

An 'egg-ceptional' invitation

Shelby native invited
to read book at White
House Easter Egg Roll

Cassie Tarpley
Star Staff Writer

Telling tales of frogs and bunnies isn't what author Kim Johnson had intended to do.

"I just happened upon it," she told The Star last spring.

The acclaim that writing children's books has brought the Shelby native garnered a special invitation this spring.

Ms. Johnson will make friends in high places Monday, when she reads from her book, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny," at the annual White House Easter Egg Roll.

Not only her work, but the purpose behind it, is responsible for the invitation, she said.

Ms. Johnson is a staunch advocate for improving literacy rates in children, a top White House priority, and was hand-picked by first lady Laura Bush for the honor, she said.

Ms. Johnson is already a familiar face among the circuit of reading association, Head Start organizations and school systems around America.

In addition to student workshops, her mission to reach children includes conducting interactive training sessions that coach teachers on how to motivate



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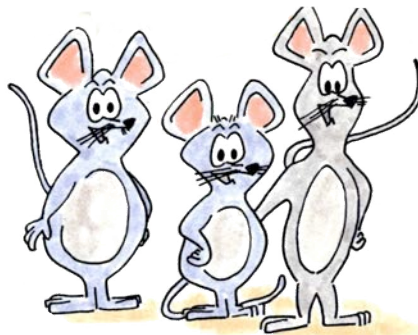
Author Kim Johnson, a Shelby native, has been invited to read her book 'The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny' at the annual White House Easter Egg Roll on Monday.

kids to read, and how to inspire them to write their own stories. She has appeared on "The Today Show."

Former N.C. Gov. James Hunt wrote the forward to her latest children's book, "Tag-Along Fred," about a boy who shadows civil servants as they work.

The Easter Egg Roll dates back to

1872, when rolling eggs on the Monday after Easter was a tradition observed by many Washington families. This year the event will be Webcast live on the White House Web site at www.whitehouse.gov. To learn more about Ms. Johnson's work, visit www.simplycreativeworks.com.



Kimberly P. Johnson, Children's Author

Student/Teacher Workshops and Keynote Presentations

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FAITH COVERAGE CONTINUES INSIDE

Questions of Faith. A grass-roots coalition of Presbyterians pushes for change. Page 3E

BOOKS

Giant step for 'Itty Bitty' author

BY SUSAN HOUSTON
STAFF WRITER

*When the woman said, "White House calling,"
Kimberly Johnson thought it was funny
That on April 1 she would be reading
From her book, "The Itty Bitty Bunny."
But it wasn't an April Fools' joke
Or anything that was shady.
The request came straight from the top,
Laura Bush, America's first lady.*

This is how poet and children's book author Kimberly P. Johnson of Cameron might write about the biggest moment in her literary career so far.

On Monday, Johnson will join such children's literature luminaries as Marc Brown and Norman Bridwell, creators of the "Arthur" and "Clifford, the Big Red Dog" series, respectively, for readings at the annual Easter egg roll on the White House lawn.

"Shoot, I'd pay them to go," says Johnson, whose first book, "The Adventures of Itty Bitty Frog," was published by Raleigh's Pentland Press in 1997.

Johnson's journey to the White House began last August, when she met with Sen. John Edwards about helping at-risk children become interested in reading. Edwards promised to pass along the message to the first lady, a former schoolteacher and librarian who has made literacy her own pet project.

Literacy is a personal crusade for Johnson, reared by her grandparents in Shelby. They enrolled her in the Head Start program, an advantage for which she is still grateful. "I owe a lot of my jump-start to that. It helps you see the light at the end of that tunnel," she says.

Her grandfather was adamant that her "book work" came first. "Papa would come home from a



Writer Kimberly P. Johnson has been invited to the White House.

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JOHNSON

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long day's work and ask me, 'OK, did you get your book work done?'" It wasn't until she was in junior high school that she knew why. Watching him sign his paycheck with an "X," she finally realized that her Papa couldn't read or write.

"He was a very smart man," Johnson says. "If there's one thing he could have done differently in his life, it would be to get an education."

Instead, he made sure his granddaughter got hers. She received a degree in radio, television and motion pictures from UNC-Chapel Hill and went to work as a journalist. But a constant stream of crime and other bad news began to depress her. So she switched careers in 1987 and became a flight attendant for USAirways.

But Johnson continued to write. Remembering how much she loved reading Dr. Seuss books and going to story time at the local Girls Club, she turned her talents to writing for children. (She and her husband, Jeff, do not have children themselves.) "I kind of fell into it," she recalls. "I wrote, hoping to submit it to a newspaper."

When she told a fellow airline employee of her secret hobby, Scott Arnold confessed that he'd always wanted to be an illustrator.



A portion of the money from the sales of Kimberly P. Johnson's books goes to help literacy programs for children.

"I said, 'I'll write the story and you do the illustrations,'" Johnson says. "And a few months later, I had to put my money where my mouth was."

*She's created an "itty bitty" series
In rhyming couplets, like Dr. Seuss.
Her characters are moral and good,
Although her meter's a little loose.
But the kids love to hear her stories.
At schools, they always bring cheers,
Especially when Mrs. Johnson
Wears her frog eyes or bunny ears.*

In her "Itty Bitty" series, a frog discovers that even the smallest creatures can be helpful. A bunny shows the value of friendship to a hos-

tile otter. A spider and a mouse discover that you can work together even if you are different. In her latest book, "Tag-Along Fred," a little boy goes to work with different people and decides that all work is good.

