

# Alum. writes children's book 'Sunbelievable'

By LESLIE YE November 15, 2011

Every night when Daniel Kairys '90 DMS'97 gets home, he sits down with his two daughters and son and conducts a science experiment with them or reads them a book. But before they embark on the night's activity, Kairys asks them in English, Haitian Creole or Spanish where they are going to college. Every night, the answer is the same: Dartmouth.

Daniel Kairys' multilingual daughters are the main characters in a new children's picture book authored by Daniel Kairys and his mother, former DMS professor Jo Ann Kairys, titled "Sunbelievable." The book, which chronicles the adventures of a magical anthropomorphic sun, was published in October and was awarded the 2012 gold award in the Mom's Choice Awards "Imagine It!" category on Nov. 4, according to Jo Ann Kairys.

"Sunbelievable" is the first book in a planned series that will connect children with scientific content in a more accessible way, according to Jo Ann Kairys. To make "Sunbelievable" as scientifically accurate as possible, the Kairys consulted with Bobby Braun, their family member and an engineer at NASA. Braun authored a short piece at the end of the book about the real sun and its role in the universe, Daniel Kairys said.

"The book itself is a platform for what we call connecting children with science and nature," Jo Ann Kairys said.

The proceeds from "Sunbelievable" will be donated to charitable organizations. The Kairys also plan to use the book in fundraising efforts with the Boys and Girls Club of America, and possibly Big Brothers Big Sisters, according to Jo Ann Kairys.

"Obviously you write because it's a pleasure," Jo Ann Kairys said. "It's even more gratifying if your product can be helpful to others."

Instead of following the traditional publishing process of hiring an agent and pitching the book to publishing houses, the Kairys chose to publish "Sunbelievable" through Jo Ann Kairys' own publishing company, Story Quest Books. The Kairys published independently to preserve their editorial freedom and to retain the rights over the book's illustrations,

which feature photos of Daniel Kairys' daughters that were digitally edited into an illustrated background, Jo Ann Kairys said.

"We wanted to maintain control over the actual photos through more than just copyright protection," she said. "The girls always loved watching Dora the Explorer, and I realized these are real-life Doras multicultural and multilingual. We did not want to characterize them as cartoon figures."

In addition to "Sunbelievable," Daniel Kairys has drafted five other children's books, he said. The stories will focus on his daughters and will also incorporate scientific concepts, although illustrations are still forthcoming. He said that working with his mother has been very complementary, adding that she is the "brains of the illustration" while he provides the storylines.

For "Sunbelievable," Jo Ann Kairys took the photos of Daniel Kairys' daughters before the story was written. He then wrote a storyline that he felt fit the story of the pictures.

"Being closest to the girls, I try to keep it close to them and she builds everything around that," he said. "It's been great as a family. The girls love it."

Many Kairys family members work in health-related or engineering fields, and Daniel Kairys' nightly experiments are extensions of the family's love of science, according to Jo Ann Kairys.

"I just try and keep them activated and thinking," Daniel Kairys said. "We make volcanoes or something. It's fun and it keeps them out of the TV."

Jo Ann Kairys described her son as a "tremendous humanitarian" with a natural love of teaching children. Daniel Kairys, who works as a general surgeon at Lakeside Medical Center in Belle Glade, Fla., often listens to his own children making up stories, which formed the foundation for "Sunbelievable," Jo Ann Kairys said. From a young age, Daniel Kairys was an avid reader of both nonfiction and fiction, and was also interested in poetry, he said.

"I grew up reading and I've always had my head in a book," he said.

He said that reading stories to his children helped develop his interest in writing children's books that would also appeal to adults.

"I put in my own books things that I like from children's books," he said.

Jo Ann Kairys, who previously worked with physicians in health care delivery research, had little fiction writing experience before writing her first children's book, "Princess Secrets," which also featured her granddaughters. "Sunbelievable" is her second book. Jo Ann Kairys was an English major at Temple University, but mostly wrote technical pieces, such as National Institute of Health grants and research papers, during her professional career.

“When Dan had his children, I started writing little stories to amuse them and putting storybooks together on the computer,” Jo Ann Kairys said. “It was an opportunity to use my right brain without the structure required of a medical paper.”

Jo Ann Kairys and her husband, Steven Kairys, who worked as a doctor at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, relocated to Russia to do medical work after the 1989 fall of the Soviet Union. The trip, which exposed Jo Ann Kairys to the never-before-seen literature and artwork of Eastern Europe and Russia, had a “huge influence” on her “as a teller of stories,” she said.

“All those bright colors from the artists of Russia the reds and golds were just a beautiful combination and I think that’s found its way into my illustrations,” Jo Ann Kairys said.

With both parents working at DMS for the majority of his youth, Daniel Kairys grew up in the Upper Valley region and said attending Dartmouth was “like being home.”

“I spent almost my whole life there until I graduated medical school,” he said. “I knew everybody there.”

Daniel Kairys, who majored in anthropology, discovered a love of poetry during his years at the College that he attributes to English professor Cleopatra Mathis, who he had met before enrolling.

“I never had any actual experience writing until college,” Kairys said. “She was sort of the first person that was ever interested in what I was writing and had anything good to say about it.”

Despite Daniel Kairys’ intentions of becoming a doctor, he “saw writing as an essential step in understanding the value of medical practice,” Mathis said in an email to The Dartmouth.