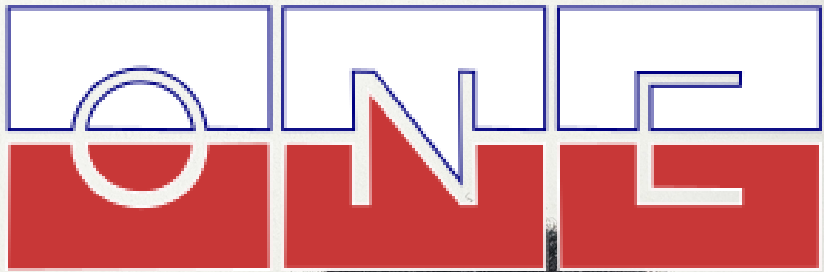


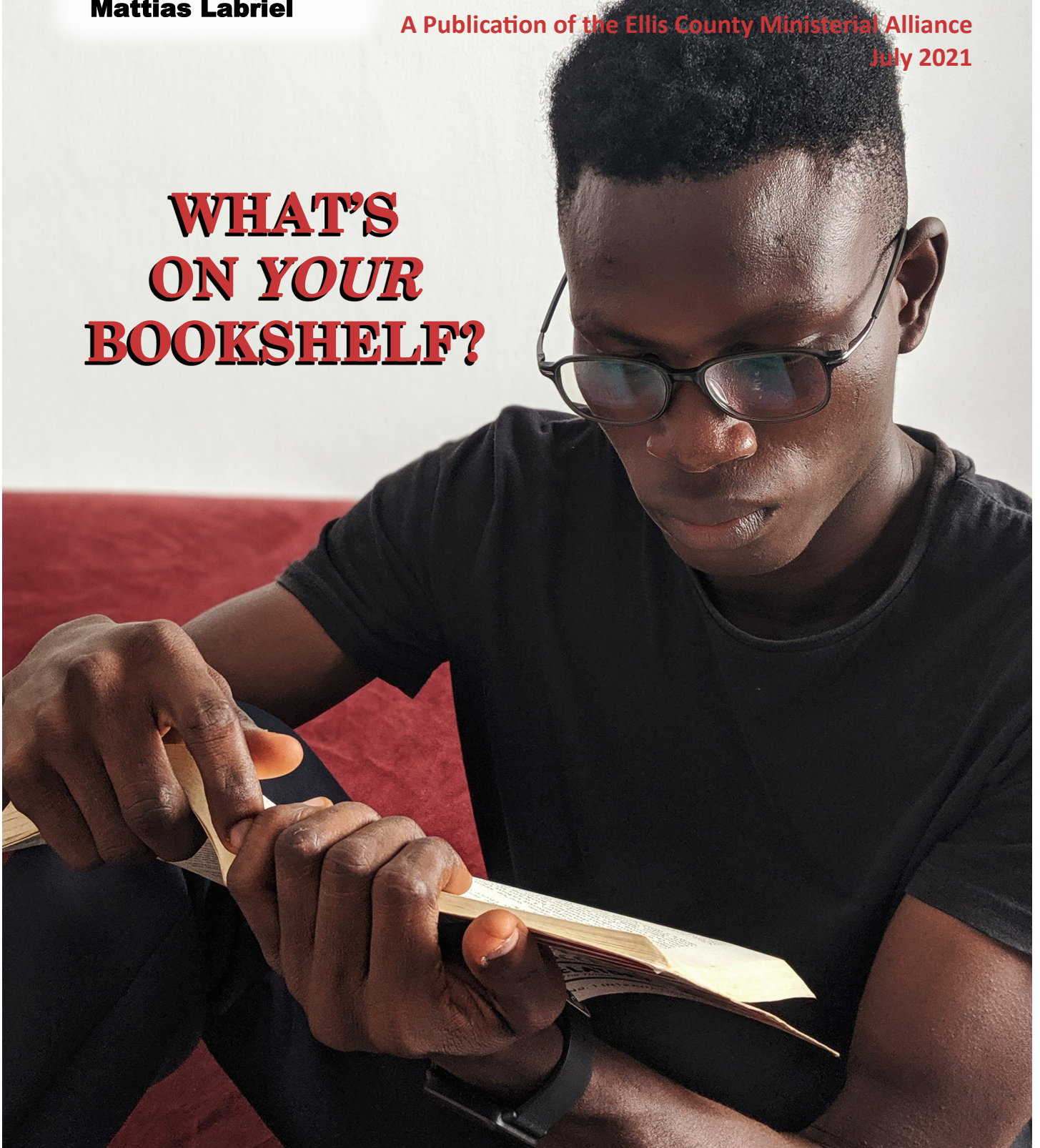
INSIDE:

- + Faith-Shaping Books
- + Teen Author Mattias Labriel



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July 2021

WHAT'S ON YOUR BOOKSHELF?





ONE is the official publication of the Ellis County Ministerial Alliance (ECMA) which guides its mission, content, and theme. The ECMA encourage submissions from ECMA congregations. Photographs, stories, testimonies, and other submissions should be directed toward your church leaders or sent via email to

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Editor's Note:

Summer is the time when many people like to laze in a hammock reading a good book, or peruse new selections at their local library. The Hays Public Library just completed renovations to its first and second floors, creating new seating areas. With that in mind, we asked our writers to share information about a favorite book (other than the Bible) that has helped them grow in their Christian faith. Here are some of their favorites.

We also are publishing a feature on a 13-year-old boy, the son of missionaries, who just published his first book and had a book signing in June at the Hays Public Library.

This Book Is Not For Everyone

Reverend Celeste Lasich

Hays First Presbyterian Church

I first read "Inspired: Slaying Dragons, Walking on Water and Loving the Bible Again" at the end of January 2020 on a Continuing Education Caribbean cruise. I had read author Rachel Held Evans' blog and followed her on Twitter for years, so I was looking forward to time with her latest book, which was published in 2018. While enjoying the peace of endless ocean views, I found myself outlining a Lent 2020 Bible study--in person, of course. I had no idea how the world and our plans would so quickly change.

Back in February 2020 I ordered multiple book copies and downloaded the creative and inviting free online study

guide at <https://rachelheldevans.com/inspired>.

As the demands of pandemic pastoring overrode those earlier plans, I gave away my copies of the book along with the 40-page study guide to people who were at home wrestling with the faith they had been taught and their still unacknowledged questions. I still really wanted to read this book with a group.

Right now I am super grateful to be co-leading a nine-week Zoom book and Bible study of "Inspired" with participants from 30 to 90 years of age who live all across Kansas and beyond. Every week we hear some version of "I never thought about it that

way, but it makes so much more sense" and "I thought I was the only one who thought about that." This book has people falling in love with the Bible again and grateful for a space where their questions and wrestling are honored.

In 2018, just before the book launch, Evans wrote in her blog "8 things I want you to know about 'Inspired.'" The following are two of the eight that might clarify if this is a book for you.

Evans wrote: "3. It's not for everyone. If you routinely use words like "clear," "straightforward," or "plain," to describe the Bible, if you remain unbothered by the Bible's most violent stories and troubling instructions, if you use the term 'biblical

This Book Is Not For Everyone (Continued)

manhood' un-ironically, you probably won't like it. But if you're eager to encounter the Bible in a way that engages your skepticism, imagination, hopes, and doubts, and if you're willing to confront the Bible's most difficult passages head-on without relying on simplistic explanations, then I wrote this book for you.

"5. I researched the heck out of this book. I'm not a Bible scholar, but I'm the kind of person who likes nothing more than to spend a Saturday night in my pajamas curled up with a good Bible commentary. What I wanted to do with 'Inspired' was share some of the most interesting, paradigm-shifting, and life-changing scholarship I've encountered over the last few

years in a way that is accessible and personal . . .

That was my challenge in writing this book, and I had an absolute ball doing it . . . I don't expect every reader to agree with every word—not by a long shot—but I did my homework. (If you're interested, the most influential scholars for this project were Walter Brueggemann, Peter Enns, Delores Williams and other womanist scholars like Wil Gafney and Nyasha Junior, John Walton, Ellen Davis, Amy -Jill Levine, Phyllis Trible, N.T. Wright. Timothy Beal, James Come, Eugene Boring, and James Brownson. I also rely heavily on what I've learned in recent years from Jewish midrash and Ignatian spirituality.)"