Since Johnson's books are easy to read and have a strong moral component, teachers began to incorporate them in their curriculum on "character education." She's in demand as a storyteller, inspirational speaker and tireless advocate for literacy throughout the Southeast. A dollar from the sale of each of her books goes to children's literacy projects.

In the wake of airline cutbacks following Sept. 11, Johnson took a leave of absence from her job as a flight attendant and has been on the road almost constantly as a stumper for literacy. She also wrote a poem about how to explain September's tragedy to children, a poem later broadcast on WRAL-TV and sent to first lady Laura Bush. "She sent me a letter about how it touched her heart," Johnson says.

Which, dear reader, brings us to the end of our story:

*On Monday, she'll be at the White House,
Site of the egg roll game,
To read from her book and to capture
An itty bitty claim to fame.*

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Author leaves readers spellbound

By **Lisa Singleton-Rickman**
STAFF WRITER

Children's author Kimberly P. Johnson isn't just another writer.

She's a fireball just waiting to explode knowledge and creative insights upon children.

She spins her stories, many from her own life experiences, with a punch that renders students, well, talkative.

"I want interaction here, guys," she says, motioning with her fingers in a come-here manner.

The sixth-graders at Hatton Elementary School in Colbert County are spellbound, not knowing what to expect next.

"I don't like boring. There's no place for boring," Johnson said.

"Today, we're going to be alive and creative and energetic.

We won't use boring words, and we'll learn to add

drama and excitement to our storytelling and our writing. We do that with exciting words. We paint

scenes, and we step into this other world."

With that, she was off. Within

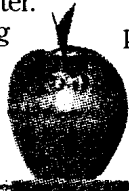
two minutes, the students were hooked.

Weaving in and out of the crowd of children sitting cross-legged in the school gymnasium, Johnson had them shouting answers to her questions, literally pulling positive vibes from children around her.

"The bad stuff out, the good stuff in," she explains, reinforcing her point that students must be accountable to their parents and teachers.

The Colbert County school system's reading coach, Tena Flanagan, calls Johnson a master at

BOOKS continued on 5B



EDUCATION FOCUS



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BOOKS: Author visits

Continued from 1B
incorporating character education into her presentation of book readings, story telling and writing workshops with students.

Johnson's series of books, *The Adventures Of* series, evokes imagination in children through the "Itty Bitty Frog," the "Itty Bitty Bunny," the "Itty Bitty Spider" and the "Itty Bitty Mouse."

While children enjoy Johnson's charismatic style of entertainment, her message is serious. Literacy is her passion.

The North Carolina native has written six books with two new ones due out next year. She has been writing professionally since 1997.

But she has always stressed the importance of literacy. She has seen its value firsthand.

Born and raised in a poor family, Johnson tells students not to underestimate the value of a solid education.

"My only focus is literacy," she said. "I'm a product of the Head Start program, and I know it works. Children must have an early start. My grandfather was illiterate, and he was determined we would be educated."

A former newspaper writer, Johnson recently completed her degree in early childhood education.

Until last year, she was a flight attendant for a major airline. After the tragic events of Sept. 11, her airline offered incentives for longtime employees to take a yearlong leave of absence.

She found herself torn between her interest in writing and working with children and her 15-year-long career with the airline, a job she loved.

Her path was made clear with a series of events, all of which seemed to point in favor of her writing career.

Last year, she contacted U.S. Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina in hopes of gaining direction on how to take her literacy message to a larger audience.

"I knew he was busy, so I didn't have high hopes of gaining his assistance, but he agreed to help, and he sent my books to Mrs. Bush," Johnson said. "Then Sept. 11 happened."

A poem she had written after Sept. 11 titled "How Do You Tell a Child?" was read on a local radio station.

At the encouragement of people around the state, she faxed a copy to first lady Laura Bush.

To Johnson's surprise, Bush sent her a letter thanking her for the poem.

"She must have put it together that I was the same person whose books she'd been given, and the next thing I knew, I was being invited to the White House to read to children at the big Easter egg hunt."

She describes the experience of meeting President and Mrs. Bush as "awesome and humbling."

She and her husband, who is in the Air Force, had breakfast with the first couple along with only a few other invited guests.

"I was so nervous I could hardly eat my breakfast," she said. "But then, when I got out there with all those children, I was totally comfortable. I was still in this awesome place, but I was in my element with these children, and yeah, it felt right."

Hatton sixth-grader Chase Hacker said he appreciated Johnson's message to never give up.

"I think I can really be a better writer if I use her tips and don't use the same words over and over," Hacker said. "I already like to read, but now I think I'll enjoy it even more."

Information about Johnson's books and educational program is available online at www.simplycreativeworks.com.

She conducted classes Monday at Leighton Elementary School and will be at New Bethel Elementary today.

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THE **ANGIER** INDEPENDENT

Author inspires students to read and write

By Krista Page
Independent Editor

Kim Johnson is excited about getting children to read and write. Her enthusiasm was obvious as she stood before a library full of third-graders at North Harnett Primary School Wednesday.

She wore bunny ears on her head as she read from her second children's book "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny." With different voices for each character, and facial expressions that often brought a round of laughter from the students, Johnson told students that words are knowledge.

