

Meteorologist mom pens children's books

NO WORDS CAN ADEQUATELY or eloquently describe the loss of a child. When veteran meteorologist **Kristine Kahanek** lost her baby, Katherine Elizabeth, one month before her due date, she took a hiatus from television to weather the storm, and since, Kristine says, “she’s sort of been our family’s guardian angel.”

Three years would pass before Kristine joined Channel 11, KTVT-TV, the CBS affiliate, in the fall of 2002, becoming the first female Chief Meteorologist in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. After numerous calls at the TV station from parents whose children



Author
Kristine Kahanek.
Profile photo/Mike Newman

were afraid of bad weather, Kristine decided to write a book to ease children's fears. There was no question who the inspiration would be for her heroine, a guardian angel named Katie.

Produced by K Co. Kids Publishing, *Katie and the Magic Umbrella* appeals to children ages 4–10 with fun weather facts; colorful illustrations by Michael Albee, Valerie Jimenez, and Jennifer Kindert; a Q&A; and a glossary of weather terms. The book grew to be a series and then a collectible line of merchandise including a coloring book, an educational DVD, and a youth-sized umbrella with pink wings. There is also a plush 18" Katie doll. Holding the doll, Kristine shares, “I wanted a tangible way to honor Katherine’s memory. I can just see little girls and boys holding on to her if they’re afraid.”

The main characters of the series, Alex and Grace, are based on Kristine’s two other children, Jared who is almost 12, and Savannah, 8. In the first book, *Katie and the Magic Umbrella: A Stormy Adventure*, Katie takes the children on a magical journey around a thunderstorm where they learn about cumulonimbus clouds, hail, and lightning. In the second book, *Katie and the Magic Umbrella: On Snowflake Trail*, Katie guides Grace and Alex along Snowflake Trail where they learn about snow, sleet and blizzards.

Kristine calls the books “kid-approved” because her children helped her write them. “They were very vocal with their ideas and opinions, like the angel dust that helps get rid of the tornado at the end of the first book...Jared came up with that.”

Kristine has read the books at Jared’s and Savannah’s schools and said they’re really proud of Mom. In fact, she makes regular appearances at Collin and Tarrant county schools.

“The response at the schools has been fantastic,” says Kristine. “It makes it all worthwhile. The kids love to learn about weather, and I’ve always had such a passion for it.”

She adds, “My whole goal at the schools is to encourage children to think about weather safety. *Where do I go in my house if there is a tornado? What do I do if I’m outside on the soccer field and there’s lightning?* The teachers love it, too, because it’s a tool to teach the simple science concepts of severe weather.”

When she’s not making regular appearances at schools or libraries, Kristine speaks at businesses. Recently, she attended a picnic for Frito-Lay and spoke to the children of the employees. She also speaks at hospitals. Last spring, she spoke at The Medical Center of Plano’s Healing Matters group for parents who’ve lost their baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or early infant death. She recalls, “That was a way for me to pay tribute to Katherine’s memory, and it was a way for me to heal as well.”

From publishing to now promoting *Katie and the Magic Umbrella*, Kristine is most proud that she’s become a savvy entrepreneur. “I’ve always worked for someone else and I’ve found that I work harder than I ever did running my own business,” she says. “You have to wear so many hats!”

After receiving her bachelor's degree in meteorology from Texas A&M University, Kristine had a brief stint with the National Weather Service in Austin. Her first job in television was in Waco at KXXV-TV. Later, she moved back to Austin to report morning weather for the ABC affiliate, KVUE-TV. Then, she accepted a position at WFAA-TV, the ABC affiliate, where she worked for over four years before moving over to KTVT-TV.

Kristine signed off from television in May of last year, and possibly for good. "I don't miss it!" she stresses. "I did it for 20 years with a lot of sacrifices. The hours are tough."

So what's in the forecast for this veteran meteorologist? "I've got another 20 years of work left so it's as if I can start a second career! I think a lot of people are reinventing themselves in their 40s. I've always wanted to go into the medical field. I might pursue a nursing degree."

Katie and the Magic Umbrella books are available at Legacy Books, Plano libraries, Barnes & Noble Creekwalk Village, and Learning Express. Visit katieandthemagicumbrella.com.

— BRIT MOTT

excerpt

From *Katie and the Magic Umbrella: A Stormy Adventure*

"Watch the storm cloud closely," Katie told the children. "When you see a flash of lightning, count until you hear the thunder."

Grace and Alex watched until they saw a bolt. "1...2...3...4...5," KAA-BAM!

"Katie, I counted to five!" exclaimed Grace.

"That means the lightning flash is about one mile away." Katie explained that the more numbers you count between lightning and thunder, the farther you are from the worst of the storm.



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