

Celebrity llama Caesar stars in new children's book about finding community

BY RACHEL ALEXANDER
Salem Reporter

Bee Dugan had never met Marion County's most famous llama when she began idly sketching him on a TriMet ride in 2019.

Dugan, a music teacher from Portland, said she came across Caesar the No-Drama Llama on social media. The therapy llama, who lives in Jefferson, travels around the region attending farmers markets, nonprofit fundraisers and other events.

"I was just hit by a sudden inspiration: the name of this llama ... sounds like a children's book," Dugan said. "This whole story came to my mind."

Dugan had drawn sketches before, but had no previous experience as an author or artist. Still, she said the idea felt right.

"I would say God nudged me," she said. "I tend to do a lot of random things on intuition."

She sent a copy of her sketch to the llama's Facebook account and began talking with owner Larry McCool, who agreed to work with her on a book.

Two years later, Dugan's debut book, *Caesar the No Drama Llama* is available in bookstores including Powell's, as well as online at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.



Caesar the No Drama Llama with owner, Larry McCool during the 2018 Keizer Holiday Parade. FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

The 32-page story, written and illustrated by Dugan, chronicles Caesar's journey as he searches for a place with no drama.

Dugan says the llama's journey in the book mirrors her journey in life. For years, she said she thought she'd be happy once she found the perfect group of friends or the perfect living situation.

"I was looking for a place that had no drama, I was looking for perfection," she said. Eventually, she realized she had to make her own happiness.

"What fills you up is more about what you're giving out so that's what the book

is basically telling you - it's this character going on this journey," she said. "Ultimately the aim of the book is to teach people about identity, love, community and how to navigate that."

The real Caesar, who recently celebrated his seventh birthday, was a fixture at Salem-area events before the pandemic. He has recently begun venturing out more again, McCool said.

Dugan first met Caesar in 2019 at a farmer's market in Lake Oswego. She discussed her vision for the book with McCool.

By that point, she said she had the text mostly complete, but the illustrations became the bulk of the work.

Dugan later moved to the Oregon Coast and had a visit from Caesar in August 2020, when McCool brought the llama out to take photos on the beach. Those became reference shots for Dugan as she worked on illustrations.

Dugan said Caesar's demeanor is right between cats, who often run away from humans trying to pet them, and dogs who overwhelm people with

enthusiasm.

"This llama is very calm. He'll approach you a bit but he mostly just has this stillness about him," she said. Getting to know him better at the beach helped her finish the book.

Dugan said she hopes the book especially resonates with people with disabilities or others who have been made to feel different from their peers.

"This book is for everyone, but I think in a special sense it's (for people) who function a bit differently and might feel like an oddball," she said.

The paperback was released Sept. 27 on Amazon. McCool said he's not sure yet how many copies have been sold, but the llama's social media following - more than 17,000 on Facebook alone - have helped spread the word.

The pair worked with Friesen Press, a Canadian publishing company that helps authors self-publish books.

Proceeds for the paperback, available on Amazon for \$10.99, are split evenly between Dugan and McCool. McCool said his share will be donated to various charities Caesar supports.


"If this blows up and it makes us lots of money there's lots of things I'd like to do, but I know it's not going to be that kind of a book," McCool said.

Dugan's hope is that the book can help her cover living expenses.

"I don't even have a car. I'm hoping this book will help me afford a car," she said.

McCool said he's working to schedule book signing events in Salem and around western Oregon, where Caesar will be able to sign books via a stamp of his hoof.

"He's going to be standing right next to the author," he said.



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