

Glen Ellyn teacher brings old school to life for real and in fiction



Six years ago, Patricia Harte-Naus, a teacher at Abraham Lincoln Elementary School in Glen Ellyn, was handed an assignment in one of her last classes as she was earning her master's degree at Northern Illinois University.

"The teacher said I needed to find a project I could do for children, write a lesson plan and go to town with it," the fourth grade teacher said.

And go to town she did.

By last September, that one assignment set Harte-Naus on a mission that led to the refurbishing of a one-room schoolhouse in the Galena area, a piece of that area's history being preserved forever and in a book being written that uses the schoolhouse and fictional students in it to teach today's students about bullying and how to handle the issue.

Harte-Naus, whose family has a second home in Galena, first went to the woman who was head of the green space committee in that area and after visiting for a while, the woman suggested to Harte-Naus that she might be the perfect person to spearhead an effort that several others had tried, but failed, to accomplish before, restoring the one-room school house.

"It was in the hills. It was built of limestone, which is unique, but in that area, that's what they would have mined," she said. "She gave me the name of a gentleman farmer who had two journals from the schoolhouse dated in 1871 and 1920s. I read the journals and read between the lines and it was the most magnificent story."

From that experience, Harte-Naus built a model of the schoolhouse out of limestone. The roof lifted off to see inside the model. She brought the model to meetings, wrote newspaper articles, produced posters and after her class work at NIU was over, she continued to work to raise money for the building's restoration.



A group of women formed a committee and held garage sales, barbecues, sold bricks and worked to get the money together to restore it, and put desks inside it. Last fall there was a rededication ceremony to honor the building and its history, complete with actors dressed as U.S. Grant and Abraham Lincoln in attendance.

In addition, she was able to track down 18 original class members to come to hold a class reunion. Harte-Naus interviewed all of them so that a permanent history of the building would exist. And, then she thought, how could she share all of this?

"I took the tales and made the fictional book 'Belden Boy.' I even made part of the book about a real contest that happened in the school's history where Sears asked schools what they would do with a flock of sheep. In the book, Peter McDugal (the main character), wins the flock. This really happened. They were trying to introduce sheep to that part of the state."

Now, Harte-Naus uses the book she wrote in her own classes. She built in a bullying aspect.

"There's conflict in there and resolution And we see how Frankie, the bully, and Peter come to work on their relationship. It's very relevant for fourth graders."

Her students have learned not only about the history of that time period from the book, or about the structure of language then or the age-old concept of bullying — but much more.

"My children have learned so much about what it takes to write a book, or even a story; what it's like to sit down and do research. There's a story everywhere you look."

As a result, writing scores have skyrocketed in her class.

"It's been wonderful. I've gone one step further. I've given them their own journal to write in all year long. I will not grade it. I had them design their own bags. They'll put their journals in there and they become something that's all their own."

And, some of her Glen Ellyn students will be experiencing life in a one-room schoolhouse. The modern-day school at its annual auction, put a day of classes at the old-fashioned school on the block. Ten families will make the trip to Galena. Harte-Naus will dress in her period outfit and teach lesson plans from the 1930s.

"There will be flowers on the desk, a bowl of apples and recess by the 'crick,'" she said. "I will teach about elocution and grammar. And, when the doors close, they will come back to my house for pizza for a modern-day celebration. Many of the kids are from my classroom so they must feel as if Belden School is theirs, too. It will be great."

For more information on *Belden Boy*, go to www.beldenboy.com,

or order the book through Amazon, Barnes and Noble or Borders. It's also available at several bookstores in the Galena and Glen Ellyn areas.



See the accompanying video on the IEA website at www.ieanea.org