

LIFE ARTS

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Remember When it Snowed?

Books chronicle 2004 'snow miracle'



BY MIKE MOODY
THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

The South Texas Christmas Eve snowfall of 2004 gave local residents hours of fun and fond memories. The phenomenon that occurs in the area only once per century gave Kathryn Childers a new nickname.

"They call me the Snow Lady," she said. Childers, a Corpus Christi resident, earned her moniker by publishing a series of photo books that document that snowy day. The latest books in the series, "More Snow: The South Texas Snow Miracle, Vol. II," and "More Snow for Kids" hit H-E-B stores early last month.

The books feature photos taken by South Texas residents, including a number of snapshots from the Rio Grande Valley. Childers and H-E-B held a photo contest after the snow fell, and close to 6,000 photos of the snow came flooding in, she said.

The first snow book mostly featured photos from cities north of the Valley. Childers and H-E-B launched a second photo contest in late 2005 asking Brownsville and other

Valley residents to submit images for the second volume. Winners received H-E-B gift cards worth \$750 for first prize, \$350 for second prize and \$250 for third prize. "After the first book came out, I realized that we had not really pitched the first contest in the Valley, and we really didn't realize the Valley had so much snow," Childers said.

Brownsville received 1.5 inches of snow that Christmas



PHOTOS BY BRAD DOHERTY/THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Top: Maria de Jesus Hernandez, 3, wears snowflake glasses while reading "More Snow for Kids" at the H-E-B store on Paredes Line Road.

Above: Mike Medina of Brownsville inspects publisher Kathryn Childers' book Friday at H-E-B. The books feature photos of the 2004 South Texas Christmas Eve snowfall.

While locals were inspired to take photos of the 2004 snowfall, Childers and her son, Clark, a Los Angeles-based screenwriter, wanted to do more.

"It appeared to me that there would be more pictures taken that day in this region of the most incredible miraculous thing that would probably ever happen in our lifetime," Childers said.

'More Snow'



"More Snow: The South Texas Christmas Miracle, Volume II" features submitted images of the "once-in-a-lifetime" South Texas snowfall of Christmas Eve 2004. A sequel to last year's "Snow: The South Texas Christmas Miracle," volume two showcases 200 more photos taken by amateur and professional photographers from South Texas, including the Rio Grande Valley. Most of the photos were entries to a photo contest held last year by H-E-B.

"This one has a different feel, it's more country," publisher Kathryn Childers said about the book. The books are available now at all local H-E-B stores.

'More Snow for Kids'



The unique, 44-page storytelling project "More Snow for Kids" came from the imaginations of Clark Childers, a Los Angeles based screenwriter, and Corpus Christi sculptor William Wilhelm. Childers wrote the rhyming story about the 2004 South Texas Christmas snow for children to read during the holidays. For the illustrations, Wilhelm sculpted pages from natural clay, then drew and painted his playful cartoons on them using dyes and glazes. The clay tablets were fired and then scanned into a computer and integrated with submitted



BY AD DOHERTY/THE BROWNSVILLE HERALD

Clark Childers, author of "More Snow for Kids" holds his book outside a moving billboard that advertises the book on Friday in Brownsville.

SNOW

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That night, Childers and her son forgot about their plans to attend Christmas Eve Mass at Corpus Christi's Church of the Good Shepherd. Instead, they stood outside the church taking in the "magical" weather.

"Kids were leaping out of cars to play in the snow, and their parents could not control them. They flung themselves down hills wearing socks for gloves and squealing. It sounded like a schoolyard," Childers said. "My son, being a writer, turned to me and said, 'Someone ought to do a book about this,' and that's where it all started."

H-E-B agreed to distribute the first book. The first printing sold out in a week, Childers said. One book wasn't enough.

"We kept meeting people asking us to do another book and to publish more photos and more photos from the Valley, too," she said. "This one (volume two) has a different feel. It's more country."

The Valley photos start on the fourth page of volume two, with a shot of a snow-covered stop sign by Harlingen resident Ralph Luaces. Rob Guerra of Edinburg won first prize in the Valley contest for his photo of snow-covered palm trees reflecting in a resaca. Printed next to that photo is Rio Grande City resident Gracie Saldana's second prize-winning photo of a blanketed mission. Lisa Flores of Mercedes won third prize with a snapshot of three horses standing in a field of snow.

