

# ~ Life in LAMORINDA ~

## Orinda author brings whimsical fantasy to life in 'Parasol Adventures'



Photo Lisa Spencer

"Parasol Adventures" illustrator, Sue Jensen (left) and author Lindy Novak sign copies of their whimsical children's book.

### By Diane Claytor

Three adorable sisters each carry a colorful parasol wherever she goes. One day, a hefty spring breeze lifts the parasols from their hooks and off they go on a lively and fun-filled excursion. "A craving for adventure, a longing to explore. ... Who

gets what they wish for? These three did, and more!"

This is the story of "Parasol Adventures," the second children's book written by Orinda resident Lindy Novak. The high-quality book, written in rhyme with beautiful, brightly colored illustrations by Sue Jensen, an Orinda native, is a whimsical tale sure to enchant 3- to

7-year-olds.

Novak's first book, "Red," is equally delightful. "I love red so much! Oh, what a color. All of the rest are just so much duller!" says the little boy who wants everything to be painted in his favorite color. Again featuring vivid drawings, "Red" was illustrated by Novak's then 11-year-old niece, Poppy Novak.

Admitting to once having had dreams of becoming a full-time children's author, Novak has learned just how hard the process is. "Red" and "Parasol Adventures" took approximately eight years from initial concept to publication with a local book printer, Edition One Books.

Novak has binders filled with ideas for future children's books, some almost completely written. She also has files of illustrations she likes and says she has done "rudimentary rough sketches" to go along with some of her plots. Her ideas come from a variety of sources. "Red" came to her simply because it's her favorite color. "Parasol Adventures" began from a retail clothing/home decor catalog which featured a beautiful photo of parasols floating upside down in water.

Neither Novak nor Jensen have children, but both admit to loving children's books and having their own collections. "The world of imagination is such a fun one," Novak proclaims. "There's something about transcending our everyday life and going someplace exciting and unexpected." Her affinity for rhymes "probably comes from my love of Dr. Seuss' clever style," she says.

Additionally, her mother was known for writing poems for family and friends' celebrations and Novak proudly states that she is happy to carry on that tradition.

Her desire to write children's books came about years ago when she was involved in Read Aloud, a program started by a former neighbor. Novak volunteered to read to first-graders in Richmond. "It was often hard to keep the kids' attention," she recalls, so, being both an avid reader and writer herself, "I thought perhaps I could write something that would keep them interested and engaged." Working in her family's Napa Valley wine business, Spottswode Estate Vineyard and Winery, left her little time to pursue this on a full-time basis. So she filled binders with her ideas.

Novak and Jensen were sorority sisters at UCLA. Novak transferred to UC Berkeley and she and Jensen lost touch. As luck would have it, they reconnected at a sorority reunion many years later and discovered they had much in common, including an interest in writing and in kids books. Jensen, a talented artist, had, at one point, taught art to preschoolers. She had also been working on her own children's book. "So, we decided to jump off the cliff together," Jensen laughingly declares, and elected to collaborate on "Parasol Adventures," with Jensen creating whimsical, colorful watercolors to accompany Novak's clever rhyming verses.

Novak creates the stories and often provides Jensen with

some very rough sketches or magazine clippings of what she envisions the images should be. Jensen then runs with it, doing her own research. "I always want the illustrations to be just right," she states. "We knew the book had to have bright, compelling illustrations and be a fun story where kids wanted to turn the pages to learn what happens next," states Novak.

Neither women had prior experience writing, illustrating or publishing a book. They took classes, attended seminars and conferences and did their due diligence. "But," as Jensen acknowledges, "we were both flying by the seat of our pants at times, learning as we worked." It was a long process but, both agree, definitely a labor of love.

A paperback version of "Red" may be purchased on Amazon. A limited edition of hardbound copies of "Parasol Adventures," may be purchased for \$30 (no dust jacket) and \$35 (with dust jacket) by emailing parasoladventures@gmail.com.



## Local libraries host summer reading programs



Photo Casey Scheiner

Laura Bruggink (center) reads to Lana and Luca Morgan.

### By Casey Scheiner

As the calendar turns to June, children turn away from the classroom to the green grass, blue sky, and freedom that summer brings. Nonetheless, though school may be out, student reading interest and participation remains high in large part due to efforts from Lamorinda libraries, namely with their summer reading programs.

"My daughter Annabelle reads about 20 minutes a day during the summer. She loves the stories and learning how to read," Ana Ramirez, a local parent, said. "The library has been a great resource for us because it has a lot of books at her level in both English and Spanish."

The library offers a number of programs to push local children to read as much as they can over the summer. The most notable is the Summer Reading Passport, in which kids can receive free books and enter drawings for larger prizes by denoting on their reading passport that they read and did outdoor activities that fit with the year's

theme of "Read Beyond The Beaten Path," such as going for a hike or drawing a picture of nature.

Additionally, the libraries typically host in-person events such as Storytimes and Paws To Read, a program where kids can read to a dog, though such events were canceled for this June due to COVID-19 concerns. Plus, the Contra Costa libraries provide many online resources on their website, from a free subscription to National Geographic Kids to reading lists tailored to specific age groups.

Some of the child reading lists seek to highlight diverse cultures, with collections of books that pay homage to the LGBTQ+ community or celebrate Asian-American/Pacific Islander month. Indeed, the importance of such programs cannot be overstated. A study from Scholastic found that in a phenomenon known as the "summer slide," students lose an average of 20% of their school-year gains in reading from June to August. So, to mitigate the negative effects that summer break can have on learning, Contra Costa libraries push students to read

during the summer.

"The library is getting kids to read 20 to 40 minutes per day, which is very important since some of them are reading less than they used to and gravitating more towards [devices]," Joshua Tong, a volunteer at the Orinda Library explained. "It's also fun for the kids because they get to read cool books and potentially win prizes."

What draws students to the library is not the "educational benefits" that psychology studies and education leaders tout, but the sheer fun of reading. A poll from the National Literacy Trust corroborated that approximately 6 of 10 children said they enjoyed reading "quite a bit" or "a lot."

"I love reading, especially flipping to the next page to find out what happens next because many of my favorite books have cliffhangers," Shay D, a rising fourth-grader summarized. "At the library I've checked out many books from my favorite authors."

This summer, kids around Lamorinda are not just soaking up the sun, but the magic of books, as local libraries continue to feed their intellectual curiosity.

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