

'Holly's Halo'

Petal mother-daughter team create arty children's book

By **ROYCE ARMSTRONG**
American Correspondent

GRIEF LED A PETAL 6-year-old to write a book before many children her age have learned to read, and quite possibly gave her direction for the rest of her life.

"I wrote the book," Samantha Gronmeyer said, "because when I shared the story with other people it made me feel not as sad and helped other people to know how I felt."

Samantha, now 10, is attending book signings throughout the Hattiesburg area with her children's book, "Holly's Halo." She first wrote the book about her puppy, Holly, four years ago.

Shortly after moving to the Hattiesburg area, a terror-stricken Samantha watched as her puppy, which was playing with another dog, ran out into the street in front of a truck.

"We had not built a fence for the dogs yet," Larry Gronmeyer, Samantha's father said. "The truck driver didn't even bother to slow down."

The puppy, named Holly, came to Samantha in a dream one night as she was struggling with the grief of losing her pet. The two romped and played throughout the dream just as they had when the puppy was still alive.

The following morning Samantha realized that she would always be able to have her puppy with her

in her mind. In this way she is able to begin dealing with her grief and moving ahead with her life.

And, she wrote the book about the dog coming to visit her in her dream.

Not only has the story helped Samantha deal with her own grief, it is a touching story that other people can relate to as well.

Amy Merino, of Petal, has purchased four of the books as Christmas presents. She has three small children and will also give copies to nieces and nephews.

"I cried when I read the story," Merino said.

"This book is not only for children. It is a very sweet story. In this book the little girl discovers that even though she lost the pet, she still has a lot of wonderful memories. I bought one for my sister who recently lost a pet."

"When you take an animal into your life and your heart and then



Jinks

you lose them, you wonder why we do that," said Jeanna Jinks, Samantha's mother.

"We realized that we were not responsible pet owners because we did not have a fence. We put a fence up right away and have not lost a dog since."

Since losing Holly, Samantha has become an advocate of responsible pet ownership. The family now has five cats, three dogs,

chickens, parakeets and is planning to add horses and perhaps goats to the collection.

Samantha volunteers her free time to work at a local veterinary clinic and also at Southern Pines Animal Shelter.

Whenever possible, Samantha said she encourages people to spay and neuter their pets and keep them secured in appropriate pens and enclosures.

Alex Barker, 10, daughter of Jeannie and Chris Barker of Petal, enjoyed the story. Alex's after-school program bought the book and Alex read it aloud to her classmates.

"I liked the story very well," Alex said.

"It is a fantastic book. It is sad in the beginning but not sad at the end. It is very funny and very cool."

The book has taken four years to produce, Jinks said, because it took her a while to realize that not only was it a wonderful story, but that it was a story she could illustrate and publish.

Jinks, who is a professional artist with her own studio, took on the task of helping her daughter publish the book. She made 20 full-sized watercolor paintings for the illustrations.

The project took more than six months to complete and the finished book was only recently delivered.

The book costs \$17.95. A portion of the proceeds from book sales is being donated to the



Submitted photo

SAMANTHA GRONMEYER with her new dog, Tommy.

Southern Pines Animal Shelter.

The book can be purchased at Garden Gate Florist, Panther Pet Hospital, Merle Norman and More!, The Willberry Patch, Antique Mall on Main and Petal Animal Clinic in Petal; and Main

Street Books and Westside Studio in Hattiesburg. For details, go to www.jinksstudio.com.

Correspondent Royce Armstrong may be reached at rarmstrong@hughes.net or (601) 766-9624.