

East end communities create an angel

> Patricia Lonergan

Three local women pooled their talents together to create a world for both young and old readers.

Yet their book, *Mimi the Angel gets Her Wings*, is more than just an effort between two authors and an illustrator. Not only did the three collaborate to bring Mimi to life, they also involved children of all ages, making their book a community project.

"We want to basically do it for the kids," said co-author Sylvie Brûlé. "It's going to be their Mimi."

The idea for the book started about a year ago. Brûlé, from Orleans, approached her friend Jennifer Clark of Blackburn Hamlet. The two had been thinking about writing books for children, so they decided to write a story separately and later come together.

Brûlé said they discovered their story and goals were the same. They both wanted to empower children with a positive role model, so they created an angel.

With a story ready to go, the two needed to bring Mimi to life with colour. They advertised in this paper for an illustrator and received over 40 replies, Brûlé said. Clark and Brûlé interviewed close to 20 illustrators before they found Julie Bonhomme.

"She's an awesome illustrator," Brûlé said. "Julie captured what we want an angel to look like."

With the writers and illustrator in place, the three women took Mimi to those she was intended to empower. They held workshops with a group of children, seeking their input.

The youngest participant was three-years-old, and the writers soon discovered they had to change the language of their text because the kids couldn't understand some of the words.

The youngsters also wanted more imagination and vibrant colours in the illustrations. Brûlé said they put snorkels on the fairies jumping off waterfalls, or they made the water sparkle more, or included more vibrant hues on the pages.

The children in the focus group came with varying backgrounds, yet each described God as either light, a rainbow, or love. Sensitive to all beliefs, Brûlé said they decided to let a rainbow represent God.

"At the end of the process we were extremely satisfied," Brûlé said. "It was such a pleasure to do."

The three women successfully created Mimi, a sweet and funny Guardian Angel who gets her wings and accepts the responsibility of helping the children of Earth. The book is meant to encourage parents and children to talk about spirituality and learn the interconnectedness of all living things. The symbol of an angel was chosen to inspire children to positive action and offer them hope in times of challenge or confusion.

"An empowered hero teaches kids the value

of goodness and hope in the world," Brûlé said of Mimi.

With one book already under their belts, the three are planning to finish another 26 over the next five years. Brûlé said they already have the titles and stories in mind, and have written four outlines.

The rest of the series will essentially be the adventures of Mimi as she goes through hospitals, or helps the environment, Brûlé explained. The next books will be more goal-oriented and Mimi will help the children of Earth throughout the series.

Brûlé said she hopes the next focus group will be organized next month and the next book will be out by summer.

The authors created Mimi Publishing Inc. to get their book to market. The three are still learning the tricks of the self-publishing trade, but have managed to sell over 1,000 copies in Ottawa.

Fully illustrated, *Mimi the Angel gets Her Wings* costs \$9.95 and can be purchased at most local book stores or online at www.mimitheangel.ca



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