



SQUARE CIRCLE PRESS LLC
137 Ketcham Road
Voorheesville, NY 12186
(518) 432-6657
www.squarecirclepress.com
bookinfo@squarecirclepress.com

**AUTHOR
INTERVIEW
Q & A**

BOOK TITLE: I Know You Won't Forget
GROUP FACILITATOR/CONTACT: Mike Cagnetti, Living Resources
AUTHOR: Members of author group "Truly Blessed Ink" (pseud.)
ILLUSTRATOR: Carol Jordan

Q. What is I Know You Won't Forget about?

A. The story is about a young boy whose mother survives a brain injury. He has a difficult time understanding what has happened to her and why she suddenly acts differently than before her accident. They face some hard times but learn to work together to overcome her impairments. So the book is really about hope, understanding and working together to overcome obstacles.

Q. Why did a group of brain injury survivors decide to write a book?

A. There were two main reasons: 1) we wanted to pursue writing as a type of group therapy project, and 2) we wanted to find a way to use our own experiences to help people with brain injuries. We also thought that by working such a project we might develop new skills and abilities.

Q. How many authors contributed to this project?

A. More than 30 brain injuries survivors contributed to the writing of the book, off and on, for over three years. Due to various circumstances in our lives, members of the group would come and go, but everyone contributed in some way to the writing process. Since no two brain injuries are the same, everyone had different skills, abilities, and impairments. We really had to work together to stay focused on a coherent product.

Q. What was the writing process like within the group?

A. We created a plot summary in text through ongoing group discussions. Once we were all in agreement, we took the single ideas from the plot and expanded them into page concepts. We developed forms and used them to help keep us organized. Once we finished the final draft of the text, we focused on finding an illustrator. We pretty much thought we were done, but then the whole group process started again once we met the publisher and realized our amateur project could become a published product.

Q. Do you think the story is realistic?

A. We didn't want to write something that was too "clinical." Brain injury is very complex. No two brain injuries are the same, and each person is affected in a different way. So as a group we tried to determine our common issues so we could keep the story as simple and as applicable to as many brain injuries as possible. In the story, the mother's impairments and the strategies she uses to deal with them are very realistic. We included the strategies that we all use every day. We are living proof that these strategies work and that people can find happiness after brain injury.

Q. Who illustrated the book?

A. We placed an ad in our newsletter, *Survivor Connection*, looking for a person with a head injury to illustrate the book. Carol Jordan is a brain injury survivor who lives and works in Amsterdam, New York, and she responded to our ad. Carol is an amazing person who seemed to really blossom after her brain injury. She runs an art program for children with disabilities, dresses up as a clown to visit children in hospitals, and is one of the hardest working people we know. She had originally drawn the character of the young boy when she was young herself, and he stuck with her over the years. Once we received her illustrations we went through a short revision process because her drawings of Joey and his mom really helped us to better visualize the plot.

Q. The group was confronted with some obstacles along the way to publication. What were they and how did you overcome them?

A. They say you can't write by committee, and the basic issue of combining all of our thoughts and ideas into one coherent story was difficult. In addition to that, our brain injuries forced us to find innovative ways to use our strengths and work around our impairments, such as memory loss, lack of attention, work initiation, organizing ourselves and other issues. But ultimately the biggest obstacle for us had nothing to do with our brain injuries. About three months before publication, the agency where we held our group meetings went out of business in New York State. For a while we didn't have a home or a place to meet.

Q. How did the group find its new home?

A. We were determined to keep the authors together. We interviewed directors of other local brain injury programs to see if they would be a good fit for our program. There was a brief period of uncertainty, but eventually we affiliated with Living Resources, and we are really pleased to be a part of their *Whole Life Project for People with Brain Injuries*. They have been incredibly supportive of both the group and the book.

Q. Was the group involved in the publication process at all?

A. Very. Our publisher, Richard Vang of Square Circle Press, was very respectful of the group process. He understood that the book publication process was an opportunity for us to continue to learn, and he included us in as much of the day-to-day decisions as possible. Richard obviously did some of the work on his own, but then we, including Richard, worked together as a group to edit and rewrite the text, rearrange illustrations, and create the front and end matter. We think we played a much greater role in the publication process than most authors do.

Q. How did the group come up with the pen name, “Truly Blessed Ink”?

A. Obviously, with more than 30 authors in the group, deciding the authorship issue was a pretty complicated process. To simplify things we chose to use a pen name. Truly Blessed Ink is a play on TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury). We feel that we are all truly blessed to have survived our injuries and to be able to help others. Our written words make up the “ink” portion of the name, which is also word play on the concept of incorporation.

Q. How did you generate the money to fund the first printing of the book?

A. The book was funded from various sources, including our publisher and the Living Resources Foundation. But we also wanted others to be able to participate in the project by helping financially in smaller ways. Our publisher helped us organize a pre-publication sales program and a donation program. The writing group was transformed into a sales team, soliciting individuals and organizations for pre-order sales and donations. They also staffed the sales tables at spoke at brain injury conferences to generate more sales. It was a whole other learning process we never imagined.

Q. What will the group do with the royalties earned from sales of the book?

A. We have set up the *Living Resources Brain Injury Now Project Fund*, which will be the recipient of the royalties. The purpose of the Fund is to support similar projects created by people with head injuries and to offer them unique social and recreational opportunities. Once again, the group is responsible for this Fund and views it as yet another fulfilling learning opportunity.

Q. So ultimately what have the group members learned from the process of writing this book?

A. Individually, each of us has learned something different. But as a group, we learned to communicate and cooperate with others, organize our thoughts, manage our frustrations, set higher goals, and follow through with difficult tasks. We also learned what we are truly capable of when we put our mind to something and believe in ourselves.

Q. How do the members of the group feel about being published authors?

A. It feels terrific. This has been a wonderful experience to put on our “rèsumé of life.” But what is more important than being a published author is our knowing that this book is helping to make a difference in people’s lives. It has been very well received so far within the brain injury community.

Q. Helping others seems important to the authors. Why is it so important, and what other ways does the group express this?

A. We’ve been blessed with amazing people that support and help us each and every day. But in turn, we wanted to show the world that people with brain injuries can provide support and help to others as well. Helping others motivates us; it feels good, and it gives us a chance to help ourselves in the process. We are involved in several public service and fundraising projects in our community. An example is our annual support to a Albany organization that puts on an enormous Thanksgiving Dinner for those in need.

Q. What’s next for the authors?

A. We are currently focusing on the promotion and sales of the book. This includes interviews, book signings, and presentations. We want this project to educate not only families affected by brain injuries, but also the professionals in the field as well. When the book fever dies down a little, we want then to help others with TBI to create their own ambitious long-term projects like this book. We also plan to work with children to teach them to understand families that might be different from their own.

Q. Any plans for another book?

A. We are looking at ways to expand our newsletter, and we already have plans for a second book. Now that we understand the process of writing a book, the next one should be a lot easier.