Johnson, a western Harnett County resident, is fast becoming a recognizable voice in the world of children's books. Her first book, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," took six months to write, but sold out in its first printing. "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny," was published in September and a third book is on the way.

But Johnson says her real mission is to open the world of reading and writing to children. Her books are, in one aspect, a means to that end.

With a cardboard cut-out of the Itty Bitty Frog as her backdrop, Johnson reads, sings, shouts, whispers and laughs her way past the tough exterior of some of her audiences and soon has them smiling, then imagining. Before they know what's happening Johnson has whisked them into a world of words.

Wide world

Johnson teaches students that all good stories have a beginning, a middle and an end; that ideas for writing are everywhere; and that reading can take you anywhere. By the time she is through, Johnson has certainly entertained her audience, but what's more, she has planted the seeds for a lifetime of reading and writing.

And the students at North Harnett didn't seem to mind that Johnson had them thinking, writing and working. Students who initially indicated writing was hard, had

Author

Continued From Page One

changed their minds after hearing Johnson speak. Under her guidance, the students used their imaginations to take on the identity of an everyday object and even an animal.

Some students stuck with the norm.

They became a green fly-eating frog that lived in a pond, but others came up with creative identities like a purple pepperoni-pizza-eating snake. But that didn't matter to Johnson who lavished the students with praise and relished in their discovery, that indeed, writing is fun.

Her third book, which will be published in March, "The Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse," will be the last install-

ment in the Itty Bitty series, at least for a while.

New series coming

The Itty Bitty animals that capture children's imaginations while teaching lessons about stealing, keeping promises and being a good friend, have established Johnson in the industry and have led the way for Johnson's newest series about Tag Along Fred, a curious little boy who shadows workers in a community. Fred's mission, is to teach children about the importance of each person in a community.

Already, Johnson has carved out her own niche in the community. Fitting in visits to schools and day cares across the state between her day job as a flight attendant, Johnson is

relentless in her quest.

"I love seeing them excited about writing," Johnson said. "When a child comes to me and says, 'I want to be an author,' it makes it all worthwhile."

At North Harnett, in the library with the third-graders, Johnson was at her best. She lowered her voice and the room grew quiet.

Her voice then rang out with a poem she wrote for such occasions. She has the rhyme memorized and she repeats it very fast.

"I open a book and I open my mind to things that are kind, Like forests and trees and rivers that run. Like people and places and things that are fun. I travel the world wherever I go. And if I open a book, I'll get there, I know."



Kimberly P. Johnson, Children's Author

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Teaching the joy of literacy

By **JULIE ANNE CARTER**
Register & Bee staff writer



DANVILLE, Va. — When Kimberly P. Johnson speaks, children listen.

Fifth-grade students at Taylor Magnet School gave their undivided attention to Johnson Monday as she illustrated the joy of reading and writing, and how fun both can be.

Johnson, a children's author, storyteller and writing consultant from North Carolina, shares her creativity with children by showing them various styles of writing techniques, including narrative and imaginative. "I want children to realize that we can all enjoy reading," Johnson said. "Reading touches the heart. If children can enjoy reading, they will always be able to enjoy writing. The two go hand in hand."

Johnson has written several books, including "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny" and "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse." Her upcoming titles include "Paperback Poetry, Part I" and "Tag Along Fred."

Johnson's books promote character education and positive self-esteem. Each book also introduces character traits, such as kindness, sharing and friendship.

She uses realistic animals such as a rabbit, a beetle, an owl and an otter to teach children. She also has created a series of motivational reading posters and greeting cards.

"I think that with Kimberly's help, the children will write more creatively," said Joyce Tucker, principal of Taylor Magnet School. "Children often write well, but a lot of times they don't put creativity in their writing. And the kids are really enjoying her being here."

Johnson said her grandfather inspired her to become a writer.

"My grandfather was illiterate," Johnson said. "It was not until middle school that I realized that he could not read or write. And it wasn't because he didn't know the importance of school, but during that time, they had to stop going to school to go to work so he could help take care of the family. But he always told me to make sure I got my book work."

"If you can get your book work, you can do anything in the world, he would say. And he's right. If you can get a good education, you can go anywhere you want to. You're not hindered. With children now, it just disheartens me to see that they take their education so lightly. It's just important to keep them excited."

Johnson said her husband also was an inspiration for her to become an author.

"The book idea was something I always had planted in my mind, but he pushed me to do it," Johnson said. "I wanted to do it, but that fear kept me from it. That fear is also in children. You can look at them and see it. But if you just get out there and do it, you'll do fine. If it had not been those people believing in me, I don't think I could've done it."

Johnson's said her passion for reading and writing is what makes her want to work with children.

"It's my passion because I love it, and I know that I can make a difference somehow, even if it's only one child at a time," Johnson said.

"And I can be so tired, and at the end of four days of jumping around, and I think, I just don't know if I can do it. But when I get into that classroom, and I see those kids, it is like someone has given me a jolt, or some type of juice, and I get up and do it again."

Johnson teaches creative writing workshops throughout the United States. She majored in radio, television and motion pictures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She later worked as a staff writer for the Durham Morning Herald and the Chapel Hill Herald.

She also is a strong advocate for children's literacy, working with various organizations such as Smart Start and the National Reading Council.

To learn more about Johnson, purchase her books, or to schedule a workshop, call (919) 499-9276 or visit www.simplycreativeworks.com.

