

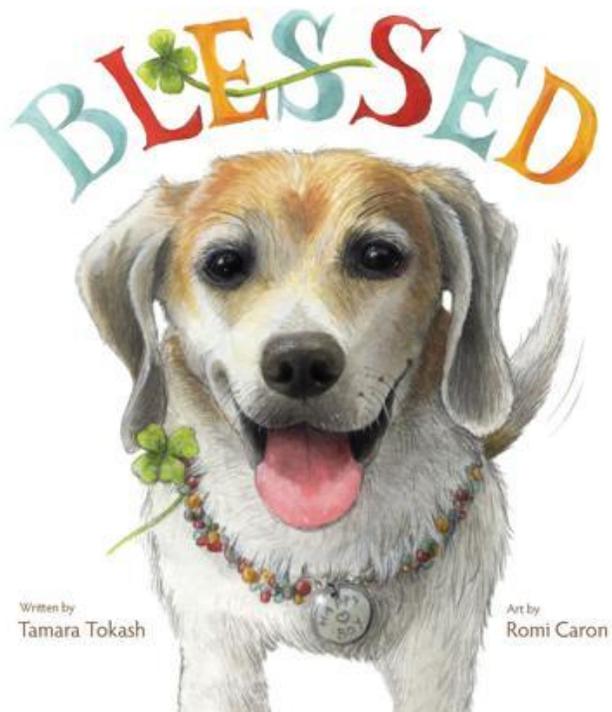
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EDITOR'S PICK, FEATURED

A dog's tale, from a dog's perspective - Stirling resident pens debut novel

By CLAUDIA CEVA Staff Writer

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'BLESSED' is dog wellness advisor and Stirling resident Tamara Tokash's first children's book. It is based on the story of the laboratory test beagle, Sammy, she and her family adopted.

LONG HILL TWP. – Dogs are members of the family and should be treated as such.

This is the belief of Stirling resident Tamara Tokash, a dog wellness advisor, has always had and hopes to convey to others through her business and her first children's book, "BLESSED," published March 1 by Shires Press.

The book, illustrated by Romi Caron, recounts the journey of Tokash's dog, Sammy, from being a laboratory test beagle to an adoptee who lived a long and happy life — all told from his perspective.



Sammy, she said, was part of a pilot program for the laboratory to see if a group of six test Beagles could adjust to life in a forever home instead of being euthanized.

"Once I realized and learned of this whole community of dogs that were experimented on, I was horrified," she said. "Then, I met him at the foster home and he became part of our family.

TAMARA TOKASH

Very soon thereafter, I knew that this dog had a story."

Sammy, in "BLESSED," spends nearly seven years as a laboratory test Beagle dreaming of becoming a "free" dog. After waiting and praying, he is fostered and put up for adoption. Once in his new family's home, Sammy has a bit of difficulty adjusting to going up and down stairs and walking on a leash, but learns in due time with much encouragement along the way.

Tokash said it was important to have patience with Sammy as he got used to his new, "vibrant," "awe-inspiring" life and to allow him to live it to the fullest until he passed at age 18.

She said she wanted to gear the story toward children in the hopes it could start a dialogue not only around the laboratory test Beagles but how hope and perseverance can pay off.

“It could speak to children of any race, religion, age – even adults. When things get tough, you just don’t give up and you always believe,” the Stirling resident said.

Tokash also provides a multitude of resources at the back of the book for ways in which readers make a difference, whether by adopting a laboratory dog, becoming an advocate for rescues and more.

“They can donate, they can potentially foster, they can just share the word with other people on social media and hopefully it can spread that way,” Tokash said.

She said since adopting Sammy, laboratories are now taking the time to socialize the test dogs and better prepare them for life outside of the facilities. The span of time the dogs actually spend in the laboratories is also much shorter.

“They see that they have value,” she said.

The book took roughly two years to write and publish, thanks to a “great” team of people.

Tokash particularly praised Caron for being able to bring Sammy to life through her illustrations on the pages.

“She didn’t just sketch and draw, she got a clear sense of who Sammy was through videos, and pictures, and stories and anecdotes,” she said.

Wellness Advice For Dogs

Wellness is a term thrown around that applies just as much to pets as it does people, according to Tokash.

The Long Hill native said in her first draft or two of the book, she did not focus as much on the nutrition and importance of allowing a dog to be a dog.

“The more I sat with the story, the more I felt this need to share that aspect,” she said.

In “BLESSED,” Sammy talks about eating raw meat, wild salmon, apples, broccoli, blueberries and spinach — not kibble. He is free to dig holes and take in all of the different scents on his walks with the family.

Tokash said she hopes readers will pause and ponder how they treat their own pets and begin to understand what a balanced diet for them might look like in addition to providing their pets more freedom to be themselves.

“Don’t take your cell phone out when you’re walking your dog because that’s time with your dog and your attention is not with your dog,” she said. “You’re not connected.”

Tokash believes a healthy life for a dog includes good nutrition and letting them know how much they are loved and needed instead of expecting them to do everything as they are told.

She suggested starting by replacing store-bought processed treats with fresh seasonal vegetables and fruits as snacks.

"If you strike that balance with the mind, the body, the spirit, you will really see what it yields in your dog and it's nothing short of miraculous," she said.

She noted how amazing it was to witness Sammy's own transformation and how he stayed healthy for the 11 years she and her family had him.

The main distinction between Tokash's holistic approach with her clients versus a regular dog trainer, she said, is most trainers focus on obedience and behavior whereas she believes good behavior comes from good food, socialization and an overall positive living environment.

For more information on Tamara Tokash's business and how to purchase "BLESSED", visit tamaratokash.com.

https://www.newjerseyhills.com/echoes-sentinel/news/a-dogs-tale-from-a-dog-s-perspective---stirling-resident-pens-debut-novel/article_0c32bd35-21a9-57e7-bdcb-7941dd8355d8.html