

Books | Woodstock

‘A Thanksgiving for the Turkeys’

Young Woodstock woman’s children’s book gives the holiday a new path

by Erin Quinn

THE DAY OF GIVING THANKS and post-harvest feasting before the long, dark winter, is almost upon us. Thanksgiving has evolved from a colonial myth into an American institution that centers around food, festivity, family and fowl. It’s Rockwellian representations often include that huge turkey on a platter, its buttery skin glistening from oven-baked heat, cranberry sauce and butternut squash topped off with pumpkin or pecan pie.

The meta-narrative of Thanksgiving and “peace-offerings” between Indigenous People and European settlers is slowing but surely being disrupted and allowing for a plethora of new voices, new ways of celebrating to enter onto the buffet table.

One of these strands has been woven beautifully by the 20-year-old writer, author, environmentalist, Lotus Kay of Woodstock, who recently read from her children’s book, “A Thanksgiving for the Turkeys,” at the Catskill Animal Sanctuary, for a live story hour where she was flanked by rescued turkeys on either side of her perch by the barn.

The book, with vibrant illustrations by Chey Diehl, follows the story of Milo the Turkey as he finds out from his other animal friends about Thanksgiving. “He’s all excited to learn that there’s a special ‘turkey day’ that celebrates him,” explains Kay. Soon, Milo finds out that this is not the kind of coming-out party he was hoping for and has to navigate his way around “Turkey Day,” by introducing new food choices and ways of thinking about gratitude. The book also features some back pages with some easy-to-digest definitions of what it means to be a vegan and how to make a cruelty-free Thanksgiving dinner.

Kay began writing the books while in her teens, enlightened by her desire to educate and inspire young people to celebrate and care for the earth and animals. The book was named one of PETA’s “Must Read Compassionate Books,” and is one of four children’s books she’s written, all centered around seeing the world through a lens that recognizes the importance of wildlife, emphasizes the beauty of nature and creating a more compassionate world for everyone to live in. These books were part of she and her sister’s *Bears for Cares* educational campaign, which aims to educate young people about endangered species and actions they can take to with a goal of protecting these animals and their habitats.

TO THAT END, ON ENDANGERED SPECIES DAY, Lotus and her sister Jazmin, both natives of the Hudson Valley, received a grant from the Jane Goodall Institute’s Roots & Shoots youth service program for their work creating the *Bears for Cares* project. Goodall, world-renowned ethologist, considered to be the world’s foremost expert on chimpanzees, wrote to Kay herself.



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Lotus Kay.



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Lotus Kay with her book “Jenny.”

“Dear Lotus, It is fantastic that you are writing these books — thank you so much for sending me some copies, including, of course, Jenny. And it is such a good idea to have soft toys with them. Children’s books are really important. Congratulations.”

— Dr. Jane Goodall, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute (JLI) and Roots & Shoots

“Jane Goodall is one of my major influences and role models,” said Kay who said she was honored to receive both the grant and the kind words from the woman who lived among these brilliant animals in the rain forest and observed them for years.

She said she also is a big fan of Colleen Patrick-Goudreau, known on social media as the *Joyful Vegan*. “I love her approach because she’s makes it fun to

and in such cruel and painful conditions. Why? It’s not based on any nutritional needs we have. It helps cause obesity, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and honestly, if it wasn’t so industrialized do you really think people would want to tear into a raw piece of bloody meat with fur on it? I don’t think so. And the impact the meat industry is having on the environment with green house gases and clearing of the rain forest? Why? It’s not necessary and it’s hurting everyone.”

BUT, THE PRECOCIOUS, LITERARY MIND-ed young Lotus, did find people who were talking about it and began to watch the documentary “Raising Extinction,” and said that she would rather be the person “who lit one candle rather than curse the darkness. We have to do what we can and I think all of my books try to empower young people to take action.”

Asked when she knew that she wanted to be a writer, Kay said, “almost as soon as I could talk. I’m on the autistic spectrum so I found it easier to communicate through writing at first than I did through talking.”

She’s doing both now and with great success. Her other books include *Jenny the Chimpanzee*, (which won the Mom’s Choice Award,) *Billie the Octopus* and *More Beautiful than Heaven*. They are published by Eifrig Publishing and Kay teamed up with the eco-friendly company, Hugg-a-Planet to provide companion stuffed animals of the main characters in the book to help reinforce its messages.

The books make a great holiday gift as they are unique and written by a local author as well as educational. They can be purchased by ordering through the website at www.bearsforcares.com or at Mirabai and Golden Notebook independent booksellers in Woodstock or at Barnes and Nobles in Kingston.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of all books and toys will be donated to the Jane Goodall Institute and the Roots & Shoots program to help support other young people passionate about helping our wildlife and planet.

‘I’ve always had a very strong connection to animals and the earth and was mostly a vegetarian growing up...’
— Lotus Kay, author

be a vegan and is not judgmental and has a great sense of humor.” Kay herself, became a vegan when she was 14 years old. “I’ve always had a very strong connection to animals and the earth and was mostly a vegetarian growing up but once I began to learn more about animal factory farming and abuses and the dangers the meat industry poses to animals, to the environment and our own health and well-being, I was horrified and wanted to say, ‘why isn’t anyone talking about this?’ One billion animals are being killed a day

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