

## Shea Megale Promotes 'Marvelous Mercer' Book

Has book signing tour and appears on 'Today Show' in New York.

By Adam Toobin  
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Virginia Run resident Shea Megale, 12, and her helper dog, Mercer, made their TV debut on the "Today Show" this week. Her appearance was to promote her book, "Marvelous Mercer," about her helper dog. This is one of many TV shows in the works. On Oct. 12, she will appear on the "Montel Williams" show, and possibly "Larry King Live," and "Oprah." She also had a book signing at FAO Schwartz in New York.

THE DAUGHTER of Larry and Megan Megale, Shea is living with the disease, Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) type 2. SMA makes Shea's muscles weaker as she ages and "it affects her from the waist up," explained her mother Megan.

"Shea had already written the book and one day I found and read it and was so touched and impressed that I knew that I had to share the book with others," said her mother.

Shea said she "never thought of being a writer for a living, because I don't think I could write if I had to do it."

Mercer is trained and donated by the Canine Companions for Independence in Medford, NY. He is a mix of black Labrador and golden retriever and has become extra hands and feet for Shea. He attends Stone Middle School with Shea where she is a seventh-grader.

"Marvelous Mercer" is the first book in a six-book series. In Mercer's first book, he does all his chores for Shea, carries her backpack, picks things up for her, tucks her in at night, and then turns her light off and settles into his kennel.

"Mercer has become my best friend and has been more emotional support for me" [than anything]," said Shea. "Mercer can open doors, ring a door bell, carry my lunch and books at school, and only barks on command."

Shea and her mom stayed in New York for two weeks of training before the dog could be placed in their home. They started the search for a helper dog when Shea was 5 and they were not sure how the dog would affect her emotionally.

"We were told that they train over 200 dogs but maybe only 60 dogs really make it," said her mom.

"When Mercer first came home with us it was really difficult on the family, because no one else could pet or bond with him other than Shea." Now he has full reign in the home — even being the only one of the three dogs they have that's allowed to sit on the sofa, said her mom.

CATHERINE CONLEY, the librarian at Virginia Run Elementary who edited the book, added: "Shea is really a great writer and it has been great working with her, and I am so proud of her."

Shea and her mom hope the book will bring more attention to this disease and also "to make people realize that life is so very precious and should not be taken lightly," said Megan. "I want people to know that if you don't do something that brightens the life of someone else then you are wasting time. Life is not all about making lots of money and having lots of things, but doing something that affects someone's life in a positive way."

In a confident voice, Shea said "this disease has affected me in a positive way. Everyday someone comes up to me and says that they admire me because everyday they go home worried about something really stupid, and when they think of me it really makes no sense to worry about something



Shea Megale with her dog Mercer.

so silly. The fact that I have that affect on people really makes life worth living." She speaks of her spiritual strength being so strong and that this helps her keep a positive outlook on life.

SHEA ALSO spoke of the support that she gets from her sister Kelly and brother Matthew, and how normal they make life for her.

"We argue and fight just like any other siblings," said Shea. Kelly said that the arguing does not happen often in a normal day as she looks at her little sister and tells her, "how very proud I am of what you are doing with your book and how much I just love you."

"Reading the book has given me insight as to what Shea's life is really like. The most appealing piece of this project is that the lesson is being taught through her dog Mercer," said her mother.

Shea added, "I have amazing family and amazing parents." Looking in the eyes of her mother, Shea said, "Mom you and dad are always there for me and I thank you so much."

To learn more about Shea and Mercer, visit <http://www.dbdynamics.com/mercero/> .

