

September 21, 2004

Book looks at bullies' subtleties

By **Bill Choy**
Ashland Daily Tidings

Watching her daughter experience being bullied at school inspired Trudy Ludwig to write a children's book on the subject.

"My Secret Bully" was published in February by RiverWood Books of Ashland, an imprint of White Cloud Press, and has been touted nationwide, including being profiled on "Good Morning America." Ludwig is in Ashland this week talking about the issue of bullying and her book to students, teachers and parents.

Ludwig, a freelance marketing writer from Portland, was inspired by the experiences her daughter, Allie Long, faced in the second grade. Her daughter was bullied by a group of six girls when she told them she didn't want to hear what she thought was unfair gossip about a schoolmate. They surrounded Allie and followed her, eventually, they penned her on a piece of playground equipment before one of the girls went to a teacher for help.

"I'm simply a mommy on a mission," Ludwig said to a group of Ashland elementary school faculty at Walker Elementary School on Monday. "I felt we need to address it as early as possible."

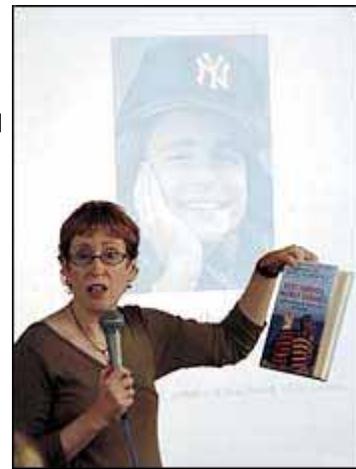


Illustration from "My Secret Bully" by Abigail Marble 

The book is about a young girl, Monica, who is bullied by her friend Katie, who does things such as name-calling, humiliation and exclusion. With the help of her mother, Monica learns how to cope, survive, and thrive.

While some people may say bullying is just a phase and a part of growing up, Ludwig counters that bullying can be harmful, now and in the future.

She presented several surveys and statistics to show how pervasive bullying is and its future ramifications.

- o One in seven school children has been either bullied or been the target of a bully. (National Association of School Psychologists)

- o Six out of 10 American teenagers witness bullying in school at least once a day. (Newsweek, Feb. 3, 2003)

- o Bullies identified by age 8 are six times more likely to be convicted of a crime by age 24 and five times more likely than non-bullies to end up with serious criminal records by the age of 30. (Maine Project Against Bullying, 2000)

o Those that are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed and far more likely to be suicidal. (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, September 2003)

Ludwig talked about the key elements of bullying, how children can be both the one who bullies one day and the one being bullied the next day, and ways to talk to students about bullying. She also gave the teachers ways to help kids take responsibility for their behavior.

She talked about the types of bullying, such as physical and verbal aggression and relational aggression, which is using relationships to manipulate and harm others. This could include spreading rumors to ruin someone's reputation, talking behind someone's back and revealing someone's secrets to humiliate them.

Ludwig hopes her book will show children that when it comes to bullying, "I'm not alone."

"I want to educate teachers that this type of bullying is just as harmful as a physical bully," she said. "I want to provide them with a resource to help them deal with it. Just as we teach kids table manners, we need to teach them social skills."

Lynnette Kelly, a first-grade teacher at Lincoln Elementary, was pleased to have a discussion on bullying and to have a book like "My Secret Bully," designed for children.

"It's nice to be able to come together and go back to our schools, and have a common language on this," she said. "[Bullying] happens every day. Hopefully, this will help empower the students and hopefully give them alternatives."

Ludwig will be speaking to students at all four Ashland elementary schools, starting with Helman Elementary today.

On Thursday, she will give a free talk to parents from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Walker Elementary School. For more information, contact any Ashland elementary school office.