



“THE KREWE OF BARKUS & MEOUX”

Barksdale Air Force officer Lindsay Cordero publishes children's book influenced by Mardi Gras parade

BY SCOTT ANDERSON

U SAF Maj. Lindsay Cordero had a pet project locked away in her mind, until her commander gave her the key to set it free.

“She asked me, ‘Lindsay, if you were doing anything outside of the Air Force, what would it be?’” Lindsay said. “I answered, like immediately, ‘I would totally be writing children’s books.’ And she was like, ‘So, why don’t you?’” So that’s what Lindsay did. And she knew just what her inspiration would be. “I went to the Krewe of Barkus and Meoux parade,” she said. “Fell in love with it!” That was 2018. Lindsay had big plans for the 2019 pet parade. She was going to dress up her cat and join in

the festivities. But she had to miss the parade that year for a work trip. Her reaction to missing the parade caught her attention. “I was so upset about it,” she said. “I was like, ‘There’s something about this. Maybe this is what my first children’s book should be about. The whole krewe is so friendly and supportive. They do such amazing things in the community for animals. There’s definitely something there.’” Only one thing stood in her way — Lindsay had no idea how to write a children’s book. “I think my first draft was over 2,000 words,” she said. “Children’s books are not 2,000 words. They are 200 to 500.” She spent a year “unwriting” the story

— “killing all the darlings,” as she puts it — and slashed the story to a mere 257 words. The next step was bringing the words to life with illustrations. Even for an accomplished artist, that presented a challenge. “I hadn’t learned how to create a visual narrative,” she said. “It’s not a set of single paintings you have in a children’s book. It’s an entire visual story.” Lindsay learned how to do that through an online course in children’s book illustration from the Rhode Island School of Design. She put everything she had learned about writing and illustrating a children’s book together. By 2021, Lindsay had her book dummy in hand, and she was on her way to seeing the dream become a reality. She just didn’t know how long a road she still had to travel. “I began pitching it to publishers,” she said. “Each month I pitched it to a different publisher or agent and each month was rejected.” She’s able to chuckle about that now as she recalls the process. That’s because she eventually pitched the project to Pelican Publishing in New Orleans. “They were immediately like, ‘This is a yes for us. Let’s do it.’” She signed a book deal in early 2022. She completed all of the artwork by the end of March that year. And that September, “The Krewe of Barkus and Meoux” was released, just in time for the Christmas and Mardi Gras seasons. “It’s been crazy, thinking back,” Lindsay said. “I saw the pet parade for the first time in 2018, missed it in 2019, so upset. Started trying to write everything. It was a long journey.” The book transforms Shreveport’s vaunted Mardi Gras pet parade into “a dance battle of Mardi Gras proportions” set in the French Quarter, Lindsay explains. The Krewe of Barkus and the Krewe of Meoux parade against each other to determine which will come out on top. “Spoiler alert... the party gets so crazy, they end up deciding they are going to combine krewes and become the Krewe of Barkus and Meoux. It’s a bit of a story about collaboration over competition. It’s just a silly story.” That silliness in the story is simply a reflection of the spirit of the parade in Lindsay’s mind. “It’s silly in the best way,” she said. “People have the best costumes for their pets. I live to see it. It’s just so fun!” Before she even had the idea for a book, Lindsay wanted to celebrate that silliness, like a chihuahua dressed as a



ringmaster in a blue, glittery costume or a horse dressed up like a unicorn.

"It was so visually appealing to me," she said as she recalled her

inaugural parade. "I was like, 'I have to make it into artwork.' The storyline kind of flowed from there." Lindsay knew at 15 that she wanted to pursue her creative interests. That's not an easy sell growing up in a military family.

"My whole family is Navy and Air Force," she said. "They were like, 'What are you going to do? You have to be able to put food on the table. Why don't you just go into the military?'"

So that's what she did.

After high school she attended the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. While she was there, she gave up "frivolous pursuits" like creating to focus her time and energy on the "serious profession" of becoming an officer.

She received her degree in 2013 from the academy and started her active-duty career. Along the way, she learned that engaging her artistic side made her a better officer, and a better person.

