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Author Touts 'Pawsitive Thinking' in Children's Books

Story by Melissa Summers

Photos by Karen Fucito

One's true passion can sometimes reveal itself in unexpected ways.

Margaret Pflug, 50, works in the pharmaceutical industry but has found something even more fulfilling in a completely different career as the author of children's books.

Writing was always part of the Mount Arlington resident's life—she loved crafting long personal letters and had made a career in corporate writing—but her first book, "The Cat Cavalry's Farm Adventure," is based on a story she first told her daughter, Madalyn, when she was 2 years old.

"I was holding her, up in her room, the nursery, and I was just overwhelmed with love for her and so excited to be a mother and have this beautiful baby," she recalled. "I thought—what could I teach her to help her have a better way in life?"

Pflug decided the greatest gift she could give her was to teach her to how to have a positive attitude, and what better way to do that than in the form of a bedtime tale. After putting her daughter to bed that night, she sat down and crafted her first story—creating the characters and even the hot air balloon they traveled in.

She found out later that she was pregnant with her son at the time and believes that could have been the source of the creativity and emotion that poured into her work. "I was in that mother zone for sure," she laughed.

Pflug said she told her children the story over and over, until a 6-year-old Madalyn asked where the book was—because she wanted to read it herself.

The story revolves around the adventures of four felines with distinctive personalities, who travel the world in a hot air balloon helping other animals regain their self-esteem and confidence.

Each character is based on treasured Pflug family pets.

One of the driving forces behind Pflug's books has propelled not only the plot lines, but the way she raises her own children. Having a positive outlook on life, or "pawsitive thinking" as her characters call it, is the idea that it's better to be hopeful than negative.

"When you are going down a road of unhappy thoughts, you can't possibly feel good when that's the focus. It's about trying to shift thinking to believe that things can change for the better," Pflug said.

Pflug's children, Madalyn, now 14, and O'Connor, 11, are a big part of her writing, but she's especially proud of the young minds who



Margaret Pflug sits in the sunroom of her Mount Arlington lake house, writing the third of her Cat Cavalry children's books.

have tweaked and edited her work with her over the years.

As Pflug went through the publishing process, she first sought input from her friends' children. Her "editors" offered suggestions on everything from dialogue to the colors of the cats' collars.

Pflug self-published "The Cat Cavalry's Farm Adventure" in 2013, through an Amazon company called CreateSpace. The book tells the story of Melody, a cow that is worried about an

upcoming race and therefore has low levels of "pawsitive thinking."

She enlisted the talents of a graphic art illustrator she found through a website that connects authors with artists. A copy of the book was placed in a time capsule that year at Normandy Park Elementary School in Morristown.

Flipping through the pages of Pflug's second work, "The Cat Cavalry's Digging Adventure," readers might recognize some of Lake Hopatcong's landmarks.

The story was inspired by the family's move to Mount Arlington—and, in a way, helped with their transition.

[Pflug, a West Virginia native lived in New York after she becoming engaged to her husband, Brian Pflug. The couple moved to Morris Plains in 2000 before settling in Mount Arlington in 2013.] "It's a really cool local story, and it was all about a dog who moved here and was very sad, and my kids did not want to move here," Pflug said.

The narrative is set at a home on the lake. In the story, the cats cruise aboard the Miss Lotta past Byram Cove and stop at Main Lake Market for ice cream. Of course, the Pflug family now thoroughly enjoys everything the lake has to offer. They often spend summer days boating and tubing and evenings cuddled up with movies.

"Digging Adventure," published in 2016, was also a product of an ongoing project with

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The first two books in the "The Cat Cavalry" series.

second-grade students from Edith M. Decker Elementary School in Mount Arlington. Students helped edit all the phases of the book, from the manuscript to the final draft.

Pflug has created a school program that goes along with her books, geared toward students in kindergarten through fifth grade. There are lesson plans and activities, and a paw print is hidden on each illustrated page, posing an extra challenge for young readers.

She has also been a visiting author, sharing both her books with the Decker school and Mount Arlington Public School.

Pflug is working on her third book in the

series, which she says will be set in New York City, where the Cavalry will be helping even more animals to think "pawsitively." A horse, a squirrel and a bird will be the featured characters in this tale, along with a fourth animal yet to be determined, she said.

The author is also training to be a yoga instructor, which she hopes to pair with her writing to inspire children to forge positive feelings both in mind and body. She will be appearing at the Lake Hopatcong Block Party in May.

Both books are available for sale on Amazon, as well as at the Main Lake Market in Lake Hopatcong and the Golden Pineapple in Mount Arlington.

One of the best parts about having self-published the books when she did was that Pflug's children were still at an age where they could appreciate the Cat Cavalry's adventures. Pflug hopes to someday go the traditional publishing route and reach a broader audience with her message.

"It brings me joy to think that if a child were to read this book, they might have a little easier way because they remember to have a positive outlook," she said.

Those themes resonate in the pages of those tales and in the hearts of the children inspired by them.

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