

# By the Book



## Illustrated by



Steve Dansereau

**J**ust three years ago, Steve Dansereau was chafing in a classroom. He liked the children he taught—fourth-graders, fifth-graders and middle schoolers—over a decade in two New Jersey communities, but he wanted to try something different. He looked around and made a big change.

Two-and-a-half years into his job as a letter carrier, the city carrier assistant (CCA) and Brick Town, NJ Branch 5420 member likes the choice he made.

“I researched it, I gave it a shot—and here I am. I’ve always liked working outside,” he said. He also is looking forward to being converted soon to regular.

Dansereau is excited about something else as well: He’s the proud illustrator of a children’s book that’s drawing a good deal of attention. The book, *Goodbye Little Dude*, is the story of a young boy stricken with what would be a fatal cancer and his friendship with a turtle he had rescued.

All profits are going to help fund pediatric cancer research.

The book has received attention from major newspapers, including the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Boston Globe*, which ran a front-page story in April under the headline: “This story about a sick boy and his turtle will renew your faith in humanity.”

The backstory of how the book came about is intriguing by itself.

In the fall of 1996, in Sudbury, MA, a 6-year-old boy named Jonathan Smyth, battling a deadly form of pediatric cancer called neuroblastoma, found a baby turtle in a parking lot—surrounded by baby turtles that had been run over by cars. His mother let him take the tiny turtle home. Jonathan named it Little Dude.

Jonathan’s health failed even as the turtle grew, and by the end of first grade, the Smyths and Jonathan’s classmates brought Little Dude to a pond in the woods behind their house to release the turtle and say goodbye to him.

A woman at the event was so moved that she went home and wrote about it. When Jonathan died a few months later, at age 7, the woman, Rebecca Trotsky, gave what she’d written to Jonathan’s mother, who couldn’t bear to look at it. Some 17 years later, Jonathan’s mother—by then living in Minnesota—pulled it out, read it and immediately called Trotsky to say that she was ready to have it published. But neither knew how. One day, another woman from Sudbury learned of the book idea and mentioned it to a childhood friend from Sudbury—Steve Dansereau—and to Damaris Herlihy, who owns Curran Press in Massachusetts.

Dansereau’s childhood friend knew that he had attended art school and told him, “I may have a book project for you,” the carrier recounted. He added, “Those were little twists of fate that brought us all together.”

The book was published last year by Curran Press.

“It was an amazing story to be a part of, because the story itself is a beautiful one, about how he and his classmates took care of this turtle,” Dansereau said. “And the reaction we’ve received has been amazing. People who have read the book have given us very positive feedback.”

In a Sept. 6 story, the *MetroWest Daily News* said that the Sudbury Historical Society would honor the book in a Sept. 30 event to raise money for pediatric cancer research.

“We were very taken by this story,” Sudbury Historical Society Director Sally Purrington Hild said. “It’s such an enchanting story...it gives parents a sensitive avenue to talk about loss with their children.”

The book’s website—[www.goodbye-littledude.com](http://www.goodbye-littledude.com)—offers more information.

Dansereau’s new career delivering the mail provides a good balance between physical work and his artistic side, he says. He completed the work



*The Boston Globe ran a story about **Goodbye Little Dude** on its front page.*

on the book during his first 14 months as a CCA, despite the often-unpredictable work schedule.

Focused on making career and on learning his new job, Dansereau hasn't discussed his book with co-workers.

"He is an extremely hard worker, a very active member in the union," Branch 5420 President **Philip Cornell** said. "He's just a great guy. I do not know anything about his children's book, other than that he did it."

As Dansereau put it, "I'm pretty quiet about it—it's just kind of a side thing for me." He chuckled softly about the prospect of a story about the book: "It'll be news to most of the people I work with on a daily basis."

**D**ansereau isn't the only letter carrier who, along with delivering printed material, is creating some of it himself. **Terry Powers**, a member of Maine Merged Branch 92, is the author of *The Death Waltz*, a fictionalized book based on the actual experiences of eight men struggling with issues of mortality.

The book, published last year by Bryson Taylor Publishing, was inspired by Powers's upbringing; his family owned a hospice care facility, so everyday dealings with the possibility of death were common.

Powers says the people he's subsequently met and the situations he's encountered in his life helped give substance to the stories.

"For whatever reason, I always seem to run into these stories," he said. "I actually feel it is an honor and a privilege to bear witness to the different things these people are going through. They are all dealing with the same thing, either their own mortality or the loss of a loved one."

"What I wanted to do was write about those things with an honest approach, but not heavy-handed," he added.

As with Dansereau, Powers's postal job followed a career shift or, in his case, career shifts. A native of upstate New York, Powers spent six years in the Air Force before working as a private investigator, a freelance newspaper reporter and a retail manager.

A letter carrier since 2007, he has served the branch as a steward, trustee, food drive coordinator and carrier academy instructor for new CCAs. He's also a graduate of Leadership Academy Class 11.

Powers has donated some of the book's proceeds to a fellow letter carrier to help with medical expenses, which that carrier called "a huge help to me and my family."

His book was nominated last year for the Maine Literary Awards, run by the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance. It didn't win, but Powers said it was an honor merely to be in the running.

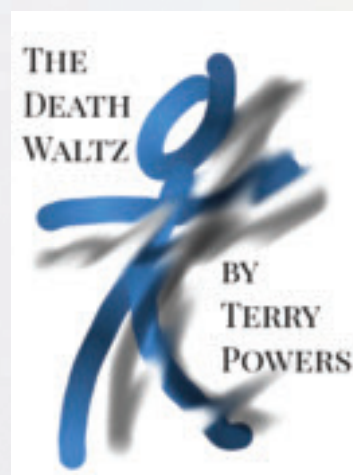
The book's website—[www.author-terrypowers.com](http://www.author-terrypowers.com)—provides more information.

The book had an interesting start. As Deb Landry, editor and president of Bryson Taylor, recounts it, a group of women in Saco, ME, who sing in an intergenerational choir run by her daughter, approached her about possibly publishing a book that their letter carrier had written.

"They came to me and said it was a really good book," Landry said. "So we invited him to a few book releases so we could get to know him and so he could see the process. His book was very well written, and it's unique, so we decided we would publish it."

That's the best part of the whole saga—the role of people on his route, Powers said.

"They made it happen; they made that dream come true," he said. "I wrote that book for myself, for my family—next thing I know, I'm signing books at Barnes & Noble." **PR**



## Written by



**Terry Powers**