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Mom and son make writing a family affair

By: Bonnie Langston, Freeman staff

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Evan and Donna Ducker (Freeman photo by Bob Haines) [Purchase a copy of this photo.](#)

classes in schools from California to Saskatchewan in Canada are reading its message.

Closer to home, the author duo will sign and read from their book at 10 a.m. July 19 at Barnes and Noble in the town of Ulster.

The forward is by award-winning journalist and author Hannah Storm, anchor of CBS News' "The Early Show." Dr. Milton Waner, of the Vascular and Birthmarks Institute of New York has endorsed it, as has Linda Rozell-Shannon, president and founder of the Vascular Birthmarks Foundation, to which a portion of money raised from sale of the book will be contributed.

Evan, a sixth-grader at Riccardi School in Glasco, was born with a port-wine birthmark. He also was born with quite an imagination. His mother said the animal characters, including the star of the book, a booby bird of the Galapagos Islands off Ecuador, are his ideas. So are their actions.

Ducker and her son have worked on books together through the years, including a favorite that Evan illustrated and titled "Blueberry, the Guinea Pig Who Lived in a Cave." It was natural for them to team up once more when Ducker could find no children's book that touched on the subject of birthmarks.

Ducker said she and her son had never had their books published. But readers encouraged them to get this one to the public. The seven-year endeavor originally drew the attention of Byron Preiss of Byron Preiss Visual Publications. His death, however, left the book in limbo until Ducker finally decided to self-publish.

Despite lack of a prominent publisher, "Buddy Booby's Birthmark" is gaining wide

attention. Ducker said Waner has ordered quantities of the book for patients and waiting rooms, and Dr. Richard Antaya, director of pediatric dermatology at the Yale University School of Medicine, is placing the book in the university's lending library. In addition, "Buddy Booby" is on the recommended reading lists of birthmarks.com and aboutfaceinternational.org

Ducker and her son have been invited in October to a reading and signing at the National Birthmarks Foundation annual conference in Boston. The foundation has expressed an interest in using Buddy as its international mascot, according to Ducker.

"Buddy Booby's Birthmark" is listed online at Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Borders, and it is expected at area bookstores soon. It also can be purchased online at www.buddyboobysbirthmark.com or www.Xlibris.com. Retail price is \$15.99.

The following interview was conducted by e-mail.

Q: Why and when did you two decide to collaborate on "Buddy Booby's Birthmark?"

A: Donna Ducker: Evan was 4 1/2 or so. I just finished reading him a story, and he asked me out of the clear blue, "How come nobody in these books has a birthmark like me?" I was kind of surprised he'd asked, but I said, "I'm sure there's lots. Mommy just hasn't bought one yet." So, we trotted off to the library and the librarian said there weren't any. Evan looked sad when she said it. So, not wanting to see my son disappointed, I said, "No big deal, we'll just have to write our own" ... Every single idea came from Evan's 4 1/2-year-old mind. His answers inspired me, and I just started writing .. It was a true compilation of my adult emotions and his childhood creativity. I'm especially proud of that.

Q: Briefly describe the history of the book.

A: Donna Ducker: Shortly after meeting with the publisher in Manhattan, (and prior to signing any written agreement), he was killed in a tragic auto accident. He was only 52. When we got the sad news ... we were shocked. They told us his company's future was undecided and that no further negotiations would be made regarding our book or any others for the time being.

But, I really believed in the book's potential, not only to be profitable, but also to ultimately help others on so many different levels - physically, spiritually, monetarily, etc. I knew that our big publisher wouldn't have wasted his time meeting with me and Evan if he didn't believe in the book's potential. I knew if a celebrity like Hannah Storm was willing to put her name to it, I had something - and I couldn't just drop it. I had come too far to give up. So, I put my money where my mouth was and just decided to move forward with self- publishing. ...

I'm so proud of the finished product and even prouder at the response it's receiving. It's been a tremendous amount of work, an exorbitant amount of money, and a true labor love.

Q: How did Hannah Storm become involved?

A: Donna Ducker: Evan and I were watching the CBS "Early Show" one morning when Hannah Storm took off her makeup and revealed her port-wine stain on the show. She went on to do a two-day segment about birthmarks and her own personal struggle (and ... her mom's) in dealing with other people's reactions. Evan said, "We should send her our book, Mom." So, he wrote her a little letter and sent her our manuscript. About a month later, we'd forgotten all about the letter, really, when an envelope came in the mail. It was a note from Hannah to Evan saying she had showed the manuscript to a friend of hers (a big-time publisher) who was very

interested. The publisher wanted me to contact him. That was back in 2004.

Q: Evan, why did you suggest the book's characters come from the Galapagos Islands?

A: Because when I was little, I thought the name "booby bird" was really funny, and I knew they were found on the Galapagos Islands because I watched "The Crocodile Hunter (on television)," and Steve Irwin talked all about them. Then, later on, we found out that booby birds' red feet are actually vascular, like my birthmark, so I thought that was an odd coincidence that I picked them back then and didn't know it.

Q: Is there anything more you would like to mention about the book or its subject matter?

A: Evan: I hope when kids read this book they'll learn to treat other people the way they want to be treated, and that it doesn't matter what you look like, it just matters how good your personality is, and that you should preserve and protect the wildlife and wilderness.

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