



© 2007 Ventura County Star

Itty Bitty stars in a book

Small dog has a big lesson for children

By Karen Hibdon

Thursday, June 14, 2007



Chuck Kirman / Star staff "Itty Bitty Saves the Day," featuring the dachshund held by author Armando Garza, shows children who are small, have special needs or who lack self-esteem that they can do great things. Garza's wife, MaryAnn, shows the book.

Sometimes, great things come in small packages.

Take for example Itty Bitty, a tiny dachshund pup who stars in his own full-color, photo-illustrated children's book written by his owner, Armando N. Garza of Camarillo.

The saga began about 15 months ago when the black and tan pup entered the world, the first in a litter of five born to Gwenny, owned by Garza and his wife, MaryAnn.

Itty was definitely the runt of the litter. Because of the special care he needed to survive, Garza began chronicling in photographs the life of the little guy who touched the family's heart in a big way.

Thoughts of turning Itty's tale into a book, however, didn't come right away. The idea slowly crept up on Garza, who retired from Verizon and has been church administrator at Calvary Chapel, Camarillo, for 18 months.

The book is short, simple, easy to understand and alive with full-color photos of puppies, with Itty as the star.

In easy-to-understand dialogue, "Itty Bitty Saves the Day" takes a simple approach to providing children who might be small, have special needs or who lack self-esteem with the knowledge that they, too, can do great things.

In the book he self-published through Lifevest Publishing out of Colorado, Garza created a story line in which Itty becomes a hero by alerting MaryAnn when his mom and brothers and sisters leave through an open gate headed for the busy street. His ability to squeeze into the very small space to get back in the yard and catch her attention averts a disaster.

The gate incident was real, but Garza admits that the rest, well, it just sort of worked its way into a story.

And in that story, Garza believes, Itty Bitty shows children who might be small or living with some sort of special need or handicap that they can do big things, too, just like the mighty Itty.

"It gives a child hope," Garza said.

Admittedly, he didn't set out to write a children's book. For more than a year, he's been putting the finishing touches on a technical book on call center management.

Once he had the photos in hand, however, a rough draft of the Itty book came together in a day. After a little tweaking and a few revisions, the book "wrote itself," Garza said. After researching publishers, he settled on Lifevest because it specializes in "good, wholesome family-type books."

"Itty Bitty Saves the Day" is offered through Amazon.com and the publisher's Web site, <http://www.authorstobelievein.com>. It also is available at Adventures for Kids bookstore in Ventura.

On Saturday, Garza will have a book signing at the All Pet Headquarters office of Dr. Sam Thomas, the veterinarian who has cared for Itty Bitty since he was born. From 10 a.m. to noon, Itty Bitty will be on hand to greet visitors.

Despite his rocky beginning he was expected to live only a couple of days Itty is now full grown, although about half the size of a normal dachshund, and he has a small heart murmur.

"He's the happiest, most energetic little guy," Garza said.

The other pups in the litter Missy, Rojito, Chewy and Scooter were all sold. But "it wasn't in our hearts to sell him," Garza said, although they had offers from folks who wanted to buy him.

With praise from those who have seen the book and others who say they can't wait for the next Itty Bitty adventure to unfold, Garza is thinking sequel and also of creating a book for older children and adults that chronicles the experiences and care required to care for a puppy such as Itty.

For now, though, the focus is on this first effort and promoting it. Garza said he plans to give 10 percent of proceeds from the sale of the book to his church or another charity in keeping with his practice of tithing.

While he's never personally "saved the day," Garza did grow up with a brother who had epilepsy, and in his work at the church has been around families of children with special needs. He also grew up knowing how it feels to be "little." At 5 feet 5 inches, he said, "I could definitely relate to Itty Bitty."

Ideally, Garza would love to give talks to interested groups on the canine, on being "Itty Bitty" or having special needs.

His message is simple: Those things "shouldn't stop people from doing big things."



© 2007 Ventura County Star