a place for them, what is heaven."

In the book, Sargeant is seen having the best view of the Fourth of July fireworks (from the sky), taking a cloud bubble bath, visiting the constellations and playing cards with his great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather,

among other activities. Depictions such as the family putting candles in a heart shape on Valentine's Day as a special message to Sargeant, and balloons carrying messages up to the sky on his birthday and anniversary of his death are things the Frantz family actually does to remember Sargeant.

This is one tool of many, Ms. Frantz said of the book. Some resources work for some and not for others, she added.

"When he died, we were all very sad. We missed him so much," the book's introduction reads, as written from the perspective of the Frantz's children who were alive when Sargeant lived.

Since Sargeant's death, Ms. Frantz and her husband Scott, a current candidate for state Senate, have welcomed their only daughter, Ann Brady to the mix.

"We were also very young and had a lot of questions, questions that would be difficult for even the smartest people in the world to answer," the book introduction continues. "*Sargeant's Heaven* is the place we created to help ourselves understand where Sargeant is now."

Ms. Weld said Ms. Frantz, a friend of more than 10 years, approached her to collaborate on the book after seeing illustrations she'd done on a thank-you card.

"It opens a dialogue," she said of *Sargeant's Heaven*, a project she said was an experience beyond words.

"Whether you're an adult or a child [reading the book], you just start thinking," Ms. Weld added.

Sargeant's Heaven, now a self-published book, will be launched at a party

open to the public from 5 to 7 p.m., Thursday, April 3, at the Arch Street Teen Center. There will be a book signing, children's activities and refreshments.

Close to five years in the making, the book has grown stronger since its beginning, Ms. Weld said. The pair used professionals at Family Centers in Greenwich to critique the subject matter, and enlisted the talents of book designer Sarah Fey to make the book's illustrations pop on the pages.

"In a good way, it's moved the project into a better place, more defined. It's made us think about it and piece it together," Ms. Frantz said of having worked on *Sargeant's Heaven* for so long.

Ms. Frantz's boys — 11-year-old Christopher Hunter and 10-year-old twins Scott McKinley and Pierce Hanley — and Ms. Weld's boys — 12-year-old Daniel and 10-year-old Charlie — all had input, the women said, whether it was inspiring the work or giving honest opinions about the artwork.

Juggling family life and working on the book wasn't always the easiest, Ms. Frantz said.

"As much as we wanted to put 150% into it, it was sort of stealing moments at the computer," she said of how it all came together.

To go along with the book, *Sargeantsheaven.com* has also been launched, and the women said they hope to expand it with interactive features. Ms. Frantz said she and Ms. Weld have also discussed writing more books focusing on

life lessons.

For now, though, Ms. Frantz said, getting *Sargeant's Heaven* off the ground and available as a resource for the grieving is a top priority. The hope, she added, is to find a major publishing company to take the concept nationally and reach more people.

"We're gonna take it and see how far we can go with it," Ms. Weld said.

All proceeds from sales of the book and pins, which are of a bird holding a balloon (a drawing in the book), will be donated to organizations that help families in crisis. Money collected at the April 3 launch party will be donated to the Den for Grieving Kids and Center for Hope, two local organizations. The women hope the book may be used as a gift for those who are grieving.

"When you have a small child who is ill or passes away, their life, even though it's so short, has such a tremendous impact," Ms. Weld said. "It's taking [Sargeant's] legacy and his positiveness and just furthering it to help more people."

"You can read the subject and think, 'Oh, a child has died, how sad, so heavy,'" Ms. Frantz said, "and I feel like that's not the book." She said she wants the book to be positive and full of hope — a celebration of life on Earth and after death.

More information about *Sargeant's Heaven* and resources that help people through the grieving process may be found on *Sargeantsheaven.com*, by mailing to P.O. Box 40, Cos Cob, CT 06807-0040 or e-mailing icyfrantz@sargeantsheaven.com.