Contact Julie Anne Carter at (434) 793-2311, Ext. 3091 or jcarter@registerbee.com.

IFAMILY

'Itty Bitty' inspiration

Author encourages children to write, do their best in all things

Katherine Burch
Star Staff Writer

SHELBY — Telling tales of frogs and bunnies isn't what author Kim Johnson intended to do with her life.

"I just happened upon it," she said.

Mrs. Johnson is the author of the "Itty Bitty" adventure series, which includes "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny" and "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse."

She worked for a few years at a newspaper before penning children's books.

"I got tired of writing negative stuff and I wanted to do something else," said Mrs. Johnson.

Mrs. Johnson's series of books put morals in rhyme for children. She said she loves kids, her hometown of Shelby and poetry — all good reasons for her interest in this year's Erma Drum Poetry Festival. Mrs. Johnson is also involved with the Star's Newspapers in Education program.

"I am committed to helping bring excitement to the world of reading and giving as much as I can back to the community," said Mrs. Johnson. "Being from Shelby, I feel that I can have an immediate impact on the youth in the community."

Mrs. Johnson will speak at the poetry festival, which is Monday at 7 at Cleveland Memorial Library. She will also give recognition to the winners of this year's contest.

Where did she find inspiration for her books?

"Itty Bitty came out of a vacuum cleaner," she said, describing how she was vacuuming and began humming and singing a story for the Itty Bitty series.

Mrs. Johnson received a degree

in radio, television and motion pictures at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Currently she is working on a second series of books called "Tag Along Fred."

Her new series shows kids that all jobs are important: doctors, janitors, waitresses and the garbage collector. She also has a series of inspirational posters.

She has spoken all over the country, leading writing workshops for children and speaking to professional groups.

As if that weren't enough, she also works as a flight attendant for USAirways on the weekend.

But it's not all the stuff she does, it is how she does it.

From her many notes of appreciation from schools, state programs such as Smart Start and state legislators, the words, "vivacious and dynamic," come up more than once.

Lou Mackintosh, vice president of the North Carolina Reading Association, said, "Kim is a dynamic speaker, captivates her audience with her enthusiasm, and the listener leaves with information that is not only entertaining, but applicable to the reading and writing processes."

Her goal is to make sure kids know that they can do well in life and that they can believe in themselves.

"I want young people to realize



Kim Johnson

that Erma Drum did tremendous things in this area," said Mrs. Johnson.

"She left her mark. I want children to know that everything they do will leave an impact.

"Something as simple as writing is a big deal," said Mrs. Johnson.

This year's sponsors of the poetry festival are The Shelby Star, Erma Drum Poetry Endowment Fund, Cleveland County Memorial Library, Friends of the Library, Wal-Mart Supercenter, Gardner-Webb University, Cleveland Community College and Cleveland County Arts Council.

"I am committed to helping bring excitement to the world of reading and giving as much as I can back to the community."

Kim Johnson
Author

The joy of reading

Shelby author encourages kids to read and write

Jackie Bridges
Lifestyles Editor

SHELBY — With every turn of the page, Kimberly P. Johnson reads the rhyming words to "A Giraffe and A Half" faster.

The words of Shel Silverstein tumble out of her mouth, but she asks the fourth-graders at Jefferson School if they want her to go faster.

"Yes."

So she takes a deep breath and reads glue on his shoe, bee on his knee, cute in a suit. She gets faster with every turn of the page. When she's done, the fourth-graders clap their hands in appreciation.

But Mrs. Johnson is not finished.

"How could I read that book so fast?" she asks.

"Practice" is the reply.

"And that's how you become a good writer," she says. "Practice your reading and writing every chance you get. Take every opportunity you have to be creative. Write down your ideas. Keep a journal and a notebook."

Mrs. Johnson, a Shelby native, was in town Monday for writing workshops at Jefferson Elementary with third and fourth graders. She also read to preschoolers at Cleveland Memorial Library. Her visit was sponsored by the Friends of the Library and was partially funded with a grant from the N.C. Arts Council Grassroots Arts Program.

Mrs. Johnson, who lives in Cameron, is the author of "The Adventures of the Itty



Lee McLeod / The Star

Mason Beam, 4, center, and Heather Quinn, 4, right, get a kick out of the story read by Kimberly Johnson.

Bitty Frog," and "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny." A portion of the proceeds from the sale of her books goes to promote children's literacy programs.

"I have spent a lot of time in the past year visiting schools and libraries throughout the United States, presenting them with the concept, 'Yes, reading is fun and creative writing can be even more fun,'" she said. "In my experiences with children, I have found that if you can grab their attention, then you can teach them anything."

Mrs. Johnson has worked with Smart Start, Gamma Pi Sorority, Project Read to Me and summer reading programs. She was the featured speaker at a meeting of the N.C. Reading Association.

On Monday, Mrs. Johnson did several writing exercises with the fourth-graders at Jefferson. She asked them to write about something they saw in the multi-purpose room, explaining that writing a story is the same way.

"You choose an idea and write one sentence and then the next," she said. "Stay focused on your ideas so the story is connected."

The students also pretended to be inanimate objects — like a toothbrush, the school or the bed. They wrote a description and the other students had to guess the object.

Chelsey Ledford liked the exercise, and she likes Mrs. Johnson's book.

"I learned that sometimes writing can be fun," she said.

Symone Jamerson agreed.

"Writing is fun," she said.

