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The Perth Courier

# WEEKENDER

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## Fairytale dragon teaches about mental disorders

GENA GIBSON  
WEEKENDER

Iris is a helpful “fairy godmother” type, always available to listen to troubled children and give them the help they need.

Iris is also a dragon. To be more specific, she’s the dragon featured in the Iris the Dragon book series, written by Rideau Ferry author Gayle Grass.

Grass has just released the second book in the series, *Lucky Horseshoes: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series*, which addresses attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) from a surprisingly unique point of view -- a child’s.

“The number-one barrier is stigma,” Grass stressed. “It has lessened a bit, but it is still a huge, huge factor.” She said using Iris as a fairy godmother for the children in the books makes the topic more friendly, and less threatening.

“(The illness) is not bothering Iris,” she said. “There’s none of this hiding in the closet, or (being) hush-hush.”

Grass said people often immediately think the worst when it comes to mental disorders, believing the “final crisis” is a fair image of all disorders.

“It doesn’t have to be, if they’re caught beforehand,” she explained.

That’s where Iris comes in. In the first book of the series, *Catch a Falling Star*, Iris leads the reader through “a variety of symptoms that could be considered red flags in a child’s emotional and social development,” according to the website at [www.irisdragon.com](http://www.irisdragon.com).

In *Lucky Horseshoes*, Skippy is a little girl who is eventually diagnosed with ADHD. She meets Iris and also learns to take care of Little Ben, a horse whose name may rightly remind some readers of another horse named Ben.

Equestrian Ian Millar, who was Big Ben’s human partner for many years, writes a foreword for Grass’ book. She said sponsors from the equine world, as well as those in the medical community, helped spur the production of the book.

She, along with her daughter Jessica, create and market the Iris series through their own publishing company, relying on sponsors to help with the costs. The third book in the series will deal with bipolar disorder, again from the viewpoint of a child.

Grass has a background in science, which lent itself well to her initial research into mental illness – research which, at first, had nothing to do with the Iris series. She began her journey 10 years ago, when her son was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

She now attends many conferences related to mental illness.

“I think the brain’s a very challenging, very exciting area,” she explained.

While the Iris series is classified as being geared to children ages eight to 12, Grass said she doesn’t believe the focus must be that narrow.

“It’s really for anyone,” she said. “It’s amazing where the book has gone – all across the board to every different age group.”



Iris the Dragon talks to Skippy, the protagonist in *Lucky Horseshoes*, in an illustration from the book. *Lucky Horseshoes* is the second in the series by Gayle Grass, which deals with mental disorders from a child’s viewpoint.

*Lucky Horseshoes* is available at the Valley Book Shop in Perth, or can be mail-ordered at [www.irisdragon.com](http://www.irisdragon.com). Grass and

her daughter have begun to market the book, with an appearance last week on A-Channel Ottawa’s morning show.

Jessica, who is a teacher, has created a curriculum teachers can use with the book to educate students about mental health.

### Furry forecaster on the job today

Earlier this morning Warton Willie peeked out of his home to determine what Mother Nature will bring our way over the next six weeks.

If he emerges from his burrow and fails to see his shadow because the weather is cloudy, winter will soon end. But if it’s bright and clear outside, he will see his shadow and get

frightened and run back into his hole. That means the winter will continue for six more weeks.

Regardless of Willie’s reaction to his shadow, be assured this cold weather snap will end over the weekend as the high for Saturday and Sunday will reach -6 C, but will dip down to -20 C on Monday.

### Flu season officially arrives

**SPECIAL TO THE WEEKENDER**

The first case of influenza was reported to the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit last week.

Health officials would like to remind the public that flu vaccines can provide adults and children with active immunity and are still available from your local health unit or family doctor.

Influenza viruses cause symptoms such as fever, cough, headache, muscle soreness, sore throat and a stuffy nose. Influenza can also lead to pneumonia and exacerbate heart and lung problems.

“Influenza spreads very easily from an infected person to others through coughing and sneezing,”

says Dr. Anne Carter, medical officer of health for the local health unit.

“Avoid contact with those who are infected and wash your hands frequently to avoid spreading the virus,” Carter explained. “And those who are ill should stay home and use tissues to block coughs and sneezes.”

For more information on influenza or the flu vaccine visit [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org).

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