

The Alphabet Book...

The concept for this book came about after visiting my nephews, Tucker Anderson and Chase Anderson, in Missouri the summer of 2005. Tucker had two very progressive diseases, Langerhan's Cell Histiocytosis (LCH) and Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) and Chase has Dechenes Muscular Dystrophy and is also nonverbal Autistic.

The summer I visited, Tucker was recovering from a bone marrow transplant and was doing well. He started to get sick again shortly after I arrived for my visit. It was hard to see how fast his fevers would come and how weak he would get. Tucker was in the hospital five times within the two weeks that I was visiting. Talking to my family, Tucker's mom, dad, and grandmother made me realize how lucky Tucker and Chase were to have family who could be with them. In the hospital, there were children whose whole lives revolved around hospitals. Some would never be able to leave and would sometimes be without family or visitors. Families were under extreme duress; struggling with illness, trying to make ends meet and keeping their family together. Having sick children and being a sick child is a terrible thing. Often there are feelings of hopelessness and that no one out there knows how difficult their situation is.

I wanted to do something to let them know that there are people out there thinking of them and do feel for them. I asked Mr. Jim Miller the English teacher at Dakota Memorial School, Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, Minot, N.D., about collaborating on a project that involved having his students write children's books and my art students illustrating them. We would then try to get copies made and send them to the Children's Hospital in St. Louis Missouri. We thought this would be a good lesson in empathy for our students at the school.

Mr. Miller had the idea of creating an alphabet story. He had each of his English students contribute by thinking of an animal that related to a letter in the alphabet and writing text that went with it.

Each of my students chose one to two of the animals to research. They made a quick contour drawing and transferred it to scratch art paper. They did a transfer onto watercolor paper and completed a watercolor illustration. The Alphabet Book took us 13 weeks (the very last page was completed the last day of school, May 27, 2006). We tried very hard to finish before Christmas so I could show the book to Tucker after his second bone marrow transplant. I never got to read the story to Tucker. He died shortly after his second transplant.

Now that the book is complete, I am hoping that Tucker's family, Chase, and the children and families from Children's Hospital will read and enjoy our story and know that there are others thinking of them.

I dedicate this book to Tucker Lane Anderson (March 19, 2004 - January 24, 2006), Chase Patrick Anderson, and the students of Dakota Memorial School. May they know that their talents have touched others in need.

~Cynthia Anderson, art instructor

Taking on the task of constructing a children's book sounded quite simple. Write a little poem, give it to Cynthia and be happy. Then my class started thinking about the importance of helping sick children (all children, really) smile. We invested ourselves on quite another level.

Not only did I want this poem book done well, my students hoped that their love would come through in a book that years from now they might find somewhere and proudly proclaim a part in. We studied every word, every thought, every rhyme.

I hope readers find we have accomplished our goal. Furthermore, we hope that as this book is shared with children, smiles emerge. Lots and lots of smiles.

~Jim Miller, English Instructor

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