

Former teacher: Say no to dares

C. C. resident Crawford releases third children's book, "I Dare You Danger"

By Giles Bruce

Staff Writer

When Joyce Holton Crawford retired from teaching eight years ago, she lost the ability to positively affect kids' lives on a daily basis. So she became a children's book writer.

Not for the money or to show off her writing chops, but to continue doing what she did in her teaching days: help children.

Crawford, who taught mostly fourth-graders in her nine years at Washington School and 26 years at Lincoln School, released a new book recently. Before reading to students at her old stomping grounds at the Lincoln library last week, she spoke with the *Press* about her latest work.

"I try to put a lesson in (each) book," she says. "Kids always say, 'I dare you! I double dare you!'"

Thus, the inspiration for "I Dare You Disaster."

Published by Tate Publishing and Enterprises, the new book focuses on fifth-graders Jeff and Greg, best friends who are dared by middle-school bullies to spend a night at their school. If they follow through with the dare, the bullies will leave them alone.

Jeff and Greg accept the dare, confident they won't get caught. But surprises await them on that fateful night in the school.

"The kids here at Lincoln will recognize the school," Crawford says. "I used the layout at Lincoln since I taught here so many years."

That night, at 2 a.m., Jeff and Greg hear glass breaking and men's voices.

"Then they know they're not alone, and think that maybe the dare wasn't a swell thing after all," Crawford says.

The lesson, she adds, is that it's a lot easier to plan something like this than to actually follow through with it.

The solution? Students should be more welcoming to their younger counterparts. Rather than scare them, they should come up with activities that will make the newbies feel more comfortable, the author says.

Author

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Joyce Holton Crawford, a former Charles City school teacher, holds a piggybank as she tells students at Lincoln Elementary School last week that they should be saving big words in an imaginary piggybank. She also talked to the kids about the importance of reading and writing. Crawford recently released her third children's book.

— Press photo by Giles Bruce

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C.C. writer has now had five books published, three for children

Author

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All of Crawford's books are similar, in that they each have a specific theme and a lesson, and take place in schools.

"I try to do it in a school setting, so all the kids have had that experience," she says. "I try to make it realistic, so kids can identify. There are kids who've actually been given a dare."

Her first book, "Don't Call Me Michael," centered on bullying, while the next one, "Thumbs Up or Thumbs Down," discussed warning signs for sexual molestation. The new book involves bullying as well, but more specifically, students being pressured into doing something they don't necessarily want to do. Crawford always knew she wanted to be a published author. In the early '90s, she would bring her rejection letters from publishers to school to show her students.

"I said, 'One day I'm going to have a children's book published,'" she recalls.

It was her way of teaching her students to never give up.

"Maybe it'll never happen, but you have to keep trying," she would tell them. "Don't quit. Have a dream and go for it."

She did — and it paid off.

“When you get your first book and you’re name’s on it, it’s indescribable,” she says.

Crawford has now had a total of five books published (the other two are about Charles City’s suspension bridge and sesquicentennial, respectively). Her career has come full circle. She’s back in schools, reading her books to students the same ages as the ones she used to teach.

“I always wanted to write books for children,” she says. “There are never enough books for kids.

“For me, it’s a hobby; it isn’t a job,” she says of her writing career. “I don’t pressure myself. I don’t have deadlines.”

“I Dare You Disaster” will be available on Amazon and at book stores July 3. Her website is at joyceholtoncrawford.weebly.com.

When the kids walk into the room on the recent day, Crawford immediately goes into teacher mode.

“How are you?” she asks the assembled first-, second- and third-graders in a high-pitched voice, drawing her syllables out. She gives them tips about the writing process. She explains the importance of reading and being read to. She tells them to store away big words in an imaginary piggy bank.

Once a teacher, always a teacher.



Charles City author Joyce Holton Crawford speaks to students at Lincoln Elementary School last week next to copies of her three children’s books. — Press photo by Giles Bruce