Jewish "midrash" is a mode of interpretation prominent in the Talmud and used by ancient Judaic authorities. The word itself means "textual interpretation" or "study."

Evans died on May 4, 2019, at age 37 from a tragic allergic reaction to medication for an infection. Her loss still grieves me even while I am grateful for her life, her faith and her risk taking voice. As Evans wrote, with her characteristic honesty, this book is not for everyone, but it might just be for you.



The Rev. Celeste Lasich is the pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Hays.

Contagious Sinfulness, Contagious Holiness

R.M. Price

Hays Medical Center Chaplain

Craig Blomberg's "Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners" examines the relatively recent claim that the meals of which Jesus partook during His ministry followed the Greco-Roman pattern of the "symposium."

The symposium was a large meal with philosophical discussions

followed by drinking and other, frequently more scandalous, entertainments. Throughout his work, Blomberg deftly sets aside the claim that Jesus' meals were in any way bacchanalian, and his focus shifts slightly to evaluate a secondary claim that the sinners with whom Jesus dined were only ritually unclean and were not truly the wickedest of sinners--in other words, the idea that "tax collectors and prostitutes"

were slanderous hyperbole at worst.

The Gospels themselves paint a clear picture that such pejorative names were not mere hyperbole. The woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair and tears received His forgiveness, not ritual cleansing.

Zacchaeus, the chief of tax collectors, received Jesus' pronouncement of salvation. The gluttons and

Contagious Sinfulness, Contagious Holiness (Continued)

drunkards with whom Jesus became synonymous received His presence. Yet in reading "Contagious Holiness," I repeatedly thought that ritual impurity and vile sin are scarcely diametrically opposed; in ancient Israel, it was both the ritually impure and the worst sinners who were separated from God's presence in the tabernacle.

Now, in His new tent of meeting --the incarnation-- He brought His presence to those who could not approach Him, offering to be king and provider to whomever would repent and turn toward Him, offering priestly healing and cleansing to those who, like the lepers, were quite unclean. Unlike those from the inter-testament era, who according to Blomberg were especially concerned about becoming contaminated by others' sinfulness, Jesus fully inhabited this world, confident in His incorruptible

purity. To the Pharisee who agonized over Jesus' physical uncleanness at the dinner table, Jesus remarked that impurity comes from within-- not from without.

While reading "Contagious Holiness," I asked myself many personal questions: Do I only associate with Christians? Do I only associate with Christians who behave in a pure manner? Am I concerned that my own spiritual and mental (im) maturity will be negatively impacted by others' immaturity? If so, does that speak of the sin outside me, or of the sin brooding within me? In what ways do I behave as the crowd blocking Zacchaeus from seeing Christ? In what ways do I overstep in trying to do the Holy Spirit's job of convicting others of sin? In what ways do I fail to imitate Jesus' extravagant friendship and call to repentance?

These questions demand thoughtful answers. In

meditating upon the implications of Jesus' contagious holiness for my own interactions with others, it is plain that I have no right to withhold myself and my friendship from others who do not meet standards that not even I can meet. If I, as a walking temple of the Holy Spirit, am the only Jesus Christ whom people ever encounter, would I deny them table fellowship--real or metaphorical--with Him simply because they are not yet the way I want them to be? It seems that would make me a modern-day Pharisee.

If so, then there is still hope for me to be called to repentance. After all, He dined with the ritually impure, with vile sinners--and more than that, He dined with the very worst of them all. He dined with the Pharisees.



R.M. Price is a chaplain at Hays Medical Center.

"THE BEST OF A BOOK IS NOT THE THOUGHT WHICH IT CONTAINS, BUT THE THOUGHT WHICH IT SUGGESTS; JUST AS THE CHARM OF MUSIC DWELLS NOT IN THE TONES BUT IN THE ECHOES OF OUR HEARTS."

- JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Book on Marriage Stresses Oneness, Mutual Submission

Brandon Nimz
Unite Ministries

Books can be useful tools in ministry work. While they often contain teachings that can be greatly beneficial, they frequently operate as a means to begin quality spiritual discussions on a wide variety of topics.

The Bible can easily be brought into the discussion to examine how well or how poorly the book's teachings line up with Christ's teachings. Often the bulk of the principles in Christian books line up well with scripture, but a few parts should be more carefully examined as they may not actually line up with Biblical teachings.

There are several books that I often turn to for the purpose of starting good spiritual discussions when given situations arise. A few among them that I have recently used are "Foreign to Familiar" by Sarah A. Lanier, "Boundaries" by Henry Cloud and John Townsend, and "Preparing for Marriage" by Dennis Rainey.

While the discussions can be useful for everyone, I find that some of my favorite parts of them are the ways that Christ can use them to remind

me of simple principles that I have used frequently in life that are not currently something I'm focused on.

Often, other things I've been learning have altered my perspective enough that a simple idea from earlier now has additional meaning and value. This has been occurring lately for me as I lead a young couple through "Preparing for Marriage."

Two of the principles that I have been frequently sharing and also examining in my own life are the idea of a oneness marriage and mutual submission in the style of Christ's demonstrated leadership combined.

The idea of a oneness marriage is, overall, quite simple. It is the concept that rather than two individuals entering into an agreement where both divide life's duties and work by 50 percent, both enter fully into a relationship giving as much as possible all the time (hopefully 100 percent each) while looking at themselves as a collective whole. It is really the underlying idea of looking at themselves as a collective whole that changes the perspective on many communication and functional challenges that can arise in

marriages.

Mutual submission following the model of Christ is also a very simple idea at heart. Ephesians 5 opens with us imitating God as His beloved children and around verse 20 reminds us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Within this overarching concept of mutual submission, these verses also discuss husbands and wives and what that mutual submission looks like.

"Preparing for Marriage" does a good job of reminding readers what Christ's leadership style looked like, and the Bible illuminates it even more clearly. He said those who lead should serve the rest, even going so far as to wash the disciples' feet as a demonstration of how they should lead.

When I think of the husband being head of his wife, as Christ is head of the church in Ephesians, without thinking back to this example in the Gospels, it can lead to very human ideas of lordship and leadership in the home that are highly contrary to Christ's teachings.

However, when I think of all that Christ taught about

Book on Marriage Stresses Oneness (Continued)

leadership and what He demonstrated, it becomes clear that the verses in Ephesians about headship are actually a strong call for the husband to serve the wife, to listen to the Holy Spirit and to figure out her wants and needs, to care for her and help her grow stronger in her relationship with God in her own right, to enable and empower her on her own walk.

Likewise, the wife's call to submit to her husband is a call to work together in this process and also to follow Christ's examples of love and support towards her husband—even though her husband is a flawed human who will not do his part perfectly.

In Christ's model of leadership, viewed through a Christian lens, these two ideas of mutual submission and a oneness marriage lead to some strong benefits to a couple—even in simple practical situations. If either the husband or the wife is overworked due to life circumstances, to where they

are unable to cook like they usually do, and their spouse, who is free, has enough time to cook but not enough mental energy to make decisions and decide what to cook, in a 50/50 model this could lead to additional stress on the couple, with both feeling the other is not taking care of "their share" of the work.

In a oneness and submitted model, both see it as a problem for their collective whole, and both contribute above and beyond to help serve the needs of the other and the whole. This leads to the one with time but no mental energy to communicate honestly that they want to help the overworked one with food preparation, but they can't make decisions right now, and the overworked one can step up to make not just suggestions but also a recommendation to compensate for the other's lack of mental energy. This leads to the one with time having what they lack and

contributing by making food, thus serving the whole.

Though this is a simple idea and a simple made-up example of this teaching in action, it is a big reminder to me to look at how I operate in my own marriage. Often when I am overworked or overtired, if I shift my perspective from "my" situation to looking at "our" situation and what is best for us collectively, it can lead to better communication and better results for us as a family.

