

KE LIFE

Local artist creates dual language children's book

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

Dago Benavidez has always been passionate about his artwork.

The 67-year old, who graduated from McNary in 1973, has a variety of his unique paintings all over his home — with several more in his garage.

Benavidez has some of his award-winning paintings displayed at Primo Barbershop in Keizer. He has also hosted several art shows and his own website, where he can put some of his favorite artwork on display.

“I have been painting, drawing and sketching ever since I can remember. I have always been into it,” Benavidez said.

Most of Benavidez’s work comes from visual inspiration — such as when he sees a beautiful bird or flower. However, his most recent project came with a different motivation.

With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting the normal way of life, Benavidez wanted to make a children’s book (ages 5-10) to attempt to help kids understand the grief they might be feeling. The unique aspect of the book, which is called *Rusty and Me*, is that it is written in both English and Spanish — the title in Spanish is called *Rusty y yo*.

Benavidez used to be a project manager for the CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) program in Salem, recruiting to help advocate for Latino children going through the court system, which played a big role in his inspiration for the story.

“I feel like children kind of get left behind sometimes and Latino kids get left behind even more. That’s what gave me the inspiration,” Benavidez said.

The book explains the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance). The story follows a child growing up with their dog, and then having to deal with the sadness that occurs when the dog has to be put down.

“Letting kids know about the five stages of grief is the focus of the whole book,” Benavidez said.

Under each stage of grief in the book, a section is left blank so that kids can write what they may be feeling.

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Before Benavidez and his family moved to Keizer when he was 12 years old, he struggled in school while living in Texas and even had to repeat first grade twice because his family only spoke Spanish in the house.

While he speaks near-perfect English now, Benavidez still remembers how difficult it was to learn a new language as a child, which is one of the main reasons he wanted to have his book be in both English and Spanish — the Spanish version was translated by the Mexican consulate.

“It is not hard to speak English anymore. It comes natural now. But it wasn’t like that when I was a kid. That is the reason I feel a need for children to see a book in both English and Spanish with the same picture in both pages. We are all the same,” Benavidez said. “It will also help the children learn the story in both ways.”

Just by looking at some of his work, it’s easy to tell that Benavidez’s paintings are incredibly exquisite and detail-oriented. But with *Rusty and Me*, Benavidez made his colored pencil drawings especially simplistic, with the animals not drawn to scale and coloring outside of the lines.

“I approached it from how a child would draw,” Benavidez said.

Another aspect that makes Benavidez’s story unique is that the main character is not gender specific, so that the story would apply to both boys and girls.

“The same things that affect adults, they affect children too,” Benavidez said. “I wanted for it to be gender-neutral so that nobody gets hurt. It applies to both boys and girls.”

The book was published earlier this year at ABC Printers in Salem. Benavidez is working on having the story available at multiple local outlets. Until then, people interested in purchasing a book can email Benavidez at dagobenavidez@gmail.com. Cost is \$10 plus shipping.

“Children need to know that it’s not just them experiencing stuff. And with COVID and hearing about people dying left and right, I felt that kids needed to understand that everything is going to be ok and this too shall pass,” Benavidez said. “What I want them to see is that what they are feeling is not unusual.”



Local artist, Dago Benavidez, created a dual language children's book to help kids learn about the five stages of grief.

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Cat of the Week

Name: ARTHUR
Age: 6

HISTORY: Arthur is a male domestic short hair brown tabby.

PREFERRED HOME:
Arthur is very affectionate and likes attention. He does well with cats and maybe other animals.



We have moved! Our new location is 4157 Cherry Avenue, Keizer • 503-362-5611