Alex Petty said Mrs. Johnson's book is about making friends.

"I learned that you can be friends with anybody," he said.

In both her books, Mrs. Johnson uses the characters to teach values. The bunny teaches a mean otter about friendship, and the frog keeps his promise to a mother bird.

"I want to write stories that will implement values in our young people without being too preachy," she said.

"The books help children realize how important it is to accept others as they are, without passing judgement or teasing them. Children will also realize how important it is to always give their best."

Kimberly P. Johnson, Children's Author

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Author visits local school

Children's author Kimberly Johnson helps Taylor Magnet School students develop their creative writing skills.

By EMILY CROPP
Register & Bee staff writer

DANVILLE, Va. — As soon as a buzzer sounded Wednesday, students' hands shot up into the air as they tried to be the first to transform a word from "rags to riches."

Kimberly P. Johnson, a children's author, storyteller and writing consultant, visited Taylor Magnet School to help third-, fourth- and fifth-grade students develop creativity in their writing for the Standards of Learning Tests.

"I came because I love these guys," Johnson said. "(The teachers) do great things to help the students become great readers and writers."

In taking a word from "rags to riches," the students took words like "old," "funny," "smart" and "cold" and came up with synonyms including "ancient," "hilarious," "genius" and "freezing."

"Get away from using plain old boring words," Johnson admonished. "The thesaurus and dictionary are like your second and third Bible because they can help your writing improve."

Johnson also worked with the students on adding adjectives and adverbs to liven up sentences.

"I'm teaching them how to make stories come to life, to breathe," Johnson said. "Even though I'm a children's author, they're authors, too."

Janice Carter, a teacher at Taylor, first heard Johnson speak at a conference in Washington.

"She was so exciting and energetic," said Carter, who invited Johnson to speak at Taylor.

Johnson visited the school last year to work with the students on their writing and was invited back



this year.

"She relates well to children (in) trying to teach them how to develop their writing more creatively," Taylor principal Joyce Tucker said.

Tucker said teachers have been working for weeks with the students on the writing process.

"Kimberly is teaching them the creative side of it," Tucker said. "Kids write like robots. They don't see the fun in it. We're trying to put fun into writing and make it more meaningful."

For her final exercise, Johnson read a story she was working on and asked the students to supply an ending. As the students read their endings, Johnson would stop them and ask them to come up with more descriptive words.

"I think children are amazing,"

Author Kimberly Johnson reads her book "Itty Bitty Bunny" to 9-year-old Kiara Mays, a fourth grader at Irvin W. Taylor Magnet School. Johnson visited the school Wednesday to help students with their writing skills.

Johnson said.

Johnson has published five children's books since 1997. She is scheduled to release two more books this year.

The characters in her Itty Bitty series teach children about kindness, the importance of keeping your word and honesty. "Tag Along Fred" tells the story of a boy who tags along with community workers including a mailman and a garbage man to see what they really do.

Johnson read her book "The Adventures of Itty Bitty Bunny"

last Easter at the White House with President George W. Bush. She also appeared before Congress in January to speak about the success of the Head Start program.

Despite her success, Johnson gives credit to the teachers.

"Teachers constantly inspire me. They start the fire and I just fan the flames," Johnson said.

For information on Johnson's books, visit her Web site at www.simplycreativeworks.com

Contact Emily Cropp at ecropp@registerbee.com or at (434) 793-2311, Ext. 3119.

Cameron woman visits schools with Itty Bitty the frog

Author promotes children's literacy

By Krista Page
Correspondent

A stack of papers sat in a box, tucked away for years in the home of Kim and Jeff Johnson of Cameron.

The story of Itty Bitty, a polite, caring and courageous frog who comes to the rescue of a baby bird, was close to Kim's heart.

The words and rhythm simply popped in her head while she vacuumed her house. She sang the little tune to herself while she worked.

"Down by the river in the coolness of the light, sat an itty bitty frog that had been there all night."

That verse became the beginning of a fantastic journey for both Johnson and her creation, Itty Bitty.

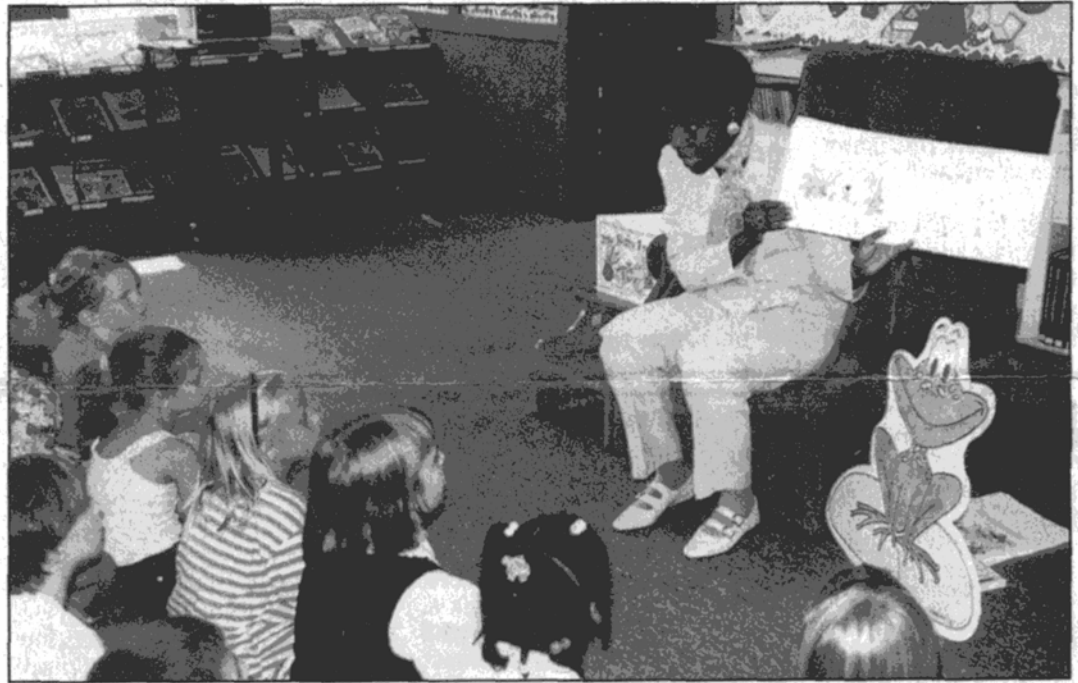
Within six months, Itty Bitty's story was finished.

