



GIRL DOGGEDLY TURNS PAIN INTO LITERARY GAIN

WHEEL-CHAIR BOUND AND PUBLISHED AT AGE 12

By **CYNTHIA R. FAGEN**

September 28, 2007 -- Shea Megale is a 12-year-old forced by a rare neurological illness to use a wheelchair -- and a writer whose fanciful stories about a disabled girl and her hero dog will stock FAO Schwarz's bookshelves tomorrow.

As part of a six-series deal, some of the book's profits will go toward seeking a cure for spinal muscular atrophy type 2.

The hero of "Marvelous Mercer" is based on Shea's assistance dog, a 5-year-old black Lab who in real life holds Shea's purse, opens doors, retrieves dropped pencils and puts his paws on the counter to hand a clerk a credit card.

But in the book, Mercer also does the things Shea can't. For instance, when Shea wonders aloud what it would be like to ice skate, Mercer sneaks off to a rink with some furry pals - so he can learn to skate and tell Shea what it feels like.

"I didn't decide, 'OK, I'm going to write about ice skating,'" said Shea, of Centreville, Va. "I don't get my stories from dreams, either. I just sit down and write. That's it."

Megan Megale, 44, stumbled upon her daughter's literary trove in a diary.

"It was a real slap in the face to realize Shea wanted to know about things she couldn't do," said Megan, whose brother, Manhattan graphic artist Curt Wagner, illustrated the book.

Said Wagner: "Shea told me exactly what she wanted."

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