

In the summer, while starting to prepare for the 2008 April OASAR conference, Barb King, our amazing Vice-President and April Conference Chair came across a very interesting web site – [www.iristhedragon.com](http://www.iristhedragon.com). Being on the conference committee, Barb, who was already well on her way to finding wonderful speakers for the conference, asked me if I could assist her by checking out this website and determine if “Iris” would be a suitable and appropriate speaker for our 20<sup>th</sup> annual conference. I contacted her and thus began an amazing relationship!

Because of her hectic schedule, Gayle Grass, author of Iris the Dragon Books, had to turn me down, for both our November conference, recently held in Hamilton on November 16<sup>th</sup>, and our upcoming conference in April. HOWEVER, she was so impressed by what I told her about OASAR, and after checking out OUR website, she offered to donate 300

books! And, shortly after that 300 **“Lucky Horseshoes: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series”** was delivered to my house!

The next day, I read the book to my students. I have a class of 7 very special boys, ranging in age from 9-13. After reading them the story, we had the most amazing discussions. Some of the boys opened up and disclosed some very private, personal and painful information about themselves!

Here are their reactions to the story:

“My favourite part is when the Dragon met the girl and saved her.” “The story made me day dream about me taking care of a baby horse. I liked the part when she meets Annabel.” “I liked it when Skippy met new friends. I liked it because they were different animals.” “It made me think about a movie that I watched. It was about a horse in a race and he broke his knee.” “The part I liked about the story was when Skippy and little Ben won the prize at the horse show. The story made me think about having courage, being brave and never giving up.” I like the part when she met the dragon. I like the book because it has all four seasons in it. I like dragons and if I could ever meet one I would like that.”



"Lucky Horseshoes: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series" addresses the topic of ADHD in children. The book illustrates, through its images and words, the feelings and thoughts of an ADHD child. Using the delicate approach of the fairy tale genre, this book provides children, with ADHD, an opportunity to identify with their thoughts, feelings and actions through the young character in the book. "Lucky Horseshoes" has an informative epilogue about ADHD from Dr. Catharine Robertson, Staff Psychiatrist at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and Chair of the ADHD Network of Eastern Ontario. In addition, the book illustrates the role of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in helping a child achieve their potential, which is helpful for any child who is concerned about having one.

Well, there was no stopping me now! I went back to Gayle's web site and decided I had to buy her other book:



"Catch a Falling Star: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series" is the first book in the Iris the Dragon series. "Catch a Falling Star" provides its readers with a variety of symptoms that could be considered red flags in a child's emotional and social development. This book is intended as an introduction to the topic of mental health in addition to educating children about the importance of sharing their thoughts and worries with a caregiver.

After reading this story to my class, the children gave me their reactions:

"The story made me think that I have to collect 16 stars, but I only collected 2. And there was a goat and I tapped it on its head and it blew a star out of its mouth. I was on a bottle and I went scuba diving and I saw a star." "I liked at the end when Fish caught the star with his fishing rod." "My favourite part is when he went to the doctor's." "I liked it when the Dragon made the boy a star and shined it and when he grew up he caught it. I liked it when he was fishing for that star." "I liked the part when he caught a star. I thought I caught a star and met a dragon, and I thought I went to a special place." "I like the part when the dragon met the boy. I like the part when he found out what he needed help for. It made me feel that I could maybe catch a falling star."

After submitting these "reviews" to Gayle, she asked me if my students and I would consider being "junior editors" and help her write her next book in the series. They were thrilled when I told them this news. However, they had to promise to keep everything a

secret UNTIL it got published. They agreed and when I read them the first few pages of this yet unpublished book, one of my students jumped up and ran to close the door! He didn't want anyone hearing what they were about to hear! They had terrific suggestions about what to add and what they thought should happen next.

Some background information you should know:

Iris the Dragon Inc. is an educational publishing company that helps children and caregivers understand and cope with mental illness. Believed to be the first of its kind in its approach to educating caregivers and children about mental illness, Iris the Dragon Inc. has been successful with its products in beginning a dialogue with children about what often can be a difficult topic.

After one of her children was diagnosed with a mental illness, author of Iris the Dragon series, Gayle Grass, was determined to educate caregivers and children about the necessity of early identification and treatment of mental disorders. Using the medium of a children's storybook, author Gayle Grass has been able to communicate her message to children and caregivers worldwide.

After graduating with an honours degree in economics, Gayle Grass worked in the investment/brokerage industry. After the birth of her children, she pursued her passion for antique children's books and illustration. This interest led to her taking a master's degree in art and architecture from the University of London, England. Her thesis was on the history of the private press and bookmaking. Today she lives with her husband and family on a hobby farm near Perth, Ontario. The bridge under which Iris the Dragon lives is based on a real bridge over the Tay River which was Gayle's favourite place to fish as a child.

OASAR's Board of Directors decided that a large number of these books will go into our April silent auction. They each sell for \$20.00. As well, EVERY PERSON WHO ATTENDS OUR APRIL CONFERENCE WILL RECEIVE A FREE COPY OF "LUCKY HORSESHOES."

Little did I know how that very first contact with Gayle, would make such a huge impact on all of us!

Submitted by Miriam Silvert – Section 23 teacher with the HWDSB