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Avon LIFE

Neighbors

Two friends who are also mothers collaborate on manners book

by Natalie K. Pollock

Serendipity has brought together Cynthia Whipple and Mary Cashman more than once. Their lives intersected in college and then on the job.

Now they are living in the same town and raising their children in tandem. They have also co-authored a children's book with a message on behavior that both children and their parents can appreciate.

Karen Lefranc, the proprietor of the children's shop Over the Moon who teaches etiquette classes in town, explained the current interest in manners and etiquette.

"There is a growing interest in etiquette, especially table manners. After 'The Mindful Child' book came out about mindfulness, it has become a movement. Children these days are stressed and rushed. Now they are learning gratitude and consideration."

In "The Mindful Child," author Susan Kaiser Greenland suggests that her mindful awareness techniques "have helped millions of adults reduce stress in their lives ... when children take a few moments before responding to stressful situations, they allow their own healthy inner compasses to click in and guide them to become more thoughtful, resilient and empathetic."

Ms. Lefranc intends to read the book in her etiquette classes and offer it for sale in her shop. Her daughter enjoys it so much that she asked to read it three consecutive times when Ms. Lefranc brought it home.

"Kids love it. They made manners fun and included charm bracelets in it. It is also teaching them while entertaining them at the same time," she said.

In "Merrilee Mannerly and Her Magnificent Manners," intended for ages 4-8, Ms. Whipple and Ms. Cashman make manners a fun and helpful way for young children to relate to one another.

The large-size picture book, with illustrations by Meredith Johnson of Pasadena, Calif., presents a story about a young girl who is invited to a birthday party by a "princess from a land of no manners." Merrilee helps her new friend and neighbor to host "the best birthday party ever" with the use of her grandfather's "manifesto of manners."

It features pretty in pink drawings and sometimes text, humorous passages that employ a play on words, and a story line designed to keep young readers interested.

Ms. Cashman came to live in Avon with her family six years ago and Ms. Whipple joined her one year later.

"We went to Trinity College together. We knew each other there, but we were not close. Then we both became lawyers. I hated my job at the law firm, but Cynthia loved hers at Morrison Mahoney, so I joined her," Ms. Cashman said.

"Then Cynthia moved to New Jersey for eight years. I am originally from Wethersfield."

Ms. Whipple grew up in Franklin Lakes, part of Bergen County, N.J. Her friend finally succeeded in convincing her to join her in Avon, where Ms. Whipple has been living with her family as a stay-at-home mom.

"On Mother's Day at the Hill-Stead two-and-a-half years ago, we talked about our kids and manners and how hard it is to teach them. There was no character in children's books that focuses on manners, so we decided there was a void in the market," said Ms. Cashman.

They both came up with some good ideas on a book for girls on the subject. She went home and started writing.

"We wrote down all our thoughts and then we realized there would be a lot of revisions because of our backgrounds as lawyers. Finally we sent it to an editor we found," said Ms. Whipple.

They found an editor in Chicago who helped them with the final revisions and introduced them to an illustrator. To insure that they would have the final word on the illustrations, the two friends decided to self-publish their book, which means taking responsibility for the printing costs and marketing effort.

"We hope that 'Merrilee Mannerly' will be the first in a series. This one is for girls

*Friends and mothers
Cynthia Whipple
(left) and Mary
Cashman reconnected
after law school and
when Ms. Whipple
moved to Avon they
had the idea for a
children's book about
manners that reflects
what their mothers
taught them.*



because our daughters were four and two when we started, so we wrote about what we knew. The book has a princess, but there will be one for boys too," said Ms. Cashman.

Ms. Whipple added "we wanted the character in this one to be fun and someone that girls would emulate."

"Merrilee Mannerly" came out in August and already the authors have several book signings scheduled, including one on November 4 at Over the Moon. They have also been interviewed on several local television shows.

It helps that Ms. Cashman's husband Tony owns the Glastonbury marketing company Cashman and Katz and his advice has been freely given.

The Cashmans have one daughter, Ava, who is four years old. Mr. and Ms. Whipple have three children: Alec, 13, Christopher, 10, and Ellena, 6. Doug Whipple is an emergency room physician at the Hospital of Central Connecticut.

The book is available nationwide, including on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, the families' favorite vacation spots. The women are planning book signings at Barnes & Noble and Borders book stores.

The marketing process has been more stressful than the writing of the book. Ms. Whipple would bring her daughter over to Ms. Cashman's home so that the two girls could play together while the mothers worked. The girls are best friends, just like their mothers.

"We never fought. The book has brought us closer. The one with the more reasonable argument won the dispute," Ms. Cashman said.

"We both have strong relationships with our mothers, but they are not here anymore. The book is an homage to them, but it was inspired by our daughters," she added.

One of their goals in writing the book was to reinforce the values the two of them had learned at home.

"Gratitude, appreciation, kindness, these are all from how we were raised," said Ms. Whipple.

Their families had an involvement, too. Ms. Whipple's teenage son, who also enjoys writing, read the book to evaluate whether the passages make sense to a young person and whether they were funny as intended.

"Both husbands were really supportive. My husband is one of our biggest fans now. He says we have a great niche and that it is as good as any in stores," said Ms. Cashman.

"Merrilee Mannerly" may be ordered through book stores or purchased online at www.merrileemannerly.com. The authors pack up and send out their books every day.

"Girls want to follow the character and be like her. She dresses cool, according to our daughters. This book is less about formal manners and more about the thought behind them. It is the best fashion statement," said Ms. Whipple. **AL**