

Published October 3rd, 2018

Beloved children's book author speaks at local Rotary meeting

By John T. Miller



Joanna H. Kraus Photo Andy Scheck

Renowned children's author and playwright Joanna H. Kraus spoke at the Lafayette Rotary meeting last week, entertaining the members with her recently published children's books.

Her two latest publications, "Bravo, Benny" and "The Blue Toboggan" are not at all alike. They are from different publishers, with their own illustrators and deal with very different subject matter.

"Both stories are based on actual events," said Kraus. "'Bravo, Benny' is more lighthearted about a girl who desperately wants a dog, but has to win over her grandmother's approval, while 'Blue Toboggan' deals with the grief of a young boy losing a close friend."

"Bravo, Benny," published in 2018 by Mirror Publishing, tells the story of Nina, who has wished for a dog on the last "eight years of birthday cakes," but must overcome her Granny Lil's unwillingness to have a dog in the house. In the end, Benny saves the day and wins Granny's reluctant approval.

"Blue Toboggan," a 2016 publication by Mascot Books, is a compassionate look at a young boy, Will, who loses his best friend Danny. The two of them were saving to buy a blue toboggan with silver stripes so they could "fly down Wildberry Hill, the two of us, faster than fast."

Kraus paraphrased from the blurb on the back of the book, saying, "With the help of a sympathetic teacher and class, Will learns that love and friendship don't have to die as long as you remember."

Rotary member Dr. Kelly Hood, who practices dermatology in Lafayette, invited Kraus to speak at the recent meeting.

"My kids read her books growing up," said Hood. "She's delightful to hear from and has lead such a varied and interesting life. Her books have universal themes appropriate for every age."

Kraus also spoke about her personal essay from the August issue of "Alive," a magazine published in Alamo. The article, titled "Aging in Place - My Manor and Me," describes a two-month nightmare at her Rossmoor home where sewage backed up into her tub. Just before that, she had endured bronchitis, an infected tooth, and a mysterious ailment that made walking extremely painful.

Once the problems were fixed - by plumbers and painters for the manor, and several medical experts for her body - all returned to normal. Until, that is, she learned shortly after that a patio support pillar and surrounding tile were cracking and she needed retinal surgery!

Kraus, who grew up in Maine, moved to California in the fall of 1995 when her adopted Korean son, who attended college at Sonoma State, announced that he would not be coming home to any more snow. She took an early retirement from her position as Professor Emerita of Theatre at the College at Brockport, State University of New York and moved to Rossmoor.

Kraus writes mostly for children and is an award-winning playwright of 18 published and widely produced scripts and an author of numerous short stories, children's books, articles and reviews.

Her books are available on the websites of Amazon and Barnes & Noble, the publishers, or through your favorite bookstore via Ingram. They will also be sold at this year's Rossmoor Fall Bazaar from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 3 in the Oak Room at Gateway Clubhouse.

For more information, visit her website at www.joannakraus.com.

Reach the reporter at: john@lamorindaweekly.com

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