The book features an essay by KGBT meteorologist Brian Hale.

"That night was a historic event in The Rio

Grande Valley, but most of all, it was a blessing," Hail wrote.

Inside are more photos from McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville and other Valley cities.

Childers rolled into Brownsville on a 25-foot Airstream trailer decorated with photos and images from her books on Friday, part of a statewide book signing tour. She and her son, Clark, autographed books for local residents at several H-E-B stores and videotaped interviews with people who had fond memories of the snow. They have plans to pitch a holiday TV special to the networks.

"Everybody has a story, so I've kind of become the snow listener," Childers said.

"More Snow for Kids" features more submitted photos, a rhyming children's story written by Clark Childers and illustrations by Corpus Christi sculptor William Wilhelmi.

For the illustrations, Wilhelmi sculpted pages from natural clay, then drew and painted playful cartoons on them using natural dyes and glazes. The clay tablets were fired and then scanned into a computer and integrated with submitted photos of the snow and Childers's story.

"The printer looked at me like I was crazy, but we plopped it down on the scanner and it was absolutely perfect," Childers said.

Both books can be purchased at local H-E-B stores. A percentage of the funds raised will go to the H-E-B Literacy Project. Childers will finish her book signing tour on Dec 1. She's debating whether or not to start work on another snow book.

"I'm still not sure," she said about the prospect of another volume. "My son keeps kidding me saying that if I do 'Even More Snow,' people will think I'm crazy."

mmood@brownsvilleherald.com

A Snow Story

From "More Snow for Kids,"
by Clark Childers

At Christmas we dream of cold winter nights. Mugs of hot cocoa and great snowball fights. Of chestnuts roasting to the sound of sleigh bells, and of holiday litchers filled with holiday smells.

A South Texas Christmas is muddy and hot. With blights in the 90's, use it or not. So we put up our hollys and decorate trees, and we hope and we pray for that cold crisp breeze.

Then one Christmas Eve, not long ago, that breeze from the north, to the south it did blow. So anxious were all for Santa to stop, nobody noticed the temperature drop. "It's eight o'clock," the weatherman said. "Put out the cookies and hurry to bed. The rain shows up on its way. Jolly St. Nick and his reindeer herds. Hold on just a moment, believe y'all, my forecast predicts tonight it will snow!" In one hundred years not once have we found a cold Christmas eve when snow fell to the ground. Few had seen these things, they call flakes and no low expectations of the snow Texas makes. But as the rain fell drops started to freeze, and with the help of that cold winter's breeze they fluffed, and they puffed, and they burst into flakes. While kids workers only require car mats.

Kids and their parents jumped from their beds, desperately searching for some kind of sleds. One boy brought a surfboard another a box. They couldn't find gloves, so instead they wore socks.

But they didn't care about warm winter clothing, all that they cared was outside it was snowing.

The Christmas Day sun brought an end to the night, and revealed to us all a world covered in white. Every city, every town, every farm, every ranch, every road, every twig, every bough, every branch. Over every house, a snowman stood guard and snow angels fluttered in everyone's yard.

Corpus Christi to Rockport, and all up the coast. Weathermen bragged they got the most. But up to the north, away from the shore, in Galia and Victoria, they got even more!

Brownsville and McAllen got two or three. Galveston was white from sand dunes to sea. Presents from Santa stayed under the tree, outside in the snow was the best place to be.

Cat tails whiskers touched the cold flaky flakes. Icy cold paws gave those poor cats the shakes. Dogs puffed and barked, then buried their noses. They jumped, leaped, and landed in all sorts of poses.

Horses, donkeys, and Longhorns alike looked for their hay, but found only white. Gangs of cold turkeys and flamingos in pink only found ice when they went for a drink.

After awhile, the snow melted away. The South Texas Snow came and went in a day. Now all we have are the pictures we saved, of the white flaky flakes, we wish could have stayed. And precious memories of a cold winter's night, when all was calm and all was bright.

The story of snow may be hard to believe, but the miracle was that it snowed Christmas Eve.

