



NEWS

Edmonton author Darla Woodley brings her books and red socks to local schools and libraries

By Madeleine Cummings, Edmonton Examiner
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Darla Woodley sports red socks as she poses with a copy of her book, *Red Socks Go With Absolutely Anything*. The book has won numerous awards since it was published in March 2015. Madeleine Cummings, Edmonton Examiner.

Red socks mean a lot to Darla Woodley and her family.

Relatives in British Columbia first explained the significance of the socks to her a few years ago.

The story originated in a hospital room where a son brought a pair of red socks to his sick mother. He promised her that they would make her feel "kind, strong and lucky."

Seven months later, the son became very sick, and the mother gave him a pair of red socks.

Wearing red socks to show support and solidarity soon became a family tradition.

Woodley, who grew up in Edmonton and lives on the north side of the city with her husband and two sons, loved the idea and started wearing red socks to her sons' hockey games and theatre performances.

Then she took the tradition one step further.

When one of her relatives got sick, she asked friends and family members to send her pictures of themselves wearing red socks. She compiled the collection of photos into a small book. People loved the book so much she printed additional copies for them to keep.

In 2014, while she was dealing with the loss of three family members in six months, Woodley decided to revisit the red socks book.

After her 99-year-old grandfather died, she sat down at the computer and started to write a story.

Woodley never dreamed she would be a children's book author, but she had always loved to write, and the story came surprisingly easily.

She called the picture book *Red Socks Go With Absolutely Anything*. It follows a child navigating life's challenges and draws on her own experiences and those of her two sons, Carter and Connor. (If you look closely, you can see their names hidden in one of the illustrations.)

Sunshine, the protagonist whose gender is purposely ambiguous, worries about things like the first day of school and a trip to the dentist. Sunshine's mother wears bright red socks to support her child at every turn.

The socks and the mantra "I feel strong. I am ready. I can do anything" carry Sunshine from the first day of school all the way to university graduation.

The socks stand out as striking splashes of colour in the beautiful black-and-white illustrations by Toronto artist Evan Munday.

Woodley also worked with a professional editor in Toronto but published the book herself in March of last year.

She said she wants to bring the book's message to as many young people as possible.

"It was a matter of sharing our family tradition, which is kind of kooky," she said.

"The most rewarding part is seeing kids who read it and understand the message and are excited about implementing the tradition into the own lives."

At one school in Bon Accord, a student named Lucas decided to dedicate one of the school's walls to Sunshine's mantra.

Woodley's work is starting to pay off. The book has received honours from the USA Best Book Awards, Literary Classics, the Nautilus Book Awards, the National Indie Excellence Awards, the International Book Awards and the Bookvana Awards.

Woodley said going against the grain of her introverted instincts and promoting the book has been the toughest part of the process so far, but her persistence has brought the book to countless local schools and libraries in Edmonton and across Western Canada.

Talking in front of students has gotten easier, she said.

"Now my face is not as red as my socks," she joked.



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