

Artist Cogan teams up with author Gotsch on new children's book

By Debra Mayeux
The Daily Times

FARMINGTON — An award-winning artist and an award-winning writer recently teamed up to write and illustrate a children's book about ways to escape bullying and abuse from a dog's point of view.

"Belle's Star" was written by Connie Gotsch, radio personality on KSJE 90.9 FM at San Juan College. The 14-chapter novel for children ages 8 to 12 is Gotsch's first children's book. She began writing it in 2005, and based the tale on her own dog, Kiri.

"Kiri, who came off of the reservation, was found by a friend of mine. She saw a man beating her and took her away from him," Gotsch said. "At first Kiri was very shy."

Gotsch shared her dog's story with a friend — Gwynne Spencer — who owned a children's book store. Spencer suggested Gotsch turn the tale into

a book to assist children who suffer from abuse.

"I used it to create a story about a dog removed from a situation who has to decide whether to stay with people or go out and be a wild dog," Gotsch said.

Once completing the novel and finding a publisher — Artemesia Publishing, a small Albuquerque-based firm, Gotsch knew she would need an illustrator. That's where artist John Cogan came into the picture.

"I was talking to Connie at one of the art shows at the college. She asked if I knew anybody who had done black-and-white illustrations," Cogan said. He had done some black-and-white drawings years ago and decided to take a shot at illustrating the book. "I did a couple of sample drawings, and they liked them."

Cogan is internationally known for his landscape acrylics, still life, portraits and wildlife images. He has been commissioned for works displayed at San Juan College. He shows work at El Prado Galleries in Sedona, Ariz., Galleries West in Jackson, Wyo., and Southwest Galleries in Dallas, Texas.

He is best known for his wildlife and landscape paintings. When Cogan had to draw pictures of Belle and a spunky soccer

playing girl named Darcy, who rescues the dog from abusive owners, he needed to find a model. The dog was no problem, Kiri became the image of Belle.

"He came over and photographed Kiri. He made her understand there are some prices to fame," Gotsch said.

Darcy was a little girl who is related to Cogan's dentist. Other characters were friends and neighbors.

Cogan used photographs to capture facial expressions and poses, then he started sketching. "It was something different. I don't do a lot of people, the dogs were up my alley," he said.

Cogan painted in between working on the book illustrations. He began the project in Fall 2008 and completed it this January.

The book is not yet available, as it is still in the printing process.

Gotsch, however, is sure it will be well-received. Its purpose is to assist children in dealing with difficult situations from moving from a familiar home to a parent's divorce or situations of physical abuse. It teaches lessons on how to react to situations through the dog's eyes.

Before finding Darcy, Belle never met a kind human. In the beginning Darcy terri-



fies her, but she soon learns to trust from characters in the books.

An on-line guide for adults accompanies the book. It could be used by parents to ask questions of their children, or it could be used in a group therapy situation. While Gotsch knows the book could potentially help children of abuse, she wrote it for everyone.

"I've already been asked to write a sequel. I'm working on one. Belle needs to learn some discipline and starts on agility training and has to learn some things," Gotsch said.

"Belle's Star" will be available in August. It can be pre-ordered at www.apbooks.net.

