Local teacher's children's book tackles topics of diversity and acceptance

By Katherine R. Dougan

Welcome to the world of Noogles McFluff and Princess Lula, a magical place that comes to life in author Debbie Marler's children's book, *The Island of WillowWind*. A teacher at Clinton Junior High School (CJHS), Marler wrote, and her daughter, Brittany, illustrated the book over the past couple of years. Brittany Brewer, a Clinton High School graduate, is a graphic designer for Sony PlayStation in California.

"My daughter, Brie, created these wonderful creatures for a project she did when she attended MSU," Marler said, adding that she liked the creatures so much she decided to write a story about them. "One thing led to another, and it morphed into a children's book."

Marler teaches eighth grade English at CJHS. She has written poetry and has always wanted to do more writing; however, as a single parent of two children, her daughter, Brittany, and her son, Christopher Brewer, she was always busy. In addition to teaching, "there was Attaché, cheerleading, student council, always something, but I always wanted to write."

After her children graduated, she realized it was time.

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Debbie Marler (center) reads her book to Ivy (left) and ZZ (right) Wallace.

"God's link tells you when it's the right time to do something. It all came together," said Marler.

It took a couple of years for the story to come together. Once the book, which is about diversity and acceptance, was completed, then Marler wasn't sure where to go with it next, as she didn't have an agent or a publisher. She decided to publish the book herself; and, in the summer of 2018, *The Island of WillowWind* was accepted into the Mississippi Book Festival, a large and reputable book festival held in Jackson. She was able to meet other authors and meet many people who not only offered encouragement but also purchased the book.

The book festival experience and feedback was valuable and encouraging, said Marler. She also solicited feedback from her kids at school; however, they didn't know Marler was the author when they read the book and responded to her questions about it. Marler said it made her nervous to have her students read the book, but she knew this was a good way to honestly find out whether or not they liked it.

"They were very positive, then they said they liked it."

In the book, Princess Lula travels throughout the Island of WillowWind, talking to the island's residents and taking photographs of them.

"Lula goes around the island and meets with different creatures. At the end, she shows how different on the outside, but same on the inside, everyone is," Marler said. "We want to celebrate diversity."

The website for the book, www.islandofwillowwind.com, advertises the book and offers information about Marler, her daughter, Brittany, and her son, Christopher. On the site, Christopher narrates the book in English and Spanish.

"Christopher wants to do some animation with it, and, since Brittany is involved in animation, we want to have the story online, and animate some of the pages."

This summer, Marler plans to take as many books as she can to area hospitals, including Blair E. Batson Children's Hospital in Jackson, and hopes she can read to the kids there. Her son and daughter, who come home during the summer, will also help with this venture. Plans include participating in the Quisenberry Library's summer program, to read her book to children there, as well.

Marler says she has donated books to the Clinton Public Schools and also

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