Unpublished for years

But for years that story remained all but forgotten until, at Jeff's urging, Kim sent out her manuscript to publishers across the country.

In September 1997, Johnson's dream was realized when her book, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," was published by Pentland Press.

The book is now in its sec-



Harnett County News photo/Ed Drohan

Children's author Kim Johnson of Cameron shares the story of the Itty Bitty Frog with a group of second-graders at Johnsonville Elementary School. The children were also treated to the first public reading of Johnson's newest book, The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny.

ond printing and Johnson is well on her way to publishing two more children's books.

Without much publicity, the book sold more than 500 copies in its first month on the shelves and is now in its second printing, a major coup for a new author in the children's book genre.

Success has been wonderful, Johnson said, but it's not exactly what she had in mind when she sent out those first manuscripts to publishers.

Literacy advocate

First and foremost, Johnson is an advocate for children's literacy.

"There are so many children who cannot read," Johnson said. "My main focus is to use books as a vehicle to get the word out that kids aren't reading and there is something we can do to change that."

With her literacy mission

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Kimberly P. Johnson, Children's Author

Student/Teacher Workshops and Keynote Presentations

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Author

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as a guide, Johnson has reached out to schools in Harnett County and beyond, taking her message that reading is a basic necessity and that writing is fun, to elementary schools from Lillington to her home town of Shelby.

Comes with props

Most of the time she takes along her friend Itty Bitty in the form of a large full-color cutout.

Sometimes, when the kids are young, she wears the bulging green eyes of a frog on her head.

"The kids love that," Johnson said.

"You have to put it on their level. You have to make it real for them."

The results her hard work has yielded have been well worth the effort and the hours Johnson has put into her literacy mission.

Johnson relishes in the small accomplishments the students make in her short time with them.

But the real reward comes in seeing kids get excited about writing and reading.

Sometimes the thank yous come in the mail with the delivery of very special letters.

Johnson keeps copies of the letters she receives from children she has spent time with

can sell.

She said she finds her greatest success in encouraging children to read and write.

Johnson's road to becoming children's writer was not a clear path.

After graduating from UNC at Chapel Hill with a degree in radio, television and motion pictures, Johnson worked as a reporter for both the *Chapel Hill Herald* and the *Durham Morning Herald*.

After years of reporting on fires, accidents and murders, she became disenchanted with her job as a reporter.

She left the newspaper business and took a job as a flight attendant with US Airways.

She's never looked back.

"Everything was negative. I wanted to do something positive," Johnson said.

"That is why I think I was drawn to children's books. The stories I write are good stories happy stories. I think this is my calling, this is what God wants me to do."

Between her job with the airline, writing books and traveling to schools and libraries, Johnson has found the time to continue her education.

She recently earned her associate's degree in elementary education from Fayetteville Technical Community College.

She hopes to pursue a bachelor's degree in education at

"Dear Mrs. Johnson," one letter reads, in scrawling child print across the page.

"I like your stories.

"I like Itty Bitty.

"Will you come back to my school?"

Indeed she will, says Johnson, who tells the children she will be by to check on their progress in reading and writing.

It's not just something she says either. Johnson has found the time to honor some of those promises.

"I just happened to be near one of the schools one day, so I dropped in," Johnson said.

"You should have seen how surprised they all were."

Heart in Harnett

While she travels to schools all over the state, Johnson says her heart lies in Harnett County.

"Harnett County is where my heart is, it's where I started, over at Johnsonville and Benhaven," Johnson said.

"I have gotten such a wonderful response from the schools here."

Being one of Harnett County's own has given Johnson the opportunity to visit many of the elementary schools in the county as well as middle schools and even Triton High School.

Johnson said that she emphasizes the importance of reading and writing no matter what age the students may be.

For Johnson, success in the writing business is not measured by how many books she

Fayetteville State University.

Johnson said she hopes the education degrees will allow her new insight into the process of educating children and also lend more credibility to her literacy mission.

Within a year, Pentland Press will publish two more of Johnson's children's books titled "Mervyn Finds a Friend" and "Tag Along Fred."

Johnson gives a lot of credit to the people who have helped her publish her books including Scott Arnold, who illustrated her first book and Landa Smith, who illustrated the two books due out this year.

