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REACHING FOR THE SKY

Pararescueman
goes to the top of
the world for vets
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On the cover: Staff Sgt. Nick Gibson, a pararescueman with the 920th Rescue Wing at Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., was a member of the all-military team that climbed the tallest mountain peak on each of the seven continents as part of the USAF 7 Summits Challenge. The challenge culminated with a climb of Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain. See the complete story on Page 12.

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Rodney and Sasha Glassman have written two children's books and have a third in the works. They distribute their books free to students in their community.

For the kids

Reservist, wife team up to promote literacy, environmental issues

By Bo Joyner

An Air Force Reservist and his wife have turned their passion for literacy and the environment into a series of children's books that haven't proven to be a big hit with youngsters in their native Arizona.

Capt. Rodney Glassman, an individual mobilization augmentee assigned to the staff judge advocate's office at the 355th Fighter Wing, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., and his wife, Sasha, also an attorney, have written two children's books so far and have another in the works.

The protagonist in their stories is a jackrabbit named Jeremy, who cares deeply about his environment and shares what he learns about sustainment and recycling with school-age children.

"One of the unique things about our books is that we don't make money from selling them," Rodney said. "We distribute them free to students in our community."

The couple finished their first book, "Jeremy Jackrabbit Harvests the Rain," in 2010 while they were living in Tucson.

They were able to give a copy to every kindergartner in Pima County, a total of more than 14,000 children.

They finished their second book, "Jeremy Jackrabbit Recycles the Can," earlier this year while living in Phoenix and gave a free copy to every kindergartner in Maricopa County (46,000 copies) and distributed another 6,000 copies to youngsters back in Tucson. The Glassmans also delivered books to children at Davis-Monthan and nearby Luke AFB.

Another neat thing about the Glassman's books is that all of the illustrations are done by kids.

"We write the rhymes and then work with the school systems and librarians to hold contests where kids can submit illustrations for the books," Rodney said.

"It's amazing to see the faces of the kids when they see their drawings in a real book," Sasha said. "For our latest book, we had a book signing, and the kids who did the illustrations each got to set up at a table and sign copies of the book. It was an amazing experience. The kids were just so proud."

For that book, Sasha and the graphic artists who helped put the book together had to pick from among nearly 1,000 drawings submitted by kindergartners through eighth-graders.

Rodney said he first got the idea for writing children's books in 2009 while attending the Tucson Festival of Books.

"I remember calling Sasha from the festival and asking her what she thought about teaming up to write a book for kids," he recalled. "She seemed to like the idea, and we were off and running."

It didn't take long for the couple to decide what their first book should be about. Sasha was finishing her master of business administration degree in sustainable energy and finance at the time, and Rodney, who also holds a Ph.D. in arid land resource sciences, had recently drafted the nation's first mandatory rainwater harvesting, gray-water plumbing and solar-powered water heating ordinances while a Tucson city councilman. So, they settled on sustainability. In the book, Jeremy learns from his friends in the desert about the importance of reusing water in easy and fun ways.

In the second book, Jeremy learns from an assortment of desert creatures how he can reduce, reuse and recycle for a greener tomorrow. The couple is currently writing their third book, "Jeremy Jackrabbit Captures the Sun."

Finding the time to bounce ideas off of each other and put together rhymes to teach the concepts they want students to learn is no easy task. Professionally, Rodney is currently serving as the interim town manager of Cave Creek, Ariz., Furthermore, in addition to their legal careers, Rodney's Reserve duty and a host of community volunteer commitments, the Glassmans are also the parents of two young girls: Rose, 2, and Ruth, 8 months.

"It's definitely a challenge to find the time, but this is something we are passionate about," Sasha, who currently serves on the governing board of the Madison Elementary School District, said. "As the parents of two young girls, we know how important it is that we teach children to take care of their environment."

Rodney's ties to the Air Force helped the couple overcome one of the first hurdles they encountered when they decided to write a book for kids.

"Writing the book is one thing, but then you have to have a publisher," he said.

"I was actually attending a JAG training course (at Maxwell AFB) in Montgomery (Ala.,) and was in the car with a bunch of my classmates. We were driving to a Montgomery Biscuits baseball game, and I was on the phone with Sasha talking about how we could find a publisher for our book. One of my classmates, Capt. Dean Korsak, an active-duty JAG, said from the back seat, 'I own a publishing company. If you are able to raise the money for your project but would like to have a publisher with an ISB (international standard book) number, bar code and Library of Congress number, I can help.'"



As a Reservist, Glassman is an individual mobilization augmentee assigned to the staff judge advocate's office at the 355th Fighter Wing, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz.

With a publisher on board, Rodney began looking for funding.

"We had deep ties with the Tucson community, so I was able to generate a good deal of financial support for the book," he said.

The first book was such a success that the couple decided to continue the Jeremy Jackrabbit series after moving to Phoenix.

"Having people like the Glassmans take an active role in the education of children at Madison speaks directly to our purpose statement, 'Extraordinary Learning for All,'" said Dr. Tim Ham, superintendent of the Madison Elementary School District in Maricopa County. "We consider ourselves very fortunate to have these champions of literacy as active participants in the Madison community."

"It's been amazing to see how Jeremy has grown," Rodney said. The second book

has a Spanish translation on each page, a recycling guide at the end and a related classroom curriculum to help teachers reinforce the messages that Jeremy introduces to kids, he said.

Arizona State University's President Dr. Michael Crow took the time to write the book's forward and ASU's Global Institute of Sustainability has written seven lesson plans that are aligned with common core standards so teachers can teach hands-on lessons along with distributing the book. Jeremy even has his own Web page, www.jeremyjackrabbit.com.

In addition, Jeremy is scheduled to hit the stage soon. The Great Arizona Puppet Theater is producing a musical of "Jeremy Jackrabbit Recycles the Can" that is scheduled to run this fall.

The Glassmans said they aren't sure what the future holds for Jeremy Jackrabbit after the third book in their series, but they would love to see other aspiring children's authors take their model and run with it.

"What we are doing could be done anywhere," Sasha said. "It's a great way to get kids involved and excited about learning." ★

The protagonist in the Glassman's books is a jackrabbit named Jeremy, who cares deeply about his environment.

