

## 20-year-old BC3 @ LindenPointe author to meet with editors, agents at Pittsburgh event

Feb. 6, 2020



Ellaura Shoop, 20, of Grove City, is shown Feb. 3, 2020, at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage with a toy meerkat. The straight-A student who expects to earn associate degrees from BC3 in English, in psychology and in general studies will market to editors and agents her first novel, “The Meer: The Blood of the Desert,” intended for middle-school-audience readers, at the Pittsburgh Writing Workshop on March 28.

(Grove City, PA) A 20-year-old straight-A student at BC3 @ LindenPointe expecting to earn associate degrees in English, in psychology and in general studies will market to editors and agents at the 2020 Pittsburgh Writing Workshop her 237-page middle-school-audience novel chronicling three young meerkats’ expedition across an African desert to save the life of their snake-bitten older brother.

“The Meer: The Blood of the Desert” was inspired by her fascination with the 2-pound members of the mongoose family since age 7 and was completed in September after two years, said

Ellaura Shoop, a 2018 graduate of Grove City Area High School who has achieved a 4.0 grade-point average through 36 credit hours at BC3 @ LindenPointe.

Chuck Sambuchino, of Cincinnati, author of the 2010 nonfiction humor book “How to Survive a Garden Gnome Attack: Defend Yourself When the Lawn Warriors Strike” and former editor of the “Children’s Writer’s and Illustrator’s Market” and the “The Guide to Literary Agents,” is the organizer of the third Pittsburgh Writing Workshop, scheduled for March 28.

The daylong series of classes, discussions and meetings can represent an avenue for a writer’s work to be published, Sambuchino said.

“Authors can meet editors and agents one-on-one and pitch their work,” Sambuchino said. “It’s an opportunity to sit down with an editor at St. Martin’s Press and with agents who have sold literally dozens of books.”

## Family, teamwork key themes

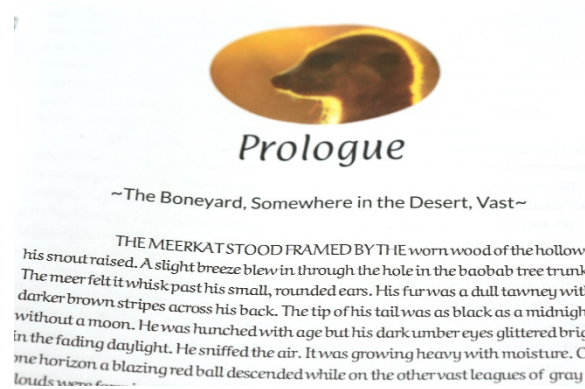
“The Meer: The Blood of the Desert” will teach 10- through 15-year-olds the value of family and of working as a team, Shoop said.

“That’s really what meerkat families are all about,” Shoop said. “They work in tandem with one another and do what’s best for the group as a whole.”

Family and teamwork are important themes for middle-school audiences because “in our social environment, we are going to have to work with people throughout our lives,” Shoop said. “As they get older, that will be expected of them. In life, in any job you have, you are going to have to work with others.”

Shoop, a full-time student at BC3 @ LindenPointe, has earned president’s list honors three times by having attained a grade-point average of at least 3.75 following the completion of at least 12 credit hours during a semester.

She is president of BC3 @ LindenPointe’s book club, is a member of its psychology and social work club, and drives 40 minutes each way to reach her part-time job in West Sunbury, Butler County, as a home healthcare aide working with those with disabilities for the Alliance for Nonprofit Resources, Butler.



The prologue of “The Meer: The Blood of the Desert,” the first novel written by Ellaura Shoop, 20, of Grove City, is shown Feb. 3, 2020, at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage. The straight-A student who expects to earn associate degrees in English, in psychology and in general studies from BC3 will market to editors and agents the book intended for middle-school-audience readers at the Pittsburgh Writing Workshop on March 28.

Her protagonist in “The Meer: The Blood of the Desert,” Sand, is a member of the desert-dwelling mongoose family that stole Shoop’s heart as a Grove City elementary school second-grader watching “Meerkat Manor” on cable television’s “Animal Planet.”

It was then she told her mother, Karen: “I’m going to write a story someday about these little meerkats,” Shoop said.

## Young protagonist in difficult situation

In her novel, 2-month-old Sand leaves his safe and secure network of burrows – a system much like “blood vessels, and the meerkats are the blood of the desert,” Shoop said. Sand and littermates Beetle and Thorn set out to find an antidote to treat 2-year-old brother Hawk, the victim of a cobra strike.

“He is forced at a very young age into a very difficult situation,” Shoop said of Sand. “Something happened to his family, and he is really thrust into it. He has no idea what he is going to do. He’s just a pup.”

“The Meer: The Blood of the Desert” chronicles the coming-of-age of Sand, who must “figure things out for himself, not just blindly believe what he is told. He is having to make up his own mind based on his own experiences. Sand will face that.”

Sand, Beetle and Thorn, in search of the antidote for Hawk called “Night Blossoms,” encounter eagle owls that prey on meerkats, Shoop said.

Nearly drown in a pool of viscous mud exposed after elephants shatter the basin’s hardened crust across which the siblings are walking.

Escape kidnapping by jackals who want to sacrifice the pups to their goddess.

## Psych class helps to define characters’ behavior

Sand is the leader among Beetle and Thorn, who are “both stubborn and get into fights a lot,” Shoop said. “Sand has to be the negotiator. He’s always calming them down and getting them to focus on something else.”

Her characters’ humanlike behavior is based on what Shoop said she has learned from Dr. Terri Finamore in BC3 @ LindenPointe classes in general psychology, social psychology, sociology, abnormal psychology and contemporary social problems.

“What takes place in our head,” Shoop said. “(Finamore) has really helped me figure out what my characters are thinking and feeling, and why they are behaving the way they are. ... Even though they are meerkats, their thoughts and feelings are very human.”

Finamore said she cannot imagine teaching psychology to younger children in the way she does to college students.

“So what better way to bridge that information than to use these charming meerkats to capture their imagination and infuse within them this understanding in using a mechanism that would appeal to them?” Finamore said.

A middle-school-audience book can be used to help pupils learn about family, loyalty and working toward a common goal, Finamore said.

“Those core values are so important,” she said. “And in giving that message to middle schoolers, Ellaura is extracting from our information the social institution of family. What is more important than that? And what have we lost more than that? So putting that out there for children to absorb can only enhance their understanding toward obtaining the same goals – living communally, and living within the context of a family.”

Shoop’s poem “With,” written during her senior year at Grove City Area High, where she was an honor roll student, was published in the 2018 edition of Poetry Games by Young Writers in Peterborough, England.

Shoop plans to finish her pursuit of three associate degrees at BC3 in May 2021 and aspires to become a full-time middle-school-audience author.