

Assistance Dog and Girl a 'Marvelous' Team

New book series by 12-year-old girl about her assistance dog raises money for worthy cause.

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This fall, legendary New York City toy store FAO Schwarz premiered the adventures of 12-year-old Shea Megale and her assistance dog, Mercer, in "Marvelous Mercer." The book's proceeds will be donated to Canine Companions for Independence, a nonprofit organization, and Spinal Muscular Atrophy research.

Shea, an outgoing writer from Centreville, Va., was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 2, a terminal illness that limits her mobility and confines her to a wheelchair.

Since Mercer's arrival in 2004, Shea and her 5-year-old canine companion had a special bond. The Labrador mix could sense when Shea was upset and comfort her when necessary. Shea's mother, Megan Megale, says Mercer has become her daughter's other half.

When Megan discovered short stories Shea wrote about Mercer, she instantly knew her daughter's talent could be used to inspire others facing similar circumstances.

"I had a gut feeling. This was so profound she was feeling this way," says Megan. "She was living through Mercer, doing things she could never achieve."

Megan then self-published Shea's books and entered the FAO Schwarz toy audition in May. She presented Shea's stories to the company's merchandising group and won immediate approval. As a result, "Marvelous Mercer," along with a plush toy of Mercer, will be featured in FAO Schwarz retail stores, catalog, and online.

"Marvelous Mercer" is the first book of the six-book children's series. The stories chronicle Mercer's adventures as he experiences activities Shea can not such as sledding, ice skating, and swimming. In each story Mercer and his friends find ways for Shea to join in the fun.

The second book is scheduled for release in January and the third story is currently in the works.

- Miesha Payne-Reid, Editorial Intern for DogChannel.com