"I kind of betrayed myself a little," Lindsay said about giving up her art in college. "Whenever I am aligned with my creativity, I am best able to serve. I am most authentically able to lead and live in my own life."

By 2015, she had returned to art and was selling commissions.

"I couldn't not make art," she said. "There was no way I could hold it in."

She took commissions until she focused her creative energy on creating the book. And while she still enjoys the Air Force, Lindsay feels called to create more children's books. She is pivoting off of active duty as a legislative liaison for Global Strike Command at Barksdale Air Force Base to Air Force Reserves so she can dedicate herself to her creative work full time.

Lindsay has several more story ideas she is pursuing. They hit her all the time, like when she's driving. Still, she acknowledges that her creative process remains a mystery.

"It's difficult to pinpoint where the creative spark occurs," she said.

"Sometimes it's the writing. Sometimes

it's the art. Sometimes it occurs simultaneously to me, almost like watching a movie that has dialog."

With "The Krewe of Barkus and Meoux," it started with the writing.

"I had to get the draft out," Lindsay said. "Just get all the words out on paper. People ask me what that first draft needs to look like. I tell them it just needs to exist. It's perfect if it just exists."

Once the words were refined, Lindsay put what she learned from RISD to work illustrating the story. That's where her analogy about filmmaking came into play.

"Every page, or two-page spread, is a scene," Lindsay explained. "In every scene, I have to consider lighting, character's costumes, positioning on stage, the angle of the camera, or the viewer, as they see the pets parading."

And like most great movie makers, Lindsay made a choice to go off-script.

"This was bit daring of me," she said. "I wanted the color in the story to visually represent the sound of that jazz music as the pets paraded through it."

The hottest colors represent the loudest sounds of the parade. Black and white areas of the artwork reflect moments of rest when there is no sound. She used contrasting, cooler Mardi Gras colors on every fourth spread to replicate a jazz rhythm.

There are many more Easter eggs in the artwork for readers to discover as well. The fortune-telling cat in the story is based on her "fat, sassy" cat named Jackie Daytona.

"There's so much nuance here," she said. "There's a lot of craft that goes into making the art for a children's book. The visuals have to carry what the words cannot."

With her debut book released, Lindsay said she is invigorated by the process. She wants others to know what that feeling is like.

"I hope everyone can find that thing that they can do for four years, feeling like you made no progress, but it keeps you so alive," she said. "That's how creativity works. You have to be so attached to that idea that you can't let it go. That's exactly how I felt about this Mardi Gras pet parade."

She shares that enthusiasm at events to promote the

book, including an art auction in Ohio. She worked with Meridian Healthcare and donated an original work of art from the book to benefit families struggling with addiction and homeless veterans.

"I was signing my Mardi Gras book in Ohio, and people would ask, 'What is Mardi Gras? I'm like, 'It's this great time with a lot of parades.' They're like, 'Can anyone do this?' I said, 'Heck, yeah!'"

The reception for the book has exceeded her expectations, and not just in Ohio. She sold out of 200 books in three days at the Red River Revel.

"I had been told by creative colleagues and friends it probably won't sell a whole lot in the beginning. At every one of my events, I have been selling out. It's the craziest feeling. My book has sold in the United Kingdom, in Hawaii, places you wouldn't expect. It's such a thrill."

The support she has received locally affirms for her the decision to write the book in the first place.

"It's been such support from this community, and I am so grateful for it," Lindsay said. "This is why I wanted to celebrate and elevate our pet parade here."


Lindsay is grateful not only for the community she has found since releasing the book, but for the community that encouraged her to start the journey as well.

"I had this crazy idea," she admits. "I took it seriously, but I didn't know how to bring it to life. One of the first things I did was join the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. It is the most supportive group of creatives — writers and artists. It's a very safe space. Join the community of people that are similarly striving to do what you are wanting to do. Once I did that, that's when I started to get momentum under me."

"The Krewe of Barkus and Meoux" is available at 318 Art Co., Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and other online retailers. lindsaycordero.com

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