

Children's book tells sad tale through beagle's eyes

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Hour Staff Writer

NORWALK, CT — What if man's best friend could communicate about all the things he witnesses when his owners think no one is watching or listening?

That is the question that led anti-drug advocate Ginger Katz to write a story about the death of her son, Ian, from the perspective of Ian's pet beagle, Sunny — that and a moment she shared with Sunny the night Ian died.

"Sunny tried to wake me up the night that Ian died," Katz said. "He came into my room and tried to wake me, but I was in a deep sleep and I just thought Sunny wanted to go out, so I pushed him away and went back to sleep. Now I believe he was trying to tell me something. "Ian Katz died of a drug overdose in 1996.

Katz wrote "Sunny's Story: How to save a young life" from the Sunny's point of view. The self-published story starts with the day the Katz family went to the animal shelter to get Sunny. Katz writes: "Then I saw a girl and a boy, and the boy saw me. He had a big smile and shiny brown hair that fell into his eyes. He was thin and strong, and looked as if he would be very good at running and playing. That was Ian!"

The story continues with Ian's decline as he joined the a crowd of pot-smoking students in high school, to when he became addicted to heroin in college and ends with the night Ian died. On that night, Katz said she and Ian had a heart-to-heart in which he said he really needed help and that he wanted to go into rehabilitation the next day.

"That conversation is why I was so sound asleep when Sunny came in my room," Katz said. "It was the first good night's sleep I'd had in five months. I felt like I didn't have to worry about Ian."

Katz wrote: "After awhile, Ginger saw me sitting next to the bed and reached down to lift me up so I could snuggle next to Ian one more time. I lay there with my head on his heart and cried. That's the end of my story of how we lost the best boy in the world."

Katz has given her Courage to Speak presentation about Ian's drug addiction and death more than 800 times, but this book was a much more difficult experience.

"This was unbelievably hard to write," Katz said. "It took me three years. There were all these pages on the desk of these really good memories and good times."

The book is part of the Courage to Speak curriculum in the third, fourth and fifth grades, but it can touch the lives of *readers of any age*, Katz said. She hopes that parents will read the book to their children.

"The number one key to drug prevention is parent and child discussion. But only one in three parents has this dialogue with their children because it's hard to do or they don't know how to

start it," Katz said. "This book is a tool to explain addiction and the danger of drugs and an easier way to get the topic out there. If parents have that discussion, the child has a 57 percent better chance of not using drugs."

Katz will sign copies of "Sunny's Story" at the **Courage to Speak's Empowering Youth to be Drug-Free Family Night tonight** at 5:30 p.m. at West Rocks Middle School. State Rep. Lawrence F. Cafero Jr., R-142, will emcee the annual event.

"I'm delighted to be able to lend a hand to help this wonderful organization that does so much in the area of youth substance abuse. We all have first-hand knowledge of the devastation and tragedy that can take place if we as parents and mentors are not vigilant when it comes to our young people," Cafero said. "We must all take responsibility for dealing with this issue, in our homes and our communities."

This year's event will highlight the work of Norwalk's seventh- and fourth-graders. Joining the evening's agenda will be Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia and Chief of Police Harry Rilling.

Also on hand will be Norwalk Superintendent of Schools Sal Corda as well as district principals, teachers, members of the business community and other local elected officials.

For more information visit www.couragetospeak.org .