

## Sunny's story

### **Anti-drug advocate pens childrens book**

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When Virginia "Ginger" Katz's son Ian smoked his first cigarette and drank his first beer, she didn't see it. But Ian's pet beagle, Sunny, did. Sunny was also there when Ian died in 1996 of a heroin overdose at age 20.

So when Katz, founder of the anti-drug organization Courage to Speak, decided to write a book about Ian's drug abuse and death, she chose to write it from Sunny's viewpoint. The result is "Sunny's Story," (Ginger and Larry Katz, \$12.95), co-written by Katz and children's author Marci Alborghetti.

The book, narrated by Sunny, aims to teach children and parents about the dangers of drug use, and the devastating effect it can have on a family. When Ian died, Katz said, "Sunny lost his best friend."

Through Courage to Speak, Katz travels the country telling Ian's story to parents, students and teachers, in hopes of breaking the silence surrounding drug abuse and addiction. The book, she said, is just another tool schools and families can use to discuss these issues.

"I wanted parents to have a user-friendly way of presenting these topics to their children," Katz said. "Kids love stories, and they love animals."

Ian was no exception. The family adopted Sunny from a Westport animal shelter when Ian was 7, because he had badly wanted a dog. The two were inseparable, Katz said, and Sunny slept in Ian's bed every night.

He even was in Ian's bed the night Ian died, and ran into Katz's room to wake her up. Katz, thinking Sunny needed to be let out, went back to bed. A few hours later, she learned what had happened. Sunny died about three years ago, after 18 years with the family.

"Sunny's Story" chronicles how Ian's drug abuse affected the whole family. Katz said the book talks about how Ian did things in front of Sunny that he didn't do in front of his parents and how, for a long time, Sunny was the only one in the family who knew what was going on.

"Sunny saw more than we did," Katz said.

The book won't be officially released until March 6, when Katz will unveil it at a Courage to Speak parent's night at West Rocks Middle School in Norwalk. However, she's already using it as part of a curriculum to teach elementary school students about

drugs. Katz was at Brookside Elementary School in Norwalk Thursday and Friday when three fourth-grade teachers read to their students from a transcript of the book. The first half was read on Thursday, the second on Friday.

After Thursday's reading, Katz said the children seemed to enjoy the book. "The kids responded really well," she said. "They were disappointed that [the teachers] only read half the story." Though she launched the curriculum at an elementary school, Katz said "Sunny's Story" targets ages 8 through 13. She said middle school students in particular could benefit from the book.

Norwalk Superintendent of Schools Salvatore Corda is familiar with the book and said it takes a gentle approach to a difficult subject. "That kind of vehicle helps get the message across to children," Corda said.

For more information on "Sunny's Story" or to order a copy of the book, visit [www.couragetospeak.com](http://www.couragetospeak.com).