

Lifestyles

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'The Potter's Perfect Piece'

Clarence author draws inspiration from life



Kenneth Metzger, of Clarence, flips through a copy of his recently published children's book, "The Potter's Perfect Piece."

by ANDREA KIMBRIEL
Reporter

It took Kenneth Metzger about a year to put together his first book but only 10 minutes to come up with the story.

The Clarence resident's inspirations for "The Potter's Perfect Piece" were verses in the Bible and his own battle with cancer.

The book was published in March.

The children's book, marketed for ages 8 to 80, describes the journey of a small lump of clay as it is developed by an old man into a beautiful teacup fit for a king. It is a parable based on the story of the

potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18.

"This story speaks to people. It's a story of hope and of inspiration not to give up," he said.

The old man represents life, and the questions the clay asks as it is being molded, spun and put through a kiln are the same questions that Metzger asked while being treated for cancer.

Questions such as "Why me?" and "What have I done to deserve this?"

Metzger had cancer in 2002. He was on a feeding tube for six months, lost 35 pounds and spent more than two months sleeping only

in one-hour increments. His doctors at Roswell Park Cancer Institute gave him a 50 percent chance of recovery, he said.

"I was bitter," he said. "When I was diagnosed, I thought 'This is crazy, how can I have cancer? I'm a health nut.'"

He said his wife's support was one of the main reasons he had the strength to fight the disease. He dedicated the book to her.

The 51-year-old has been cancer-free for about five years but will deal with the permanent effects of his illness for the rest of his life. He has no saliva, so swallowing and eating are difficult. He said his wife, a nurse, has had to perform the Heimlich maneuver on him several times.

Metzger's favorite scene in his book was inspired by a drawing by the book's illustrator, Denise Armstrong. She asked him if he could find a place for it in the story. It shows the newly formed cup catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror and deciding that all of the trouble was worth it.

He said he had a similar moment when he chose to keep persevering, and that is the message he hopes to share with readers of the book — survivors of tragic circumstances can decide how to respond.

"I think you get to choose to be bitter and say 'My life is over,' or you can be better. The world is full of people who choose to be a solution, to help others who have had a similar experience," he said.

The little piece of clay in his story ultimately becomes a beautiful teacup and understands the reasons for the difficult experiences the old man put him through. Metzger said he has also come to see meaning in his own struggles.

The story is appealing to children but also has a message that Metzger believes will resonate with adults.

The whimsical illustrations on each page were created by Armstrong, an East

Amherst artist, and a friend of Metzger's. When he shared his idea for the story with her, she told him he needed to write it and she wanted to illustrate it.

Armstrong is also a cancer survivor. When she was diagnosed with a tumor more than 20 years ago, doctors thought she would die.

"When Ken came with the book, I connected with him because I, too, have experienced God's blessing as a survivor," she said.

She has been a professional artist for 30 years and has illustrated other children's books, women's devotionals and technical manuals.

"I think the message I would like to see come from the book is that God is in control of our lives. He has a plan for us. If that message can get through, people will have more peace," she said.

Armstrong is in the process of illustrating three more children's books that Metzger has

written and is hoping to publish. The other stories focus on themes such as generosity, obedience and humility.

Metzger said each is designed so parents can read them to children and talk about them. "The Potter's Perfect Piece" includes a discussion page to encourage conversations about the book.

"The Potter's Perfect Piece" was published by Winepress Publishing and is available at Bender's Parable Christian Store and The Farmer's Daughter Gifts and Antiques, where Metzger will be doing book signings this month. It can also be ordered from the Web site barnesandnoble.com and other online locations, as well as bookstores.

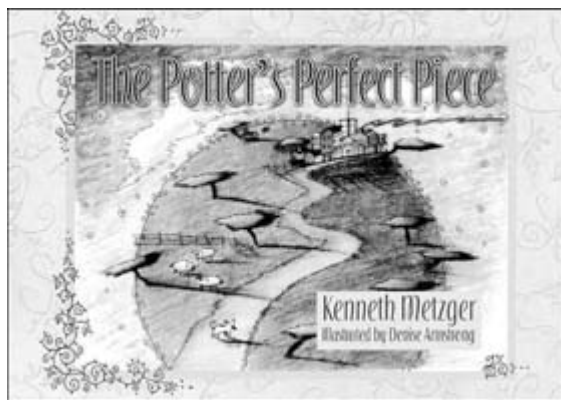
"In a nutshell, read it when life has you down, and go from 'Why me?' to 'What am I going to do about it?'" said Metzger.

Craft show set at Harris Hill church

The Harris Hill United Methodist Church will hold its annual craft show from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 17 at the church, 8495 Main St. A variety of vendors will be present and a silent auction and Dutch kitchen featuring homemade soup and baked goods will be available. Craft tables are still available. For more information, call the church office at 632-4688.

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Book signings for "The Potter's Perfect Piece" are from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturday, Nov. 17 at The Farmer's Daughter Gifts and Antiques, 8386 County Road, Clarence; and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 24 at Bender's Parable Christian Store, 8550 Sheridan Drive, Clarence.