



Eli, Paige, Wesley, Jaxon and Bryan Reischl

A Home for Gnome

Written by Alyssa Campbell

A Q&A with Children's Book Author, June Vanderhoff

The Eli's Park Project is a legacy of love and a promise of inclusion for children in our community. In his nearly four years on this earth, Elijah Del Reischl opened minds, changed hearts and inspired his family and community to create a space where people of all ages and abilities can find joy and peace through play. Along with a community-led volunteer group and partnered with Seattle Parks and Recreation, Paige Reischl and her team seek to renovate the Burke-Gilman Playground Park into a fully-inclusive, nature-based park where people of all abilities are included in the fun.

To help support the Eli's Park Project, June Vanderhoff, a first-time children's book author and proud grandmother to Eli, as well as nine other grandchildren, wrote a tale called *A Home for Gnome*. Inspired by Eli's zest for life, his affinity for gnomes, and his boundless spirit, June knew a story was born to share with others in hopes of creating a more inclusive world. Eli passed away in 2017 at just under 4 years old.

How did your grandson, Eli, inspire you to write a children's book?
A Home for Gnome isn't a story about Eli specifically, but he was

certainly the inspiration for this book and he embodied the characteristics of the main character, Lampy the gnome. Much like Lampy, Eli was sweet, warm and loving. As I was creating the book, I knew that Lampy would end up finding his home in a beautiful new park, just like the renovated Burke-Gilman Playground Park will be. My greatest hope is that this story honors Eli's memory.

Can you tell our readers about your background as an author?

I'm a first-time author! I've always loved to read and tell stories, especially to my grandchildren. Writing a children's book is something I have always considered doing but never really pursued. After we lost Eli, I decided it was time to give it a try. I found the writing process to be therapeutic during a very difficult time for our family.

You mention that Eli was very fond of gnomes. How did that interest begin for him?

Eli took an interest in some cute, gnome figurines inside a hollowed-out tree trunk in his Seattle neighborhood. Eli and his family made frequent walks to the tree trunk to feed Cheerios to the gnomes who lived there. Eli's two brothers, Jaxon and

Wesley, who are symbolized by the birds in the book, always made sure the Cheerios disappeared before their next visit to the tree. Eli was tickled to see that the Cheerios were eaten by the gnomes. Still today, new gnome figurines appear



from time to time in the same hollowed-out tree trunk, which delights other children who come to visit.

The illustrations for this book are so fun. How did you meet the illustrator, C.S. Fritz?

Peanut Butter Publishing, my independent publisher in Seattle, put me in touch with C.S. Fritz, a talented illustrator who caught my vision for *A Home for Gnome* right away. I was fortunate to find an illustrator so creative, capable and easy to work with. Our partnership was a good fit from the beginning and I'm grateful to him for developing the characters I'd envisioned.

What would you like readers to know about your grandson, Eli?

Like the gnome character, Eli was able to give in unique ways all his own. He taught us about love and compassion towards others. This reciprocity of giving and receiving is such a simple yet profound lesson, and it's exactly what the Eli's Park Project hopes to accomplish by including all people. In the four years he was with us, Eli was such a gift to me and to our family and he changed us all for the better. Eli spread unconditional love everywhere he went with his big smile and tight hugs. He was so full of joy and opened our eyes to the beauty of differences and the benefits of inclusion. I'm proud that this park's creative design will allow it to be a place that people of all ages and abilities can access and utilize. It will be a place where everyone belongs.

Readers can learn more about **A Home for Gnome** and the **Eli's Park Project** by visiting:

www.ahomeforgnome.com

www.elispark.org



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