Smith of Hope Mills said this is her first time illustrating a book and that it has been an interesting process.

Met at FTCC

The author and illustrator met while going to school at FTCC.

Smith said she sometimes finds it hard to keep up with her energetic and tireless co-worker.

Johnson said her energy for children's literacy comes from her passion for the cause.

"As long as we continue to have children who cannot read, which is a basic life skill, we have to continue to work for those children," Johnson said.

"The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog" is available at bookstores and from the publisher by calling 1-800-948-2786.

Johnson is available for readings and presentations and can be contacted by e-mail at kjsfrog@aol.com.

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Author stresses reaching for the sky by reading

Dividing her
time between
flying, writing
and education
gives her
the best
of all worlds

By Dana Damico
JOURNAL REPORTER

WALKERTOWN

Kimberly P. Johnson, 32, spends the week walking two very different paths. Friday through Sunday, she patrols the aisles of planes, doling out peanuts and sodas. The rest of the week, she weaves between elementary-school desks, urging kids to read and offering writing tips.

Johnson's two professional hats are as a flight attendant for US Airways and a published children's book author.

On Wednesday, she donned her reader's cap and entertained pupils at Walkertown Elementary School.

Kindergartners and first-graders giggled as Johnson read her book, *The Adventure of the Itty Bitty Frog*, the tale of a do-good frog with a humongous smile.

And the third- and fifth-graders squealed with delight as she alternately whispered and roared the rhymes of Dr. Seuss' classic, *Green Eggs and Ham*.

Johnson, who was born in Shelby, said her first career involved neither planes nor children's books. Instead, she got her start writing for the *Chapel Hill Herald* and the *Durham Morning Herald*.



JOURNAL PHOTO BY DANA DAMICO

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Kimberly P. Johnson reads her book to pupils.

AUTHOR

Continued From Page K1

But reporting on accidents, petty crimes and murders depressed Johnson so much that she left the newspaper business. "I thought: 'Is this my destiny? Oh, God,'" she said.

More free time and the chance to travel attracted Johnson to the airlines. And time spent as a substitute teacher made her realize that "too

many children these days can't read," she said. Now, when she's not working in the skies, she's working in the schools, helping pupils realize that reading and writing are fun, she said.

"I want them to feel that (reading) is not a chore," Johnson said, as more than 30 youngsters filed out of the room, smiling and clutching the work sheets she had given them. "This can be fun. That's how you get it across to them."

Walkertown's pupils *did* have fun. They listened attentively. They

leaned in closer when the baby bird in *The Adventure of the Itty Bitty Frog* got washed away in a flood. And they fell into fits of laughter when Johnson read from her second book, *Mervyn the Otter*, which will be released next year.

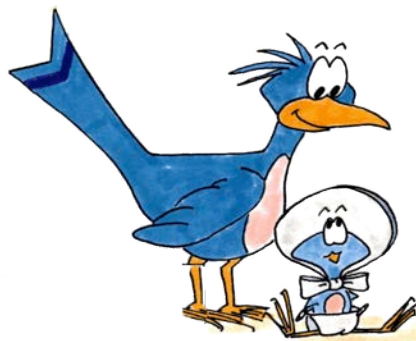
"Mervyn had dirty brown hair that he didn't clean," she read. "And he always wore a frown because he liked being mean."

Johnson's books reveal more than the motive to inspire merriment: she wants to reinforce morals. "Just because others are mean

to you is no reason to be mean back," Itty Bitty Frog advised Mervyn. "If you start to be kind, maybe they'll get on the right track."

If Johnson ever lost the attention of the kids, it was only for a second. Her energetic, even perky, reading style pulled them back. And her pep-rally-like messages of encouragement were exciting.

"It does not take an extraordinary person to be an author," she told the kids. "Anyone can be an author. Just practice your reading, practice your writing."



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Shelby native releases third book

Writer uses animals
to teach moral lessons

Jackie Bridges
Lifestyles Editor

Kimberly Johnson's books may have "itty bitty" in the title, but the stories and characters are making a huge difference in North Carolina and across the nation.

Mrs. Johnson, a Shelby native, recently released her third book in the "itty bitty" series, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse." The new book went into second printing after one month of its release. Like the first two, the third book uses

"I love seeing them excited about writing. When a child comes to me and says, 'I want to be an author,' it makes it all worthwhile."

Kimberly Johnson
Author

small animals to teach a moral lesson. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of "itty bitty" books, greeting cards and posters goes to children's literacy programs. And Mrs. Johnson has recently established a scholarship at Fayetteville Technical Community College for students going into elementary childhood education.

In her workshops across the United States, Mrs. Johnson encourages children to read and write. She helps students tap into



Special to The Star

Landa Smith's illustration shows the itty bitty spider and the itty bitty mouse walking past Susie Squirrel playing in a tree from a page of the book, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse."

their creative writing abilities by using various activities. In her lively presentations, she uses poetry, storytelling and music to help children see that everyone can write.

"I love seeing them excited about writing," Mrs. Johnson says about her work with children. "When a child comes to me and says, 'I want to be an author,' it makes it all worthwhile."

Recently, Mrs. Johnson was asked to help kick off Children's Book Week with a signing at Barnes and Noble Booksellers in New York City.

"It was an honor to be asked to

sign there," she said.

While in New York, Mrs. Johnson met Al Roker of the Today Show and gave her books to Today Show Host Katie Couric.

