



by Hand by Hobby



Deb-Hamel-Gay's Children's Books on Hunting

By Nicole S. Colson

It wasn't until she was in her 50s that Deb Gay learned the joys of spending time outdoors in nature. She took that fresh perspective and turned it into a series of children's books that highlight experiences that last a lifetime.

Gay, formerly Deb Hamel (her pen name) and a long-time resident of Keene (23 years) and active community member, is now a published author. This summer, the first three books in her "Daddy's Hunting" series: "Daddy's Hunting Story," "Daddy Bought me a Bow & Some Arrows," and "Fall at Camp," were released at major (including online) retailers.

People in the Keene area may remember Gay's work as a member of the Keene Planning Board, as president of the Keene Lions Club, and in local politics and on local television and radio.

Gay, 58, married to her high school sweetheart, Doug Gay, in 2019 (the couple attended Fall Mountain Regional High School), accepted an invitation to accompany him on one of his hunts at what is now their home in the Great North Woods Region of New Hampshire on 122 acres.

"He hunted his whole life," she said. "I just started going

out with him and he started teaching me about wildlife. I got a bow and arrow and started shooting for target practice."

That was three years ago.

As someone who considers herself a fashionista who loves to wear high heels, lipstick and perfume, Gay said to sit still in the woods and be quiet (and not wear perfume or use hairspray) was a whole new experience.

"I absolutely love it and the time we spend together out there is wonderful," she said. "Hunting is not about filling the tag, it's about being one with nature."

Gay suffered two major strokes several years ago and while she said she's recovered about 90 percent, there have been lasting effects.

"It's made me look at things differently," she said. "I notice colors, sounds and I enjoy things like wildlife and foliage."

While her husband was out on a hunt last year in Illinois, Gay said she was going to write him a story.

"That was the first book," she said. "It was about him going off to hunt for the day and I had sent him off with breakfast."

She wrote the story by hand and drew all the pictures to surprise him. Then she decided to write another story, and by the end of the week she'd written nine manuscripts.

The little girl, Debber, the main character in the books, Gay based on her.

"Her big, blue eyes and messy hair and just her antics and silly questions are a lot like how I talk to (my husband)," she said. "Because of the strokes, my mind is very childlike in some ways."

The Daddy character is, of course, inspired by her husband.

The setting of the books is their home in the New Hampshire North Country.

Gay's illustrator, from Belarus and now a resident of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia, based 85 percent of her watercolor illustration on Gay's own photography of the events depicted in the books—all of which happened to Gay.

She plans to donate a portion of the proceeds to the organization, Hunt of A Lifetime, which provides a dream hunting or fishing trip to children under age 21 with life-

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threatening diseases and illnesses. This month, she and her husband gave a 16-year-old boy and his mother their dream trip—a four-day, three-night black bear hunt at their home.

Gay's books have received many accolades already, including endorsements from Olympic gold medalist and archer, John Williams (Gay is a member of the Archery Hall of Fame), as well as from the Wildlife Federation of New Hampshire and New Hampshire Fish and Game.

"I have found a niche market," she said.

Gay has submitted the first three manuscripts to her publisher for a new series, "Daddy's Fishing," based in the Florida Gulf Coast, where the couple has a second home. Those books feature the same characters. They plan to host a child from the Hunt of a Lifetime organization again, this time for a dream fishing trip.

Then Gay will continue work on the Daddy's Hunting series—she has six additional manuscripts written, stories about bear, deer, raccoons, food plots and more.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission plans to incorporate the "Daddy's Hunting" series into its education program.

Gay believes the overwhelmingly positive response her books have received so far is because they carry only positive connotation about the sport.

"They show hunting is about going out and tracking wildlife and seeing them in their own environment," she said. "They are also about family tradition. They are just adorable, educational and funny—they show all the good about hunting."

Gay's "Daddy's Hunting" series, by Small Sleeps Publishing, are available at Barnes & Noble, Walmart, Target, Amazon, Books-A-Million and many other retailers in hardcover, soft cover and e-book format. Visit www.debhamel.com for a full list of retailers and more information about upcoming books.