

The Gift of the Ladybug Woman turns pain of son's death into children's book

By GARY SEMAN JR.
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A German Village woman has turned personal anguish into global awareness after her son died from a rare neurometabolic disorder.

Carole Amber is the author of *The Gift of the Ladybug*, a children's book that teaches love, peace, self-respect and acceptance.

The book celebrates the life of her son, TJ, who died April 5, 2009, from Leigh syndrome, a mitochondrial disease that affects the central nervous system. There is no cure for the disease, which usually affects infants.

As part of Global Mitochondrial Disease Awareness Week, Amber will be signing newly released hardcover copies of *Ladybug* from 5 to 7 p.m. Sept. 20 at the Celebrate Local store in Easton.

Upon the release of the book, Jan. 28 — coinciding with her son's birthday — Amber gave 70 percent of her proceeds to the United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation. Her plan is to continue to give 30 percent of book profits to the foundation (www.umdf.org).

The trouble started when TJ was 6 months old. Amber and her husband Troy noticed that he was having difficulty with head control.

After four months of testing, a neurologist at the Cleveland Clinic delivered the bad news: TJ likely wouldn't live past his third birthday.

He died at 14 months old.

Naturally devastated, the couple was on the car ride home on a rainy cold December when the idea for the book struck, Amber said.

"I feel like it was divinely inspired," she said. "I feel like it came to me and through me by something that was greater than myself."

Amber said she wrote the story in about 90 minutes.

"It brought me wonderful relief in that terrifying moment," she said.

The story line revolves around two horses that learn their son is a ladybug.

It was an instant hit, becoming the No. 1 Mover & Shaker and the No. 2 Hottest New Children's Book on Amazon.

"I was pleasantly surprised at how well the book has been received and by families of all kinds — perfectly healthy families and children to families dealing with life-threatening illnesses," Amber said.

Troy Amber said it's been an uplifting experience.

"It's been so rewarding to see how this book has impacted other people's lives, people searching for something, searching for help in this world," he said.

"It's opened my eyes to this world. It's a rewarding thing when you see you can help in that kind of way."

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German Village resident Carole Amber holds her late son, TJ, whose death from Leigh syndrome inspired her to write the book *The Gift of the Ladybug*. She will be signing copies of the book from 5 to 7 p.m. Sept. 20 at the Celebrate Local store in Easton. A portion of the proceeds will go to the United Mitochondrial Disease Foundation.

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