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Professor set to publish second children’s book

What do “Beowulf” and “The Canterbury Tales” have in common with a helpful puppy? They’re connected through Sacramento State Professor Kim Zarins.

“The Helpful Puppy” is the title of Zarins’ latest children’s book, which will be published Aug. 15 by Holiday House.

It’s the story of a puppy that wants to do something to help out on the farm, but realizes he can’t crow like the rooster, pull like the ox or give wool like the sheep. The puppy’s efforts are recounted in playful text with rhymes as well as illustrations by Emily Arnold McCully, a previous winner of the Caldecott Award for children’s books illustration.

Zarins, who holds a doctorate in 14th century literature from Cornell University, was hired three years ago as a medievalist literature professor at Sacramento State. Shortly after her arrival, she recognized a need for more offerings in Children’s Literary Classics and began teaching that as well. Plus, she never outgrew her love of children’s books – and she points out that authors such as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien were medievalists.

“Medieval lit and children’s lit are pretty much the only fields to be invested in talking animals, dragons and the like,” Zarins says.

As a child, Zarins enjoyed horse and dog stories. Her interest in writing her own children’s books is not a new development. “Even at Cornell I was writing children’s books because I love the vibrant genre and, of course, the wonderful young audience,” Zarins says.

The new book is partly inspired by her childhood dog, Teddy, who also didn’t do chores or fetch a ball, “but boy was he full of love,” Zarins says.
“The Helpful Puppy” is Zarins’ second recent publication. “Playful Bunny” was published in 2006, and Zarins has many other projects in the works, including a big fantasy novel for teens that she hopes to finish this summer. “It also uses my medievalist side,” she says of that project.

For more information on Zarins and “The Helpful Puppy,” visit www.facebook.com/kimzarins. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

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