

Long Valley School Mascot Stars in Children's Book

Back in the 1970s, Bowser the Basset Hound lived with the Chase family on Old Farmers Road in Long Valley, New Jersey. Bowser loved children. When Pam and Michael Chase left for middle school each weekday, he was lonely. One morning he walked over to Old Farmers Road Elementary School in search of friends.

In those days, it wasn't uncommon for dogs to run loose in neighborhoods, and school doors were left wide open in warm weather. So that particular day Bowser just wandered in. He was welcomed by everyone, the principal, school nurse, teachers, support staff and of course the children. Over time he became a regular visitor delighting everyone with his antics.

First, he'd visit the principal who always gave him a dog cookie, then it was onto the nurse's office. The nurse also gave him a treat. Next, he'd wander down the halls and pop into classrooms. Usually, he was welcomed. Except the music teacher closed the door and kept him out. So, Bowser sat in the hallway howling in tune with the children singing.

Over the years, Bowser had many adventures at the school, he joined students on stage during a holiday performance and had to be removed, he participated in many student birthday parties, followed along while Principal Kopecki played his bagpipes in the hallway and so much more. Eventually, the beloved Basset Hound became the school mascot.

In recent times, current Principal Ciulla asked animal book author, Loren Spiotta-DiMare of Tewksbury, New Jersey and long-time Old Farmer's third-grade teacher Becky Kwiatkoski of Long Valley to write a picture book about Bowser. The two were delighted to take on the project.

Spiotta-DiMare has been writing animal books for adults and children for 40 years. In the last seven she also started teaching Introduction to Book Publishing classes. Kwiatkoski was one of her first students. "Becky and I are avid animal lovers and easily became good friends," Spiotta-DiMare says. "I'm proud to say she is my star student having self-published four books since taking the class. Her titles are: *Harley*

and Heloise: It's a Rescue, Paisley You're Crazy, Moose is Loose
and *Bo's Pond*.”

“I was really excited to have the opportunity to co-author a book with Loren,” Kwiatkoski says. “I requested stories from past principals, teachers, students and others who knew Bowser. The anecdotes were so touching and sometimes just amazing.”

Spiotta-DiMare adds, “I’ve never co-authored a book before but I have to say it was a lot of fun. I’d certainly do it again.” The author’s previous books have been recognized by the Dog Writers Association of America, Doris Day Animal Foundation, Humane Society of the United States, USA Book News, and the EQUUS Film and Arts Fest.

The co-authors entitled their book, ***Bowser's Back!*** and hired Long Valley animal artist Rebecca Backer to illustrate. “Rebecca joined the Just 4 Kids Writers Group I chair in Long Valley,” Spiotta-DiMare says. “When I saw samples of her work, I said to Rebecca, ‘You have missed your Calling, you should be illustrating children’s books!’” Interestingly, Backer’s son attended Old Farmers Road School.

Both authors say Backer did an amazing job of capturing Bowser's likeness and expressions. "She really brought his story to life," they echo.

The story was further enhanced by graphic artist Lynn Eberenz of Mendham, New Jersey. who designed the book. Eberenz is also an artist and member of Just 4 Kids.

Bowser's Back! is sure to appeal to Long Valley residents especially those who knew Bowser, Basset Hound lovers and children of all ages.

The hardcover book sells for \$20.00 and can be ordered on-line at www.LorensReadingRoom.com or www.RebeccaReads.org.

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