

Neighbors, Narratives, and New Lessons: The Teeda Says Story

SUBMITTED BY RIVER OAKS RESIDENT
THERESA HILDRETH



THERESA HILDRETH, lovingly known as “Teeda” to her grandchildren, is a Houston-based author behind the Teeda Says children’s book series, inspired by family, legacy, and everyday lessons shared with her five grandchildren. Through warm, accessible storytelling, she transforms real-life moments into meaningful guidance for young readers, focusing on values that help shape character and community.

Her newest release, Teeda Says “Be Responsible,” continues the series’ mission of teaching children practical life

lessons through relatable scenarios such as staying focused, following through, and making thoughtful choices. Illustrated by Kenny Kiernan, the book brings these moments to life in a way that resonates with both children and adults. Beginning with Be Patient, the series will expand to future titles including Be Loyal, Be Humble, Be Kind, Be Honest, Be Generous, and Be Helpful. We were so excited to connect with her and have her share her inspiration, creative process, and the heart behind the series.

The project is also closely tied to fellow neighborhood residents Tena and Tama, co-presidents of **PetSet**, a nonprofit focused on humanely addressing the stray animal crisis and strengthening community safety. United by a shared love of animals and service, the trio collaborated on the upcoming Teeda Says “Be Loyal and Loving,” with all proceeds benefiting PetSet’s programs. **Teeda Says “Be Responsible” is available now on Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Learn more at Teeda Publishing.**

How long have you lived in River Oaks, and what is your favorite thing about living in the neighborhood?

Over my 71 years, I have lived in West University, Montrose, and Spring Branch, but I moved to River Oaks in 2020 during the COVID pandemic. I love being part of a community that is rich in beautiful architecture, with many homes dating back to the 1920s and 1930s, stunning gardens, excellent security, and a strong sense of neighborhood connection.

Walking our two Labrador Retrievers allows me to soak in the beauty of River Oaks every day. As a native Houstonian, I feel as though I’ve lived in River Oaks my entire life. Growing up, I attended Lamar High School, and the Avalon Diner was my favorite place to spend time with friends. Years later, my cousin purchased the Avalon Diner and still owns it today. It has become a beloved River Oaks institution.

What inspired you to turn everyday moments with your grandchildren into a children’s book series, and how do you decide which life lessons become their own stories?

The series began with my now 18-year-old granddaughter when she was just 5 years old. We were sitting on my front porch watching a butterfly in my garden, and she wanted to know everything there was to know about butterflies. I began explaining the science behind their transformation, but she grew impatient learning about all the stages a butterfly must go through before becoming beautiful.

To help her understand, I created a simple story about the butterfly’s journey. She loved it and asked me to tell her every time she visited. Fast forward ten years, and at age 15 or 16 she asked, “Teeda, whatever happened to the Teeda says, “Be Patient” story about the butterfly?” I was amazed she still remembered it. Somehow, I found the story, and the rest is history.

Finding illustrator Kenny Kiernan brought Teeda Says to life and inspired me to continue what has become my third career, as an author.

As for choosing life lessons, they often emerge naturally from real experiences. Teeda says, “Be Responsible” was inspired by my grandson, James. Baseball is his passion, and after one particular game, a valuable lesson about responsibility came

to light. He was 14 years old at the time, and the experience inspired the story. The book explores responsibility through everyday situations children can relate to, such as staying focused, following through on commitments, and making thoughtful choices.

My newest book, Teeda says, “Be Loyal and Loving”, was inspired by my friendship with sisters Tena Lundquist Faust and Tama Lundquist of PetSet and our shared passion for animals. Together, we wanted to address the issue of homeless animals in Houston and throughout Texas. Through this story, we hope to encourage young readers to embrace compassion, fostering, and adoption while inspiring future generations to be loyal and loving.

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I have always believed that pets are among our greatest teachers of unconditional love and loyalty. If people could love the way our pets do, the world would be a much better place.

How do you hope the Teeda Says series will shape the way families talk about values across generations?

The Teeda Says series is a heartfelt collection of stories inspired by family, legacy, and the values I hope to pass down to future generations.

As I get older, I recognize that values were taught differently when I was growing up. Today, children are surrounded by social media, tablets, and constant online access. They often spend a great deal of time entertaining themselves. While technology certainly has its place, I still believe that books with meaningful messages and beautiful illustrations remain powerful tools for

sparking imagination and teaching important life lessons.

I plan to continue writing stories centered on the core values my grandparents taught me. Patience, Responsibility, and Loyalty and Loving are the first three. I hope to follow them with stories about being Humble, Kind, Honest, Generous, and Helpful.

How did you decide to partner with PetSet for Be Loyal and Loving, and how has that partnership shaped the message and purpose of this latest book?

This was an easy decision. My friendship with Tena and Tama began several years ago, and I have long admired and supported their mission to reduce the number of homeless and abandoned animals on the streets of Houston. I have championed their efforts to improve legislation and advocate for resources and funding at both the state and national levels to address this ongoing issue.

Two years ago, I lost my beloved rescue dog, Babe Ruth. I wanted to dedicate this book to Babe Ruth and to all the wonderful pets who have given unconditional love to the families who rescued them.

Thanks to Tena and Tama’s contributions, the story includes many of their pets as well as members of my own family’s furry family. That personal connection makes the book especially meaningful to all of us. I believe many families will see reflections of their own pets and the unconditional love they share when they read Teeda says, “Be Loyal and Loving”.

What advice would you give to young readers who dream of becoming authors one day?

Journal. Journal every day. Write down your thoughts, dreams, and observations. Create stories about the little things you experience every day. Share those stories with family and friends and ask for their feedback. Children today have incredible technology at their fingertips. They can use their computer skills to design a book, create a cover, write a title, and even print copies to share with others. Host a book-signing party for friends and family. The opportunities are endless. A child can become an author today.