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FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Grosse Pointe Theatre returns to classic with themes that transcend generations

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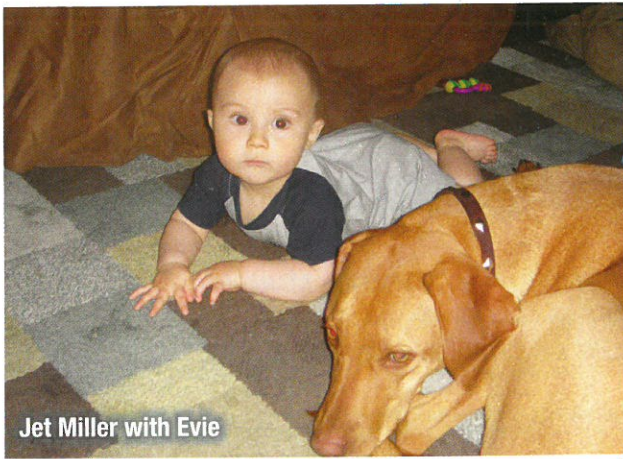
Bettejean tells of meeting Edmund and humble beginnings

TINY HOMES

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Featuring the best of Grosse Pointe life



Jet Miller with Evie

JET MILLER

DEFER STUDENT WINS WRITING CONTEST

By Anthony Viola

Jet Miller was shocked when he heard he had won. “I thought she said Jack at first,” he says.

The 11-year-old Grosse Pointe Park resident and his classmates, with help from their teacher, Kari Mannino at Defer Elementary, entered the University of Michigan-Dearborn Young Authors’ Writing Contest. About 260 entries from third through fifth grade students across the state were submitted; Jet’s was deemed the best.

Every year of the four-year-old contest, a student from Ms. Mannino’s class has won an award. This year, five of her students took home prizes, including Jet’s Grand Prize Award.

A half-day festival accompanied the contest in November at the Mardigian Library at UM-Dearborn. There were breakout sessions held by university students, a keynote speaker, Newberry Medal winner Christopher Paul Curtis, and, of course, the awards. The contest’s goal is to promote reading and writing skills in children and offer tips to adults on helping to develop their children’s literacy development.

Jet is an incredibly perceptive young man. Sitting in a Grosse Pointe Park restaurant on a cold December morning, he orders peppermint tea and has a hard time comparing himself to his younger sister.

“I can’t really say [I’m smarter than her] because we are years apart,” he says. “I mean, she would have to be the same age because you get smarter as you grow older. Maybe wiser, but not smarter.”

He is a product of the Magnet program and very supportive parents. His father, Justin Miller, says they started reading with him at an early age. Jet says he enjoys reading fantasy books, *The Hobbit* and *Percy Jackson* for example, and attributes a lot of his writing skills to reading those books.

These skills show in his poignant, award-winning story about the family dog, Evie. It’s the ubiquitous story of having to say goodbye to the family pet.

“We have to write about emotion in our class,” he says. “So, I thought that had a lot of emotion in it. That’s a story I can remember very clearly.”



Photo by Kip Kriigel

Jet Miller and Prof. Danielle DeFauw

The sensitive retelling of an emotional time in his life shows ability well beyond his years. Evie, a vizsla, was adopted four months before Jet was born. An older sister, Jet says. Evie became sick with Addison’s Disease, and in “Family,” Jet’s story, he remembers watching his father carry Evie out the door to go to the vet, hearing the phone ring an hour later, his mother answering, and knowing already what was happening.

He recalls how a cold door knob felt good on his sweaty palms and how after he got home from the vet, tears poured down his cheeks “like a waterfall on a mountain.” Jet realizes the true meaning of family, including Evie’s place in it.

He read his story at the festival in front of 110 other elementary students, nearly 100 adults and 40 college students. Jet says his story struck a chord with the audience.

“There were people crying,” he says.

And his father says he still can’t read it.

Jet wants to continue to study writing, even through college, because he enjoys the freedom.

“I can express myself anyway I want. I could write about anything. There’s not really a limit on what I can write about,” he says. “In math, if I wrote down any problem I wanted to, it wouldn’t really be the right answer, but in writing there’s not really a right answer.” ☐