Likewise, when applying some of these principles as a believer to group situations (since Christ also talks about all believers being one as He and The Father and The Holy Spirit are one), I can often have a clearer vision towards solutions that may yield a better outcome for not just myself, but for everyone around me, as well.



Brandon Nimz is the leader of Unite Ministry in Hays.

“NEXT TO THE BIBLE, THE BOOK THAT I VALUE MOST IS JOHN BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS. I BELIEVE I HAVE READ IT THROUGH AT LEAST A HUNDRED TIMES. IT IS A VOLUME OF WHICH I NEVER SEEM TO TIRE.”

- CHARLES SPURGEON

Footprints on the Road Less Traveled

Becky Rogowski

First Presbyterian Church

When considering what book has had a great impact on my life and reflecting on something I would recommend or “plug” to others, I was suddenly at that infamous standstill.

I classify myself as well read. I read. I read a lot, actually. I own more books than I care to admit, even though the library is my friend.

Choose a book. This is like going to a bookstore and being told to come out with one book, or choosing one book at the library. I kept coming back to the fact that the greatest influence on my life as a result of literature is actually two poems. I have never considered the two poems together before. I am about to share them both with you, and I’m sure you will wonder how I never made the connection before.

Poem One: “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. Poem Two: “Footprints in the Sand,” whose authorship is in dispute. If you don’t know both poems, please take the time to Google them. You won’t regret it.

In Frost’s famous poem about “The Road Not Taken,” the speaker comes to a fork in the road and has to choose which path to take. Not to completely spoil it, but the speaker chooses the one that has been less traveled and that is less worn.

I first heard this poem in eighth grade when I was at the point of figuring out who I was and who I wanted to be. Did I want to give in to trends and peer pressure, or did I want to be my own unique person? This poem was constantly in the back of my head. It was a constant reminder that sometimes taking the less traveled path can make all the difference.

Around the same time, I was trying to find my place in the religious world. It was the year I was confirmed into membership of the church I grew up in. I was free to make “church choices” for myself now. I knew the Bible stories I’d learned in Sunday School. I knew a lot of cool songs my Sunday School teachers had faithfully taught me. Most importantly, I knew that Jesus was my friend. I knew that He loved me, no matter what. I knew there was nothing I could do that was so bad that He would leave me or stop

loving me. I suppose that is why I instantly fell in love with the “Footprints in the Sand” poem.

The truth is God never leaves us. As we stand at the fork in the road trying to determine which path to take, He’s going with us on whichever one we choose. Even when we are not actively aware that He’s there, He is.

In the second poem, a man is walking on a beach with God. He looks back on his life and the footprints in the sand and sees two sets for most of his life. But, at times, he only sees one set. He realizes that the times he sees only one set were in his darkest days. He turns to God and asks Him, “Why, when I needed you most, have you left me?” God simply replies that the times he speaks of, the darkest times in his life, are when God carried him.

We must understand that God is always with us, even if it feels like He may have abandoned us. He is always right there beside us, or carrying us on our way.



Becky Rogowski is the Generations in Faith Together Coordinator at Hays First Presbyterian Church.

13-Year-Old Writes, Publishes First Book

Linn Ann Huntington

ONE Editor

In many ways, 13-year-old Mattias Labriel (pronounced Lay-bree-el) is like any other typical young teen-ager. He likes Pokemon cards, Minecraft, tennis, and swimming. His favorite classes are language arts and physical education.

But then there are the ways in which he's not so typical. The son of missionaries to Ecuador, Mattias is fluent in Spanish and English and has studied Portuguese. In his young life, he has lived in four countries.

Plus, he has just written and published his first book on amazon.com. He had a "Meet the Author" book signing at the Hays Public Library on June 14.

Mattias is the son of the Rev. Carlos and Sarah Labriel. For the past three years he has lived with his parents and 11-year-old sister, Layla, in Cuenca, Ecuador, where his parents

have worked establishing a church. They are affiliated with WorldVenture, a missions organization headquartered in Englewood, Colo.



(Screen shot from amazon.com)

Sarah Labriel grew up in Hays and graduated from Hays High School. She is the daughter of former Hays residents, David and Debbie Breeden. Sarah Labriel recently spoke at her home church, North Oak Community Church, which supports the Labriels' work in Ecuador through its

Global Missions Program.

