

June 11, 2008

Authors' dogs spark children's books

• Pups wander, kids learn

• By Katelyn Farago • MCW This Week • June 11, 2008

- Judy Kessler of Mendham said one author's booth caught her eye at the [New York](#) International Toy Fair this past February. The 60-year-old Kessler said she took a copy of what was the author's first children's book and read it.
- "It was such a sweet, heartwarming story," she said.
- Kessler enjoyed the book so much that she said she invited the author to do a book reading and signing at her store -- the Mendham Apothecary, located at 88 East Main St. in Mendham.
- The book, "Casey and Bella Go To [New York City](#)," by Jane Lovascio, is the first in a series of children's books about the adventures of Lovascio's two real dogs: a Jack Russell terrier named Casey, and a tea cup Yorkie named Bella.
- A portion of the proceeds from each book in the series will go to a [nonprofit charity](#). For every "Casey and Bella Go To New York City" book sold online, Lovascio said \$2 will be donated to Loving Paws Assistance Dogs, an organization that trains therapy dogs for children with disabilities. She said she chose Loving Paws Assistance Dogs because it was an organization that worked with both children and animals.
- "I'm trying to make Casey and Bella the first book series that really gives back and teaches children to help others," Lovascio said.
- **Dogs as teaching tool**
- In the book, Casey and Bella sneak out while their masters are away and travel to New York City.
- The duo meet a variety of quirky characters along the way, including a poodle from the Upper West Side of [Manhattan](#). The poodle, who dons a diamond collar, initially acts superior, but Casey reminds Bella that it's what's inside that counts.
- "It doesn't matter where you live or what you wear, what makes you a good friend is being generous and fair," Casey said in the book.
- Kessler, of the Mendham Apothecary, said she enjoyed the positive messages that came through in "Casey and Bella Go To New York City."
- "You can never judge a book by its cover, just like you cannot judge someone by what they're wearing," she said. "It's within oneself. It's not about fancy clothes, or fancy houses, it's the mark one leaves upon life."
- Lovascio said the concept for "Casey and Bella Go To New York City" actually came from Casey herself. Casey knows how to jump up and hit the door handle, she said. The idea for the book was borne when Lovascio began wondering what would happen if Casey managed to get out of the house.

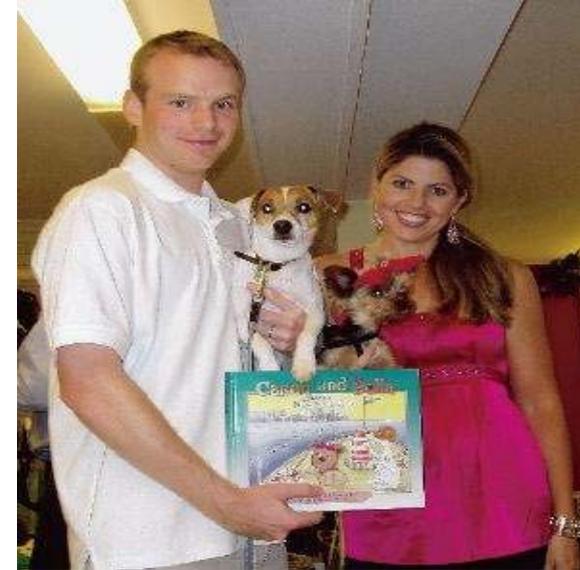


karen mancinnelli / mcw this week

Author Jane Lovascio, right, reads her children's book, 'Casey and Bella Go To New York City,' to Emily Walker, 7, left, and her sisters Molly, 4, and Lily, 19 months, at a book signing event at Mendham Apothecary. The book was inspired by Lovascio's two dogs, a Jack Russell terrier and a tea cup Yorkie.

• Charitable efforts

- The next book in the series, "Casey and Bella Go To [Hollywood](#)," will be released this fall and will benefit the Jubilee Center in Hoboken. The Jubilee Center is a nonprofit that provides a safe after-school environment for children from public housing.
- The children involved receive a hot meal at the center as well as tutoring and enrichment classes. Lovascio said she has been on the board at the center since having come in for a book signing shortly after her first Casey and Bella book was released.
- "What I'm hoping is that each book (in the series) leads me to a charity," she said.
- Lovascio's long-term goal is to create the Casey and Bella Foundation to benefit children and animals, she said.
- In order to promote the books and her charities, Lovascio said she hosts book readings and signings at schools free of charge and has never turned down an event.
- "With anything in life, you have to work hard and promote it," she said. "But I'm willing to put the time and the energy in. I'm willing to do as much promotion as possible. I've never said no to an event. Every event -- no matter how small -- every event leads to something else."
- Lovascio said Casey and Bella often tag along to the book signings, although she did not bring them to the one held at the Mendham Apothecary. She said she thinks meeting the characters makes the story more real for the children.
- "The dogs are a huge hit," she said. "The children want to meet the dogs, not the person who wrote the book. They're the stars -- not me."
- Next year, Lovascio said she plans to host a contest, asking children to submit ideas on where Casey and Bella should go next. The winner will be named and pictured as the co-author of the book. Though only the first book in the Casey and Bella series has been released by Big Tent Books, Lovascio said she has written six others, in which the dogs travel to Hollywood, [Boston](#), the carnival, the aquarium, the farm and school.
- **Katelyn Farago can be reached at (973) 428-6630 or kfarago@gannett.com.**



- Lovascio and her husband, Jeff, hold Casey and Bella, along with a copy of the book they inspired.

June 11, 2008