"She was a very nice lady, and she has already e-mailed me to say that she loved the books," Mrs. Johnson said.

Mrs. Johnson lives in Cameron and her husband, Jeff, is serving in the U.S. Air Force. She has been a flight attendant with USAirways for 14 years. Mrs. Johnson attended the

PLEASE SEE BOOK, 8A

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Shelby native releases third book

BOOK FROM 7A

University of North Carolina, where she majored in radio, television and motion pictures.

She earned her associate's degree in early childhood education and plans to pursue her elementary education degree. She has been a guest speaker for various local and national organizations, including Project Read to Me, Smart Start, National Reading Association, Head Start and the Society of Children's Book Writers. She is a member of International Reading Association, Society of Children's Book Writers and Children's Book Insider.

She received her first major corporate sponsorship with a "Teaching Technology Fair" for AT&T's Cable in the Classroom.

In addition to her books, she has also developed a line of greeting cards and motivational posters for teachers and children.

For more information about Mrs. Johnson's books, visit her Web site at www.simplycreativeworks.com.



Special to The Star

A bored itty bitty mouse and an itty bitty spider discuss their boredom before setting out on their adventure.

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BIGGY-WIGGY BOOKS

A Cameron flight attendant's 'itty-bitty' book series is a hit with children. Just ask the frog and the bunny.

By Rodger Mullen
Staff writer

In the 1980s, Kimberly Johnson worked at the Durham Morning Herald, writing obituaries, covering city meetings and whatever else her editor assigned.

A few years of that was enough.

"I got so burnt out on writing stories that were depressing," Johnson said. "I wanted to write something that was exciting, fun. Good news stuff as opposed to bad news stuff."

That "good news stuff" turned out to be a series

of children's books. An "Itty Bitty" series.

Johnson's first book for young readers, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Frog," was published by Raleigh's Pentland Press in 1997.

"The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny" followed this September, and next spring should see the publication of "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse." Johnson's books are available at local bookstores.

Johnson, a graduate of Fayetteville Technical Community College, was in Spring Lake last week to read to children in the Smart Start program. She is scheduled to sign copies of her book Saturday

from 2 to 4 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Book-sellers.

A native of Shelby, Johnson attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she studied radio, television and motion picture production.

After leaving the Durham Morning Herald, Johnson took a job as a flight attendant and later attended FTCC, graduating with a degree in early childhood education in 1998. But her dream of writing a children's book remained.

On one of her flights, Johnson met Scott Arnold, another flight attendant and an aspiring graphic designer. Johnson told Arnold about her goal of publishing a children's book and showed him the manuscript for "Itty Bitty Frog."

"The story had been done years before, but I never did anything with it," said Johnson, who lives in Cameron. "It just stayed in the shoebox."

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Arnold took the manuscript and came up with his conception of the Itty Bitty Frog: "When I saw that frog, I said, 'That's the Itty Bitty Frog,'" Johnson said.

The book, with illustrations by Arnold, sold out its first printing, Johnson said. She promptly started work on her second.

For the illustrations in "Itty Bitty Bunny," Arnold turned to a fellow FTCC graduate, Landa Smith, who lives in Lumber Bridge. Johnson said she saw Smith's work at an art show and was impressed.

"She's just a phenomenal watercolorist," Johnson said.

In each of her "Itty Bitty" books, Johnson stresses character values. "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Bunny" tells of a bunny who tries to befriend a "mean old otter" who shuns the other animals because they always tease him.

The bunny, along with his friends Betty Beetle, Ollie Owl and Susie Squirrel, decide to throw a party for the otter, who learns to accept their kindness and not be so mean.

"The idea is that just because other people are mean to you doesn't mean you have to be mean back," Johnson said.

Johnson visits schools often to read her books, and a portion of the proceeds from their sales goes to literacy programs. Johnson is a member of the Artists in School programs and conducts writing workshops in schools in Cumberland County and elsewhere.

"When a child comes up to you and says, 'Miss Johnson, one day I'm going to be an author,' that's an amazing feeling," Johnson said.

At a Smart Start program at the Spring Lake branch library last week, Johnson read her books and those of other authors to dozens of preschoolers. She donned a frog

IN PERSON

■ Kimberly Johnson is scheduled to sign copies of her books Saturday from 2 to 4 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 131 Glensford Drive. Call 864-0840 for more information.

■ Johnson is available to conduct writing workshops or speak to groups. She can be contacted by e-mail at kjsfrog@aol.com or through her publisher, Pentland Press, at (800) 948-2786.

headpiece when she read from "Itty Bitty Frog" and pulled out a stuffed rabbit for "Itty Bitty Bunny."

"Did you guys like that story about the otter?" Johnson asked after finishing "Itty Bitty Bunny." "Was he mean?"

"Yes!" the children shouted. "Was he still mean at the end?" she asked.

"No!" they responded.

Johnson's next book, "The Adventures of the Itty Bitty Spider and the Itty Bitty Mouse," tells about how two very different creatures become friends. And that will be it for the "Itty Bitty" series, at least for now.

In the fall, Johnson plans to publish a book about a boy who tags along with firemen, policemen, garbage collectors and other community workers to learn about their jobs.

Johnson continues to work as a flight attendant. With her writing and her work in the schools, it makes for a busy schedule, but Johnson isn't complaining.

"I tell you," she said, "when I'm on that plane I come up with some awesome ideas."

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