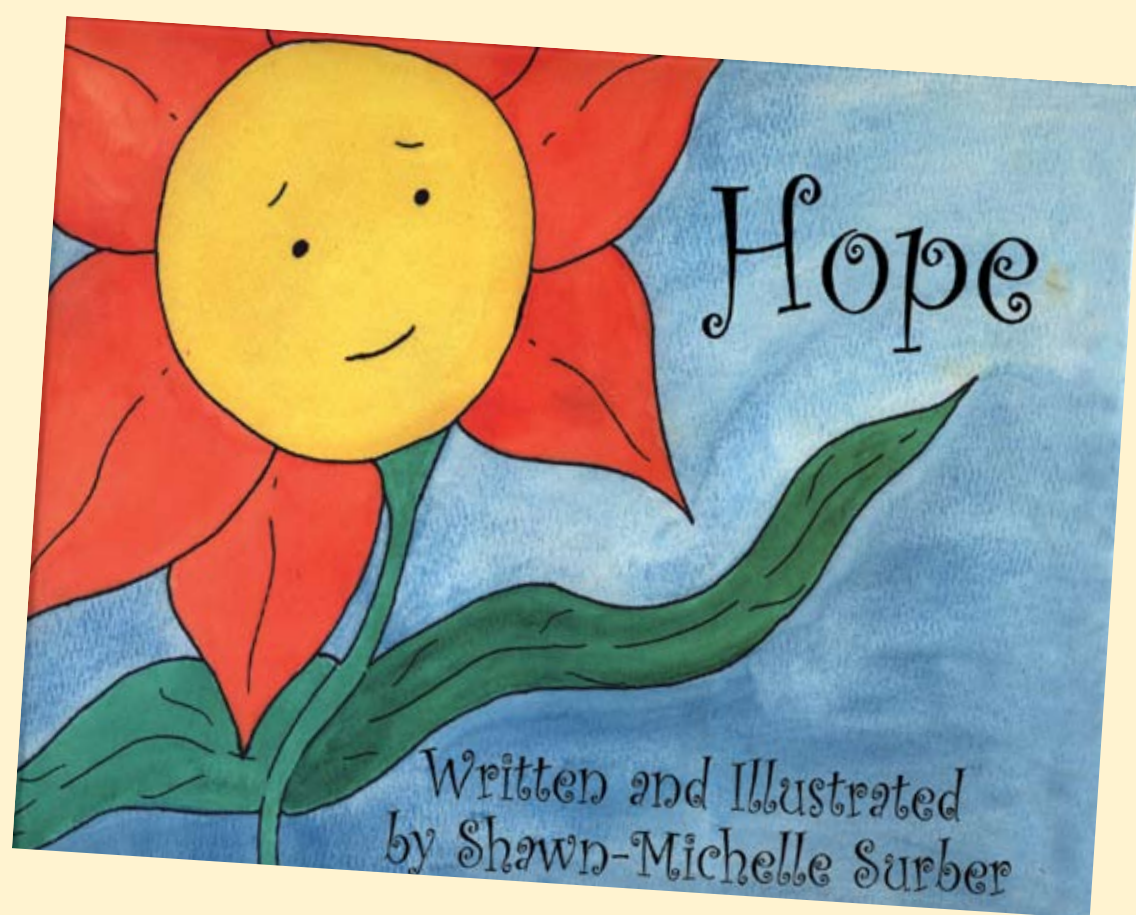


the arts

STORY BY
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Shawn Nelson's Hope

There is within every writer a passion, a desire to speak and a need to be heard.

A simple story has kept the heart of Shawn-Michelle Nelson in a suspended state of eagerness: She is the self-proclaimed "little author that could." However, upon reading



her children's book, you may find that she is actually the little author who does.

Her story is called *Hope*. Her readers are short, tall, sick, happy, sad, anxious and at peace. Her venue has been the little hearts of Williamson Countians, but her hope is for many. It is a message she believes so important she has been willing to produce the book herself.

Her determination is contagious. "I believe in this book because I've seen the inspiration that it's given to adults and children," Nelson says during a breakfast interview at The Loveless Café.

TAKING IT TO THE HEART...

Grassroots is the only way to describe the genesis of Nelson's creation and the marketing behind it.

After writing the story, Nelson opted to paint the images herself, one page at a time. Without a formal publisher, she took on the task of learning how to make a book, one step at a time. Not one to become discouraged by circumstances, Nelson kept her eye on one goal: getting her story to the reader.

Adults and children alike have heard Nelson sharing *Hope* whether in the neighborhood coffee shop of The Good Cup or in a local elementary school during an annual Dr. Seuss Read Across America Day event. And when children gathered recently at a public reading hosted by Book 'Em, an association devoted to child literacy, Nelson enthusiastically participated.

"Each page is charming with illustration and lovely font," says Sally Lee, a longtime county resident, who attended Nelson's book signing at The Good Cup

NELSON'S HOPE

It was in southern California in the late '70s where she first learned of the pain

children sometimes must endure.

A younger brother, hospitalized more than once, opened her eyes to the resilience of youngsters, even when facing the unknown. Both her parents grappled with health problems yet consistently persevered. Nelson found herself being the keeper of optimism for her family.

Now in her mid-30s, Nelson moved to Franklin as an older teenager, a West coast transplant, if you will. After a tough transition in high school, she worked her way through Belmont University with the help of family and friends. She says she's always been bold. In elementary school, Nelson was one of the few girls to play Little League baseball, not softball.

"I had my cleats and my ballet slippers," she recalls of a spirited, but challenging childhood growing up in Malibu.

Today, more than a decade later, she takes her writing cues from feelings she battled back then. In more than 30 pages, Nelson explores the relationship between fear and courage.

This is a make-believe story of a lonely flower, wrestling with isolation in a vast desert. The irony is purposeful. Flowers are not supposed to be in deserts, but then

again children are not supposed to be sick for months on end, though there are many who are. In this story, the flower's cry is one of pure frustration. Who will reassure her, sit beside her, and guide her through the daily grind of growth in the absence of rain?



Given the ongoing drought of this region, it could be that Nelson has a timely message for us four-season Tennesseans. Ah, but the rain did finally come. The downpour was more than the flower could endure alone. Just as she began to cave under the pressure of a long overdue shower, an unsuspecting stranger came to her aid.

Enter Wisdom. In Shawn's book, he doesn't come flying in draped in a super hero's red cape; he comes without resume and references. He shows up unexpectedly and offers challenging words. Without giving away the rest of the story, let's just say Nelson intuitively understands the way children think.

MOVING FORWARD

Nelson is now working on her next children's book entitled *Courage*. She knows that in 2008, as in 2007, things will be not as they should. The imperfections and struggles of people will continue to overwhelm young and old alike. Yet as long as children can point to hope and have courage, Nelson believes the future will be brighter.

"I'd love to be a well-known author, but the rewards that I've received from being able to help people know hope have been spiritually awesome, and that is what propels me to keep writing," Nelson says.

(For more information about Nelson and her story, visit www.thehopebook.com.)