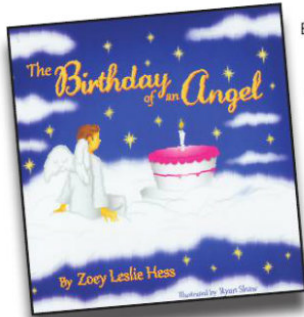




Fifth-grader's book helps children cope with loss



By MICHAEL C. DUKE | JHV

A fifth-grader at The Shlenker School has published a book that offers comfort to those who have lost loved ones.

Zoey Hess' "The Birthday of an Angel" (LongTale) reimagines death not as loss, but as an opportunity to keep one's memory alive.

The autobiographical story was inspired by the loss of the author's grandfather, Dr. Morton J. Adels, a prominent local obstetrician and gynecologist, who died in 2010.

"I want you to believe that love never dies," Zoey writes in the 24-page, illustrated book. "Your angel will always be in your heart. Even if you can't touch them, there are always ways to feel them."

Shlenker hosted a book-launch event at the school on May 14 that



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Zoey Hess signs a copy of her book, "The Birthday of an Angel" during a ceremony at The Shlenker School on May 14.

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synagogue in Southwest Houston.

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included a reading and Q&A with the author. Among those who attended and purchased the book were local educators, who said they were looking for new resources to help children cope with loss.

Zoey said she wrote the book in order to help people. Though incepted as a children's book, she believes it will appeal to all ages.

"I'm excited to help people with the experience of losing a loved one," Zoey told the JHV. "My book shows a more positive way to view loss, so you'll be able to feel your loved one is still with you."

The book recounts how Zoey developed her unique perspective. A year after her grandfather's death, the family gathered to light a yahrzeit candle in his memory. Zoey was 7 at the time and didn't understand the meaning of it. Moreover, she was troubled that it was a sad occasion. In response, Zoey offered a different view on death.

"Can't you think of it as the day they became an angel – the birthday of an angel?" she asked her mother.

Zoey told the JHV she had a special relationship with her grandfather.

"Every time he came over to my house, he would sit in this big blue chair and I would always come over and sit on his lap and we would draw together, or we would watch movies or we would play games," she said.

The book began as a series of journal entries, Zoey noted. She said it took her

about a year to complete. The book is illustrated by Ryan Shaw, who also was present at the Shlenker book launch. Zoey said she worked directly with Shaw to design each page.

"The most challenging part was finding the words, so that everyone can relate to it," Zoey said. "I wanted everyone to easily understand that, although it's my personal story, it could also be theirs."

"That's why in the book, the angels don't have faces or are shown from the back, so it's easy for other people to see themselves in the story and make it their own," she said.

Zoey's mother, Kelly Hess, expressed amazement and pride in her daughter's accomplishment in writing and publishing the book.

"It's been such a dream that she wanted to make happen," Hess told the JHV. "It's been five years since my dad's been gone and Zoey still has a relationship with him, which is beyond special."

"This book not only honors my dad, it's a resource and a tool to help other people, she said.

"It's changed my own perspective," she added.

Shlenker was pleased to help promote the book, which it sees as a product of the education it offers its students.

"The book is a reflection of Zoey and the amazing relationship she has with her family," said Shlenker head of school, Ricki Komiss. "It's also is the product of the writing program we have and a product of

music, as well as songs for peace and local favorite

how we encourage children to think about positive ways to treat people and to think about their own struggles in a positive way – to look for solutions, rather than complaints."

Rabbi David Lyon, senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel, who also teaches at Shlenker, said the book epitomizes what it means to transform sorrow into joy.

"Because of Zoey's gifts and the way she was inspired [to write this book], she helps us to remember that grief, though real, can also be transformed into joy and inspiration," Rabbi Lyon said.

"We come to learn what Isaiah [11:6] taught us so long ago: 'A child shall lead them,'" the rabbi said. "Indeed, today, Zoey is that child, who will lead us to greater understanding and meaning and hope."

Zoey's book is available for purchase at TheBirthdayOfAnAngel.com, through Amazon.com and BarnesAndNoble.com. □

