

Henri le Frenchie Stars in New Children's Book

Sometimes it's hard to separate our most painful moments from our greatest joys—like a link that connects what breaks our hearts to what puts us on top of the world. Pets are like that. Their love moves us in ways we don't understand or even feel we deserve, and they take us higher than we could ever go by ourselves. So losing them can feel unbearable, irreparable, and hopeless. But like the light and shadows of a great photo or the tragedy and comedy of a tour de force, the pain and joy that coexist in our everyday lives make us whole. And they often help us learn life's most important lessons.

Henri and the Magnificent Snort, a new children's book by Solana Beach-based author Samantha Childs, contains one of those lessons. No, make that several of those lessons. The book was inspired by two deeply personal true stories. The first is the story of Henri le Frenchie, Childs' real-life Instagram famous French bulldog who charmed followers around the world with his adventures living in New York City and then San Diego. In the book, the character Henri's unique trait—his little snort—suddenly leaves him feeling self-conscious and alone when one of his friends makes fun of it. He begins to question whether he really has any friends, and he's never felt more alone in his life. The second true story is the author's own personal journey through the bullying she endured as the new kid in middle school. "Like Henri in the book," says Childs, "I was called names, chanted at, and cut off by my old friends. I felt so alone."

Childs wrote the book as both a tribute to Henri, whom she lost in 2018, and to give hope to kids like her, who've been singled out and bullied. She wants to make sure these kids know there's nothing wrong with them, that we're all different from one another, and they're worthy of friendship and love, no matter how unkind others may be to them.

"In the book, I tell the story of what hap-



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pened to me and how it made me feel through Henri and his interaction with the other dogs," explains Childs. "After my own bullying experience, I believed for a long time that something must be wrong with me for people to have treated me that way. Like Henri's character, for a while, I was genuinely shocked when anyone reached out, wanting to be my friend."

The isolation Childs felt in middle school stemmed from her shame at being treated so cruelly, because it made her believe something must be fundamentally wrong with her. She says now, "It would have helped so much if someone had stood up for me or simply next to me. Sometimes no one stands up, or it takes a long time for someone to stand up. That's why I hope the messages in this book, coming from outside the situation, will be heard by everyone who reads it. I hope they encourage people to stand up for others who are being bullied, even when it's hard. And I hope it helps people who are being bullied understand there is nothing wrong with them, and they have no reason to feel ashamed. I want them to know they are



Samantha Childs

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lovable, that life has challenges and different seasons, but things will be okay. They'll come out the other side of this hard situation wiser and even more beautiful. And they might be able to help others because of what they went through."

Bullying and kindness, Childs believes, are timelessly important and consistently relevant topics. "Through the lens of a bullied French bulldog, I wanted to explore the beauty of our differences, how we all belong, and how we are all lovable. I think these ideas are so important for how we view and treat not only other people but also ourselves. Bullying can take so many forms throughout our lives, as children and as adults, both externally and in our own minds. The way we talk to ourselves is powerful, and when we think negative thoughts, we're bullying ourselves. Treating ourselves and others with love and acceptance is the answer."

Henri le Frenchie knew about love and acceptance—he gave both freely. Endlessly entertaining and endlessly lovable, Childs says Henri had the most positive, upbeat, sweetest, goofiest personality and soulful, beautiful eyes. "He would look at me, and I would feel his love," she remembers. "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. The way he embraced life was my



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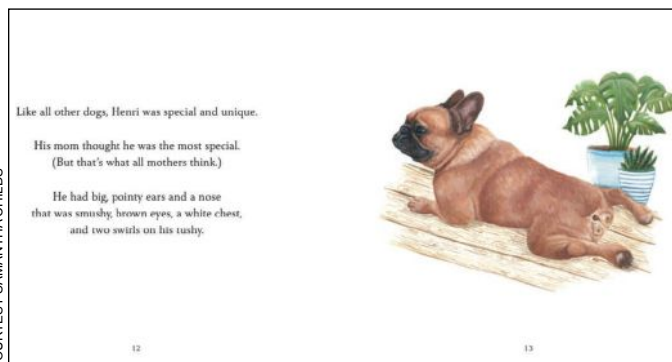
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inspiration. He was my hero and when people said that he was the way he was because of me, I felt so honored that they thought that. But I think he was the way he was because that's just how he was. I was so lucky to be his mom."

While the idea of writing a book with Henri at the center started with her desire to share her funny, adorable Frenchie with the world, Childs believes that children's books have power. "When you grow up with a book, the story becomes a part of you and how you view the world," she contends. "The book's messages are ones that I needed to hear when I was young and being bullied. They're messages I need to hear today, in fact. And as an adult, I still love reading children's books. 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."



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She particularly loved the idea of addressing the issue of bullying using dogs as the characters, she says, because dogs are so clearly lovable and innocent. "No one would think that a dog deserved to be bullied," she points out. "And dogs are so different from each other, in shape, size, color, personality, etc. But they are all dogs. And they're all lovable."

In this way, Childs believes dogs can be beautiful mirrors for humans. "I've learned so much from animals," she says. "And a children's book is the perfect form for playing with those ideas and expressing that."

The book's charm has much to do with the endearing canine characters on every page—each dog in the book is the real-life pet of a friend or family member, or someone Henri met and connected with on his travels or through his Instagram fame. That is, all except the "bully"—

that little guy was purely fictional and no one Henri ever met in real life. Illustrator Hannah Farr has been “the most extraordinary illustrator and friend to work with on this book,” says Childs. Incredibly, the two have never met face to face, as Farr lives in Cornwall, England. “While we live 5,353 miles apart, we’ve spoken on a regular basis for ten years, and I feel so grateful to have her in my life,” Childs reveals. “We’d go back and forth with ideas, brainstorming, sketches, tweaking, and creating the beautiful illustrations that now fill the pages of the book.”

And don’t forget, “If you’re ever feeling worried that there is something wrong with you, remember Henri the snorting Frenchie and know that you are lovable too.”

To get a sneak peek at Henri and the Magnificent Snort, visit henriandthemagnificentsnort.com or on Instagram @henriandthemagnificentsnort. And join Henri’s 67K Instagram followers @henrilefrenchie to get to know the Frenchie who inspired it all. You can see more of Hannah Farr’s illustrations at hannahfarr.co.uk or on Instagram @hannahfarrs.

Visit henriandthemagnificentsnort.com to find—



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- Bullying prevention resources
- Photos of the real dogs behind the characters in the book
- Reader’s gallery, where dogs, horses, cats, snakes, turtles, and even a mouse show their love for Henri and the Magnificent Snort. Add your pet’s photo to the gallery!
- Creative space where readers share art and writing inspired by the book and its topics



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