Mattias, who just completed the seventh grade, attended school in-person in Ecuador for his sixth grade year. Then Covid-19 hit. All schools were closed. Seventh grade was done through home schooling on the computer.

That's when he started on his book, titled "Xylion–The Dark Lord." It falls under the fantasy genre and is designed for upper elementary and middle school readers.

The book is about Xylion (pronounced Sil-ee-on), a regular middle-school boy, who likes to hang out with his friends and isn't a big fan of schoolwork. One day Xylion and some of his friends travel to the wondrous land of Oxa, where they fight Zio, the villainous Dark Lord.

Mattias said the book began as a school assignment in his English Projects class. That's when he created the character of Xylion. It took him about

13-Year-Old Writes, Publishes First Book (Continued)

three months to write the book itself after his mom allowed him to work on it during breaks from his home schooling.

Mattias said, "We were on total lockdown, so I wasn't really doing anything else, and I could just type on my book."

After the book was completed, Sarah Labriel contacted Andy Stanton of Hays, a marketing consultant, for help in getting the book published.

Stanton, owner of Grey Goat Marketing in Hays, met weekly with Mattias on Zoom, initially working with the young writer on character and dialogue development.

Mattias said working with Stanton was very helpful. "He helped me use more description," with his mom adding, "helping to get the reader into the writer's mind."

Stanton also did the book's final editing, layout and design. The cover art was done by Erica Pierre, a

friend of Sarah's, based on a drawing by Mattias.

Stanton said, "Amazon allows you to do self-publishing. It created an ISBN number. Then you choose where you want them to distribute the book."

The 88-page book sells for \$9.99 in paperback and \$7.99 as an e-book suitable for Kindles.

The book is actually the first in a series of three. Mattias has already finished books 2 and 3, and Stanton said he would begin editing

book 2 this summer.

Mattias said he plans to keep on writing and is already planning another series. He said he deliberately left some loose ends in book 3 that can be developed and resolved in a second series.

But for now, he is enjoying the summer, the first time that he, his mother and sister have been back in the United States in more than three years. Dad Carlos stayed behind in Ecuador to look after the house, care for the family's



Mattias Labriel, far right, prepares to sign a book for Elijah Schmitz, 12, of Hays, while Julia Kuntz, far left, and Rita Kofoid look on. The three were among those attending Mattias' book signing at the Hays Public Library on June 14. (Photo by Linn Ann Huntington)

13-Year-Old Writes, Publishes First Book (Continued)



In addition to writing, Mattias Labriel loves to bake. Here he checks on a batch of pumpkin cookies. He recently published his first book and had a book signing in Hays. (Submitted photo)

various animals and continue his radio ministry since their church is still closed.

Sarah Labriel said Covid-19 remains a major problem in Ecuador, and there are long waiting lists for vaccines. A facemask mandate remains in effect. "You get a ticket if you don't wear a mask in public," Sarah Labriel said.

The ongoing pandemic is one reason why she decided to bring her children back to the States this summer. They

are staying with her parents, who now reside in Broken Arrow, Okla.

"We just needed sanctuary from Covid," she said. "Mattias will go to camp. Layla is going to Vacation Bible School. This will be 'normal kid time' for them. For the past 1½ years, they have only been able to play with each other. This summer they will be riding bikes, going to the pool, and hanging out with cousins." She said they plan to return to Ecuador the first

part of August.

Mattias said the No. 1 thing he looked forward to in coming back to the States was drinking a root beer, something not to be found in Ecuador.

The No. 2 thing on his list is going jet skiing. He recently completed his certificate in boating and jet skiing and is looking forward to hitting the waves.

Stanton said he is looking forward to editing Mattias' second book. "He really is an excellent writer. He has an excellent imagination. I was surprised at what a well-developed writer he is at such a young age. It was fun getting to know him."

A Facebook page for the book is located at <https://www.facebook.com/Xylion-The-Dark-Lord-109793834638229>.

More information about the Labriels' ministry is available at www.worldventure.com/labrielfamily.