

**A summary of an article from the News & Observer, December 28, 2006**

## **Cat tales make an appealing memoir for children**

Patrick Wynn, Staff Writer

Gary Kramish's, self-published ode to his departed companion, Biff, is "A Cat Named Trouble".

It is a one-man enterprise powered by word of mouth and Kramish's instinct to tell everyone he meets about the book. His sales ramp up in the weeks before Christmas. "I keep talking about it," he said. "And people keep buying it."

Kramish, 50, is autistic but accomplished. He has a business degree from Durham Technical Community College and a recreation degree from N.C. Central University. He managed a peanut stand and a deli with his father.

When Biff died of cancer about three years ago, Kramish lost his best friend.

"Because I don't have children, he was a way to fill the void," Kramish said.

Biff, a gray-and-white tabby, was a master of mischief. He scrapped with squirrels, got stuck behind the dresser -- as well as the apartment complex storm drain -- and once disappeared for two days.

"He had really studied Biff's personality," said Kramish's sister, Marci Campbell, a UNC-Chapel Hill nutrition professor. "Most authors would have presented the cat in a literary way. The appeal here is that it's all real."

At his sister's urging, Kramish looked into having the book published. Networking with a family friend, they lucked into an aspiring illustrator and mother of four living in Texas.

Kim Duncan read Kramish's copy and paired it with soft, bright sketches. The quality surprised Campbell and Kramish. This book might sell, he thought.

"I wasn't so sure," said Campbell, who fronted her brother money for the printing costs. He planned to charge \$15, making a little more than the \$10-per-book printing cost.

Campbell doubted her brother would even make it through the first run of 100. In a month, they were gone.

Kramish is well-known at TEACCH, a nationally recognized autism treatment center in Chapel Hill. He told teachers he volunteered with about the book. And children at an autism summer camp. And partners at his swing dance classes.

Chapel Hill's Jackie Lofgren recently met Kramish when he secured a vendor's table at a Carrboro United Methodist Church fall market.

That day, she bought eight copies as Christmas gifts for her nieces and nephews.

"Gary is just lovable. I just wanted to put my arms around him and hug him," Lofgren said. "With what life has given him, he's showing the world what he can do instead of what he can't."

Biff Jr., an orange-and-cream tabby, doesn't resemble his predecessor. But he apparently shares Biff's taste for adventure. Kramish is writing the sequel to "A Cat Named Trouble."

"I think I'll call it 'Trouble Strikes Back.' "