

AT YOUR DISPOSAL

Recycled story

Family camping trip prompts woman to write children's book

By Mariana Silva

It should have been just a family camping weekend at the Brown County State Park, the largest state park in Indiana. But despite the beautiful trees and wildlife, places to fish and to play, Beth Starr, her husband and their three children could not get past the garbage left behind by campers and hikers.

"At first my husband and I were like, 'OK, just leave it,' but then it got to be, throughout the rest of the weekend, where the kids had started to notice more and more [trash] on the trails," Starr said. "So instead of discouraging them from picking it up, we just started to go with it."

One night, Starr told her children about Rascal and Shady, two raccoons that engaged the forest's habitants into collecting the material people left behind.

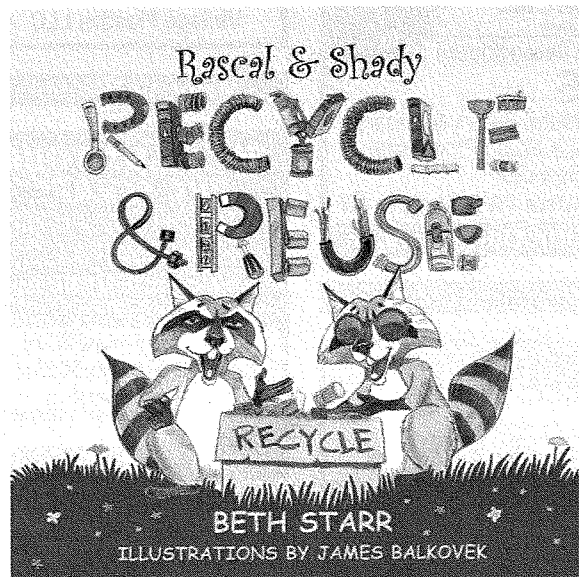


Starr

The children went to bed after the story their mother told them and when they woke up in the morning they were ready to start collecting the garbage left in the park. "That kind of got the kids more eager to pick up trash because they had been thinking Rascal and Shady were really happy for them to do that," Starr said.

After the family came back home from the weekend, Starr said the children continued picking up trash when they encountered it, and they continued to talk about how they were helping Rascal and Shady keep their environment free of garbage.

Along with their memories from the



trip, the family had brought home ideas for a book that would encourage children to take a closer look at reuse and recycling.

"I got home and I thought: If this is sticking and my kids are noticing weeks after [the story] that there is stuff we can do in our community, I think other kids would," Starr said.

Starr, also an elementary school teacher, realized that if her children were getting into the idea of reducing, recycling and reusing, other kids their age would as well. And in January 2010, "Rascal & Shady Reuse and Recycle" was published.

After that trip to the park the couple realized not only that their children had changed their attitude toward what was getting thrown away, but also that they had started to hold their parents responsible for what the family was trashing.

"They held us accountable, which is really funny," Starr said. "That was when I realized this had such a huge impact. They will catch us if they

think that something should be recycled but isn't there," said Starr, referring to the place where the family deposits its recyclables.

"It is really funny," said Starr about the couple's children. "They are always watching what they are doing."

Starr also said the children have been paying even more attention on what they can do with the recyclable material. She said her oldest daughter constantly finds creative and crafty ways to use the material she takes out of the recycling bin.

"Her mind is always thinking of ways to create something else out of what you would think is already there to be recycled or to be throw away," Starr said. "She looks forward to doing something different with it."

The author said many times adults forget to teach their children about recycling and end up not explaining the importance of depositing garbage in the right place or why the children should do it. Starr said she plans to visit schools and read "Rascal and Shady Reuse and Recycle" to other kids. She also has prepared a puppet show with the characters to interact with the children.

"Kids are more interested when you make it relevant and simple," Starr said. "That's when I see the kids are more interested, when you tie it to a character or characters that are something they enjoy and they relate to. It makes it more fun, and it is a better way for them to remember what to do next time they see a recycling can and trash outside in the street or on the curb." ■

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