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BRAIN INJURY SURVIVORS WRITE AND ILLUSTRATE CHILDREN'S BOOK

*Group therapy project results in picture book geared towards
children whose parents have suffered from a brain injury*

A group of Albany, New York brain injury survivors have been working for four years to create a book that can help children cope with the trauma of their parent suffering a brain injury. I Know You Won't Forget was written and illustrated as part of an innovative group rehabilitation program and has just been published by Square Circle Press. The book's authors, "Truly Blessed Ink," will be celebrating with a book release party on September 25th at the new headquarters of Living Resources at 300 Washington Avenue Extension in Albany. The event will take place from 4 – 7 pm and will feature book sales and an appearance by the members of the author group.

Until this past year, brain injuries have been either misunderstood or unknown to the general public. While the majority of the 1.4 million people diagnosed with a brain injury each year in the U.S. receive them in typical accidents, the situation has become increasingly prevalent as war veterans return home from Iraq with brain injuries received from IEDs and other blasts. Now referred to as the "signature" injury of the war, brain injury can take many forms and is quite often invisible to others, as the brain can suffer severe shock without the presence of open wounds to the head. A brain injury can result in loss of memory, language skills, vision, hearing or motor skills. Spouses and children often cannot understand or cope with the ways a brain injury affects their loved one and their family life.

Truly Blessed Ink hopes that their book can help with these family situations. I Know You Won't Forget tells the story about a young boy whose mother receives a brain injury. After being embarrassed by and ridiculed for his mom's inability to act according to their community's idea of "normal" behavior, the boy helps his mom with coping strategies, showing how a brain injury affects everyone in a family and how issues can be resolved. As the public recently learned from the story of ABC news

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anchor Bob Woodruff and his family, children can play an important role in the recovery of a parent suffering from a brain injury. The book attempts to educate these children about what their parent is dealing with and how they can help them.

The brain injury survivor group has other hopes for the book as well. “We also wanted to hold this project up as an example to other professionals in the brain injury rehabilitation industry. New approaches to brain injury therapy such as this provide a sense of meaning and accomplishment to brain injury survivors. We are still learning so much about these injuries, and many different avenues for rehabilitation need to be explored,” explained Michael Cognetti, facilitator of the group at Living Resources.

In addition to the authors of the book, the illustrator is a brain injury survivor as well. Carol Jordan suffered a brain injury in 2003 and currently owns and operates a small arts and crafts studio for individuals with disabilities in Amsterdam, New York.

Both the author group and the illustrator worked very closely with the publisher on all aspects of the book’s publication process. Richard Vang of Square Circle Press met with the group on a frequent basis to discuss the project, working with hem to edit the manuscript, select illustrations and explain the details of bringing their story from idea to publication. “I can’t tell you how profound an experience this has been for me. In addition to being intelligent, interested and engaging, the members of the author group have been some of the friendliest and most welcoming people I have ever met. It was a personal joy for me to see the look of pride on their faces as I presented each phase of the finished product to them.”

Members of the group have been appearing at brain injury conferences to discuss their project, and are now highly sought after as public speakers at similar venues. To help fund the project, the group went into the community to solicit pre-publication sales, further expanding their roles and involvement in the publication process. Further financial support of the book project was provided by Living Resources, which now houses the author group as well.

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Responding to the lack of services for individuals with traumatic or acquired brain injuries, Living Resources joined with Neuro-Psychologic Rehabilitation Services to create a therapeutic model to address the deficits that occur with brain injuries. A holistic, integrated system of activities and therapy aimed at increasing independence and improving self-esteem was developed; this specialized area of services became known as the Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Department. Today, this program continues to emerge as a leader in long-term support for people with head injuries. Through their generous financial support of this project, Living Resources voiced a strong commitment to improving the lives of those affected by this complex injury.

The book has been well-received within the brain injury community, including such as organizations as the Brain Injury Association of New York State and the Brain Injury Association of America. Trisha Meili, author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *I Am the Central Park Jogger: A Story of Hope and Possibility*, had this to say: “As a brain injury survivor, I am so moved by the authors’ dedication to bring understanding and hope to those affected by traumatic brain injury. This simple story, with wonderful illustrations that make you feel a part of each scene, will help children understand how a brain injury can affect someone. Most importantly, it lets them know that they can be an important part of the healing process. *I Know You Won’t Forget* reminds us that with love and support, there is hope.”

The book is being distributed nationally to both the library and retail markets. To order copies of *I Know You Won’t Forget*, contact your local bookstore or call 1-800-431-1579. Online ordering and detailed information about the book is available at the publishers web site, www.squarecirclepress.com.

PUBLICATION INFORMATION, AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHIES

Title: I Know You Won't Forget

Author: Truly Blessed Ink (pseudonym)

Illustrator: Carol Jordan

ISBNs: 978-0-9789066-1-0; 0-9789066-1-6

LCCN: 2007901754

Retail Price: \$16.95

Distributors: BCH Fulfillment & Distribution/Ingram (retail); Baker & Taylor (libraries)

Book Specifications: 40 pages, full color, 10 x 8 inches, hardcover w/ laminated casewrap

Age Level: 8 and up

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Author bio: This book was written by survivors of traumatic brain injury participating in the New York State Department of Health/Medicaid Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver program. They receive support in their homes and communities throughout New York's Capital Region as they pursue their individual goals. In 2003, they established their first weekly group, "Brainstormers," through Crotched Mountain Community Partnership. In 2007, the authors chose to participate in a self-directed group program through Living Resources. Together they provide and receive peer support, plan and participate in social activities, and create projects designed to help others and raise awareness of TBI. Today, they have established ten different groups, and several more groups are being developed. More than 30 survivors have contributed to the creation of this book under the pseudonym, "Truly Blessed Ink."

Illustrator bio: Carol Jordan is a wife, mother and grandmother who owns and operates a small arts and crafts studio in Amsterdam, New York. She holds classes almost daily for individuals with disabilities, many of whom are supported by programs through Liberty Enterprises, an ARC agency. In 2003, Carol suffered a traumatic brain injury following brain surgery to remove an acoustic neuroma. She now suffers from total hearing loss in her left ear, mild facial paralysis, and difficulties with balance. As someone who has enjoyed drawing and painting her entire life, Carol believes that art is an effective way to bring out the feelings hidden deep inside us all. She hopes that through her illustrations of the story of Joey and his mom, the family members and friends of TBI survivors will better understand the ways they can help their loved ones.

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