

‘I WROTE STORIES ABOUT KIDS’



Author Debra Young Hatch signs copies of her children's book, "Giraffes in My Closet," at Barnes & Noble on June 21. PHOTOS BY JOHN OLIVA/CALLER-TIMES

Author Debra Young Hatch holds book signing, reading at Barnes & Noble

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Children sat in awe Friday in Barnes & Noble as Debra Young Hatch read to them a story about three giraffes sneaking into a young boy's closet and creating a lifelong friendship.

The bookstore hosted local author Young Hatch to sign copies of her children's book, "Giraffes in My Closet," and do two readings for little ones and their

families.

When someone purchases the book, a portion of the proceeds is given to Driscoll Children's Hospital. On Friday, proceeds also went to the Giraffe Conservation Foundation to help the mammals.

"Giraffes in My Closet" is dedicated to Heath Naumann, a child who was born with a severe congenital heart defect known as hypoplastic left heart



Sister Claire and Maddie Prillaman listen to author Debra Young Hatch read at the "Giraffes in My Closet" book reading at Barnes & Noble on June 21.

syndrome. At five days old, he had surgery to receive a heart transplant.

Six years later, he is living life to the fullest, Young Hatch said.

The book has several messages for children, including kindness, caring and inclusion, Young Hatch said. But the main message is knowing your friends will always be in your heart.

"I tell young kids that authors put a lot of messages into books," Young Hatch said as children started to gather around her table of giraffes. "The message in my book is that sometimes you might have to go to a different school or you have to move out of town and your best friend can't come with you. They always will be with you in your heart, because that's where they belong."

Young Hatch had kids follow her into the children's section of Barnes & Noble and gather around the reading stage, where she explained World Giraffe Day (which was Friday) and then started to read her book.

When she came to Corpus Christi 15 years ago, Young Hatch started to write stories about children for Driscoll Children's Hospital.

"I wrote stories about kids and I decided I wanted to figure out what I could do to give back to use that skill set," Young Hatch said. "I decided to write children's books. I didn't know what to write about or how, but one day my husband woke up and said, 'My closet is so messy I dreamt I had giraffes in my closet.' I told him that was an excellent title."

That day, Young Hatch sat down and wrote the first draft of her story. But she kept it tucked away for several years until she had the courage to start the process of getting the book published and distributed.

A sequel/prequel to her book will be released in the fall — "Elephants in the Attic."

The new book will be dedicated to children with disabilities and focus on autism, down syndrome, ADHD and dyslexia.

After Young Hatch finished reading her book, she shared some educational facts with her young audience. She taught them how long a giraffe's tongue is, how big their feet are and how big their hearts are.

Children were then able to see if they would go home with a stuffed gi-

raffe, a coloring book, hats or other fun goodies in a "gir-affle."

Later on, people were able to have Young Hatch sign copies of her book to take home with them. Some even took photos with the author or her stuffed giraffe next to her table.

"I hope children take from my book that each one of them is special and unique," Young Hatch said. "No two giraffes are the same; all their spot patterns are different. Everyone's fingerprints are different, so everyone is special and unique."

The book can be purchased at local bookstores or online at forkidssakepublishing.com.

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Author Debra Young Hatch talks to a group of children and their parents at the "Giraffes in My Closet" book reading at Barnes & Noble on June 21. JOHN OLIVA/CALLER-TIMES