

## PEOPLE

## A French bulldog, his cute little snort, and a lesson about bullying in new children's book



Children's book author Samantha Childs at her home in Solana Beach on Wednesday, June 21, 2023. (Eduardo Contreras/The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Samantha Childs, of Solana Beach, is a writer whose children's book, "Henri and the Magnificent Snort" is being released June 27. The book follows the story of Henri, a French bulldog, and

how he deals with being bullied by his dog friends after he moves from New York City to San Diego

BY LISA DEADERICK

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There was a French bulldog named Henri who taught Samantha Childs a lot about love. For years, she had longed for a pet of this breed, so when her parents gifted her one for her 30th birthday, she was elated. He didn't just teach her about the love between a dog and a human, but he helped her with a deeper understanding of love of self, and others.

"I had no idea what I was doing, and I also had no idea that my heart could feel so much love. I could literally feel it in my chest, and it only continued to grow," Childs says. In 2015, she had an idea to write a children's book about bullying, using her own experience with childhood bullying, but told through the lens of a community of dogs centered around Henri (who was a bit of a celebrity in real life, with 67,000 followers on Instagram, [@henrilefrenchie](#)). "[Henri and the Magnificent Snort,](#)" which is being released Tuesday, follows the pup on his journey from shame for his snorting, to self-love and acceptance.

"The way he embraced life was my inspiration. He was my hero, and when people said that he was the way he was because of me, I felt so honored that they thought that, but I think he was the way he was because that's just how he was. I was so lucky to be his mom," she says of Henri, who died in 2018 (Childs was [recently awarded a judgment](#) in a negligence lawsuit she filed against a local veterinarian in Henri's death).

Childs, 43, is a writer living in Solana Beach, where she grew up spending hours with her sister in the children's section of their parents' independent bookstore. She took some time to talk about her book, why she chose to focus on bullying, and her beloved Henri.

**Q:** What was the inspiration for this story?

**A:** "Henri and the Magnificent Snort" is based on a mixture of two true stories. The first is the story of Henri — his personality and unique characteristics, as well as his life in San Diego and New York City. The second story is my own personal story from childhood and my experiences with being bullied. I was bullied when I entered a new school for middle school. Like Henri in the book, I was called names, chanted at, cut off by my old friends, and felt so alone. For me, it lasted a year and half, and then I transferred out of the school. And like Henri in the book, after all I'd been through, I was shocked in the future when people wanted to be my friend. For so long, I'd believed that something must be wrong with me for people to have treated me that way. In the book, I tell the story of what happened to me and how I felt through Henri and his experiences with the other dogs.

**Q:** Why did you want to address bullying, specifically?

**A:** Bullying and kindness are such interesting and important and consistently relevant topics. Through the lens of a bullied French bulldog and this book, I wanted to explore the beauty of our differences, how we all belong, and how we are all lovable. I think that these ideas are so important for both how we view and treat other people and also for how we view and treat ourselves. Bullying

can take so many forms throughout our lives, both as children and adults, and both externally and within our own minds. And why in the form of a children's book?

There is something very powerful about children's books. When you grow up with a book, the story becomes a part of you and how you view the world. I want this story to reach children and to help them. The book's messages are ones that I needed to hear when I was young and being bullied. They are messages I need to hear today. I still love reading children's books now, as an adult, too. There is magic and depth in the form. Children's books can portray a message so quickly, and in a way that sticks in your mind.

## **What I love about Solana Beach...**

*I love how beautiful it is, and how walkable, and how it feels like a small town in the middle of a big city. I love the magic of its beaches and lagoons, and how within five minutes all your worries seem less important. I love that it's laid back and filled with kind locals and that it has the same sign and dandelion statue that was there when I was a child living there in the '80s. I love that it's artsy and that people decorate their front yards and homes with all sorts of eclectic delights, and that it's full of fun places to explore, eat, drink, shop, and listen to live music, and that those fun places are filled with both new and familiar smiling faces. It's a wonderful place to live.*

**Q:** Can you talk a bit about [Henri](#)?

**A:** Henri had the most positive, upbeat, sweetest, goofiest personality. He was

endlessly entertaining and endlessly lovable. He had the most soulful, beautiful eyes. He would look at me, and I would feel his love. He had a famous Frenchie howl and he did countless funny things. He would snort to me when I talked to him. He would sniff people's eyes. He would army crawl around the carpet. He would do Frenchie zoomies (running in circles). He would sleep in the diamond of my bent legs.

**Q:** In the acknowledgments at the end of your book, you thank the people who supported you when Henri passed and your work to strengthen animal rights, related to Henri's passing [the details of the negligence suit were documented on your [GoFundMe](#) page to build a legal fund for the case]. What role did Henri's passing, and the subsequent lawsuit, have on how you approached telling the story of "Henri and the Magnificent Snort"?

**A:** Henri's death and the subsequent lawsuit was one of the hardest things I have ever gone through. When it happened, the rough story of "Henri and the Magnificent Snort" had already been written and most of the artwork had been completed. However, for a long while, I did not know if I was going to publish the book. When I had written the book, I had also thought that Henri would be with me as I did readings and book signing tours. I was also really struggling with my grief and simultaneously dealing with the trauma of bringing a lawsuit and doing what I hoped would protect other animals from Henri's fate.

Interestingly, sometimes the words from my book helped me go forward. I remember during a tough time during the lawsuit, looking through the draft of the book at Henri on his soapbox and reading the words I'd previously written, "He was going to hold a rally to share what was true, and help others benefit from all he'd been through," and thinking how my life was now like the book

and now it was me, standing up for Henri and other animals. So, I kept pushing forward and, eventually, I kept pushing forward with the book, too.

**Q:** What is the best advice you've ever received?

**A:** "Don't worry about what other people think." It is so basic, and so important, and yet one that I continually relearn. Something I've thought about recently is how people's thoughts and opinions are fluid, including my own, and they are based on a limited and skewed perspective that says more about the individual person and what they are going through, than they do about what they are judging. Perspectives also change, so living trying to please others is trying to live in a world that doesn't exist. You are just torturing yourself for no reason. You are worrying about something that you made up in your own head. You never fully know what someone else is thinking, and regardless, thoughts change. My own thoughts and opinions and perspectives change. We are all constantly growing. Let it happen.

**Q:** What is one thing people would be surprised to find out about you?

**A:** I'm allergic to dogs. Before I got Henri, I went to an allergy clinic because I wanted to be given shots to help me so that I could get a French bulldog, which had been my dream for years. They said that, first, they had to give me an allergy test, and they pricked me with lots of things (I think, mainly different trees and pollens). I started to swell up so badly that they freaked out and gave me an emergency shot and an epi pen and quickly sent me home. They never treated me for my dog allergy. I got Henri anyway, and I wasn't allergic to him. It was meant to be.

**Q:** Please describe your ideal San Diego weekend.

**A:** There are so many ideal weekends in San Diego! If I'm imagining one, it would be spending time lying on the beach with good friends and a good book and a journal; boogie boarding under a hot, sunny sky; going for a hike; spending time with family; doing some art; going out for food and drinks, maybe stopping by one of my new favorite spots, Local Roots in Solana Beach; and dancing and listening to great music at Belly Up.



Lisa Deaderick