

New book aims to help children cope with death

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By Heather Rivers
ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

THAMESFORD — Everything was fine when five-year-old Carly MacArthur left for kindergarten one fall morning in October 2000.

However, by the time she arrived home her world was turned upside down.

"She went off to school and when she came home her Oma was gone," explained her mother, Thamesford author Henriette MacArthur.

During a routine operation, her beloved grandmother Dora Brekelmans, died suddenly at age 69.

"In the aftermath, my daughter, who is a very analytical little girl, had a lot of questions," MacArthur said.

Questions like: "Whether or not they can still see us?" and "Why don't they come back and tell us where they are?"

"It was very devastating and hard to put your trust in anything after that," MacArthur said.

So, MacArthur went off looking for a book that would help her daughter work through her grief — and while she did find a few, she "couldn't find anything about a sudden death or that applied to all circumstances," she explained.

From that moment MacArthur set out to write a story she hoped would help her daughter and validate some of her feelings and questions.

Seven years later, that story has become a book that has been welcomed by parents looking for ways to explain death to their children.

The book revolves around the



JOINT EFFORT: Thamesford author Henriette MacArthur, left, and St. Marys artist Anna Koot hold a copy of their collaboration called "Henry and Harriet."

Submitted photo

story of two caterpillars, Henry and Harriet, who become lifelong companions — until one day when Henry can't find Harriet, until he happens upon her empty cocoon.

"He had heard that his happened to all caterpillars eventually, but he didn't expect this to

be Harriet's time to leave," the soft covered book reads.

Delicately and gracefully illustrated by St. Marys, Ont. artist Anna Koot, the story takes readers on a journey into the questions

that Henry asks about the disappearance of his mate, while at the same time documenting Harriet's journey.

"Now she was a butterfly, Harriet could see everything ... she could understand why everything was the way it was, and she felt tremendous peace," the story reads.

MacArthur said her daughter

would read the story "again and again."

Because the main characters aren't human, and are without age specifications, the story can apply to many different circumstances.

While Carly, now 12, was the initial impetus for the story, MacArthur's younger son helped her further develop the manuscript — giving his approval on the wordings and pictures.

"I wrote it for one kid, but the other helped me finish it," she said.

The story was a form of therapy for both MacArthur and Koot, who both had recently lost a parent.

"We took on the project together to deal with the awful parts of losing somebody — make something positive out of it," she said.

A publisher did pick up "Henry and Harriet", but MacArthur said she found it "hard to let go of the creative rights to it" and started her own publishing company called More Than Words.

The book is for sale at Merrifield Book Shop where it was on the bestseller list for three weeks earlier this

year, even obtaining No. 1 status for a week.

"It's a beautifully illustrated book which handles the subject of death for children in a helpful way for them," said Laura Schneider of Merrifield's. "It's been well received by the people."

The book sells for \$14.50, including tax.

MacArthur, who formerly worked for VON Oxford, is currently working with the Alzheimer's Society of Oxford on a second book entitled, "Beaver Tales" that will help explain the disease to young children.

For more information visit www.morethanwordsbooks.ca.

