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A Tale of Sisterhood - and Zombies

by Sloan Brewster

A novel written by a Hebron local and set in Glastonbury tells the story of a teenage zombie and her best friend – her sister.

Over her career, Stacey Longo, a resident of Hebron who grew up on Longo Farm in Glastonbury, has often brought her family into the mix. She has included anecdotes about them in the humor column she wrote for the *Block Island Times* from 1999 to 2007 and she still brings their stories to her blog, so it was no great surprise when she decided to weave a tale about sisters in her latest novel, *My Sister the Zombie*, set to be released on March 11.

Best friends with her sister Kim Kane, Longo wanted to write about the deep relationship sisters share.

"My sister and I are very close; we have been all our lives," she said. "We talk on the phone every day. She is absolutely my best friend."

Best friend indeed. In the book, Longo transformed her sister into Blossom, a 16-year-old girl, who, due to a nuclear accident, becomes a zombie.

Kane took being made a zombie in stride.

"I wasn't too surprised. My sister is a horror writer, we're close and why not be a zombie?" she said. "I think I said to her, 'I don't die?"

She doesn't.

Blossom is, in fact, the protagonist. Sure, she's a zombie, but she's the good guy, Longo said.

"She's very likeable in the book," Longo said. "I definitely made her the hero."

The story begins in Arizona, where Blossom becomes a zombie. The family decides to move to Glastonbury to escape the dry climate, which is wreaking havoc on the young zombie's skin. After the move, strange things start to happen in the area.

"People start dying. Their brains are removed," Longo said. "Blossom is the only zombie [so] she's the suspect."

The mystery to solve is who is actually committing the heinous acts.

"It was a good mystery," Kane said. "I didn't know who did it until the end."

Despite the violent deaths, the novel is for

young adults and is written in youthful language. Longo said it's for kids on the younger end of the young adult spectrum – i.e., high school freshmen versus seniors.

"Seniors would be like 'This is cute but a little young for me," Longo said.

Aside from being a story about the bond of sisterhood, there are other messages in the book. One underlying theme is about how people who are different are treated.

As a zombie, Blossom is treated as though she's handicapped, explained the writer. Her communication skills are limited and her sister, the only one who can understand her, has to translate, so they both take the special needs bus.

The story is also about more than the mere bond between sisters, but the conflicting layers of sisterly love.

"Jasmine, the younger sister often is frustrated," Longo said. "She feels that she didn't want to move to Glastonbury; she [moved there] because of her sister."

Despite her frustration, Jasmine sticks by Blossom.

"The relationship at the end is that this is still my sister," Longo said. "We're in it until the end."

Vlad Vaslyn, publisher and founder of *The Storyside Press*, which is publishing Longo's book, said Longo takes readers on a journey.

"Stacey has a knack for turning the uncomfortable into the humorous and this is one of the books that does that," he said.

Longo makes the story believable by injecting real-life episodes into the narrative, Vaslyn said.

Some of those situations come from Longo's own childhood.

For example, there's a point in the book where Blossom and Jasmine go fishing and a snapping turtle makes a snap a Blossom. Managing to get away from the turtle, the girls run home as fast as they can and tell their mother that a snapping turtle was chasing them.

As she retold the story, transitioning to the real-life tale that inspired it, Longo laughed heartily.

When the real sisters were children, they went trout fishing on the family farm when they encountered a snake on the water.

"The snake cuts through the water right there, where we're sitting on the bank," Long said.

The sisters ran with all their might back to the house, cutting through a cornfield to get there, screaming the whole while.

"We told mom there was a snake, it was chasing us, it was an anaconda," Longo said.

Not until four years later, when the more mature sisters were watching a snake-themed Duran Duran music video, did they acknowledge that, perhaps, it wasn't as bad as it seemed, she said.

"Kim looks at me and says, 'You know, I'm pretty sure the snake wasn't chasing us," Longo said.

Of course, over time the story continues to evolve and now, Kane says the snake was chasing them, Longo said, laughing again.

Putting the anecdotes into the book works, according to Vaslyn and brings the characters to life, especially Blossom, who while a zombie, is also a teenager, dealing with typical teenage problems.

Longo "manages to humanize the zombie into a 16-year-old girl," he said.

It took Longo about six months to get through the first draft of the book and then a year more to complete edits and revisions.

She went to Storyside after another publisher she was working with changed hands.

Storyside, a collaboration between five authors who pool resources to publish books, was founded in 2014. In September 2015, the publisher released its first book. Longo's book will be the company's fifth release.

According to her bio, Longo has been published in more than two dozen anthologies and magazines. Her critically-acclaimed first novel, 2015's *Ordinary Boy*, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She has also written a pair of books aimed at helping children understand



Hebron author Stacey Longo

their parent's diagnosis with illness: My Mom Has MS, and My Mom, MS, and a Sixth-Grade Mess, which won the Preditors & Editors Readers' Choice Award for Best Young Adult Book of 2017.

Longo is also an award-winning editor, and has worked with authors such as Jonathan Maberry, Jeff Strand, Rick Hautala and James Moore, among others.

My Sister the Zombie will be available in bookstores and online at Amazon and can be preordered in Kindle.

Longo will have her first book signing for *My Sister the Zombie* on Saturday, March 24, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Riverfront Community Center, 300 Welles St. in Glastonbury.

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