

## **John Dunn: San Diego Children's Book Author Celebrates Read Across America Day by Donating His New Book to Schools**

On March 2, schools and families celebrate the National Education Association's Read Across America Day, a time to uplift inclusive stories so that kids across the country can see themselves reflected in a book. Because of Covid restrictions, local author, John Dunn, can't read his popular children's book *Boo and Ted's Amazing Adventures – Beach Rescue* to them at their school, but he's sending free copies to teachers at several San Diego schools.

Dunn took a break from drafting his next book *Boo and Ted's Amazing Adventures - Saving Christmas* to chat with us about how making up bedtime stories for his daughters several years ago led to authoring children's books.

### **Tell us about *Boo and Ted's Amazing Adventure*.**

My daughters loved for me to make up bedtime stories when they were younger. They especially like stories about our two dogs, Boo and Ted, and their adventures when we left them home alone. Boo and Ted's beach rescue is based on one of their favorite stories about our two dogs. I decided to write the story down as part of a family Covid project and it grew from there. It is a light-hearted tale about how adventurous Boo and timid Ted save a swimmer from drowning at Coronado Beach.

I hope this story communicates an important message to young children: Being brave doesn't mean you are not afraid. Courage is about facing your fears and overcoming them, whether it is trying something new, standing up for a classmate who's being bullied, or just returning to classroom learning.

### **Why is this message especially important now?**

Teachers and parents have seen increased levels of anxiety in children during the Covid-19 pandemic. School shutdowns, sick loved ones, and family stress have all taken their toll on children. I'm hopeful that my story about two friendly dogs facing a stressful situation might bring some comfort and fun to children, especially those who may be struggling right now.

### **Is there evidence that stories can provide that sort of comfort for children?**

In a recent study published by the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, scientists who studied the effect of storytelling and riddle-based games on children hospitalized in an intensive care unit found that listening to stories lowered young patients' stress hormone levels and reduced their pain. Researchers also hint that storytelling could have a powerful effect on children's well-being beyond the hospital setting — including those whose home and school lives have been left in disarray by the coronavirus.

Stories help young people identify their own feelings through the thoughts and experiences of characters. I've been gratified by the responses I've received from parents and children who have told me how much they've enjoyed *Boo and Ted's Amazing Adventures – Beach Rescue*. This is such a tough time for families and I'm glad to offer a fun story that can also serve as a powerful tool to discuss fear and bravery.

### **Who are the real Boo and Ted?**

I must first explain, that for the book, I switched the genders of our actual dogs. In real life Boo (Ted in the book) is a timid 65-pound Labradoodle who we bought from a breeder in Bonita. Ted (Boo in the book) is an adventurous 20-pound Poodle-Chihuahua mix we found at the pound. The gender switch is a little confusing for those who know our dogs Boo and Ted. I switched the genders because having daughters, I wanted the girl dog to be the adventurous leader in the story. I wanted to show little girls that they can be in charge and leaders. Regardless, they're great dogs and although they have very different personalities, they're best friends. They love to go on walks at the park, to go to dog beach, and best of all, they love to wrestle with each other.

### **How long have you lived in San Diego?**

My wife and I first moved here in January 2007 when I was a Marine stationed at MCAS Miramar. We moved to Northern Virginia in December 2009 and then back here when I left active duty in August 2012. We've lived here ever since.

San Diego is a wonderful place to live and raise a family. Everyone knows about the great weather, but what I really enjoy are the people – San Diegans are kind, generous, relaxed, and down-to-earth. I love going to Balboa Park and its museums, hiking in Mission Trails Park, and going to the beach.