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January 2017

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Preteen Author Hannah Hoffman

Proves that Dreams
Do Come True

Kathryn Starke

Scores a Touchdown
with Tackle Reading

Julie Sternberg and Marcie Colleen

Create a Memorable Tool
for Middle Schoolers

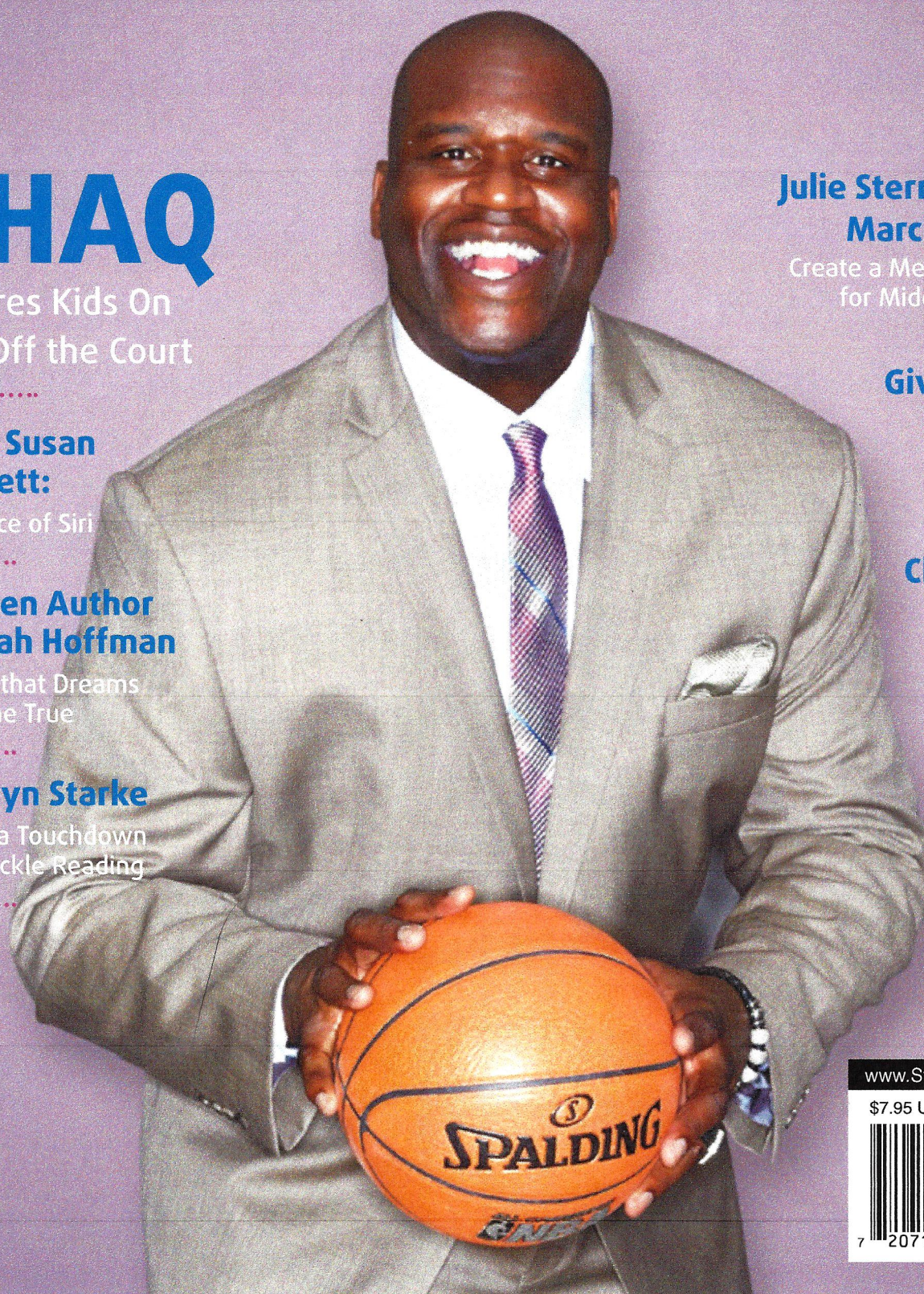
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In this issue...

While a second career as a children's author might seem an unlikely choice for this basketball giant, Shaquille O'Neal tells us that he turned to writing books for children in his retirement as a way to continue to champion two of his favorite topics: reading and basketball. That's a slam dunk in our playbook.

For iPhone users who need immediate answers to their questions, information is only a button-push away. For years, Apple devotees wondered if the voice inside their phones was computer-generated. To some extent it is. However, there is a real woman behind that sound. Meet Susan Bennett, the voice of Siri!

Also in this issue, we meet 12-year-old Author Hannah Hoffman, who tells us that having her debut book published has been a dream come true ... literally. Kathryn Starke tells us if she learned one thing in the 10 years she spent teaching in inner-city public schools, it's that many students need extra help to learn basic literacy skills. So she combined her expertise as a literacy specialist with the thrill of the NFL to create *Tackle Reading*, which features thoughts on reading from over 45 contributors in the fields of education, entertainment, and professional sports.

Middle school years can be painful for children as they try to identify how and where they fit in. Julie Sternberg and Marcie Colleen have created Play Memory, a brilliant resource for parents, teachers, and librarians to help young people cope with the challenges they are facing every day. And our special contributor this month is Noelle Sterne, Ph.D., who gives us some tips on giving a great children's presentation.

Tell us what you think of this issue! Email your comments to cristy@storymonsters.com.



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Preteen Author Hannah Hoffman

Proves that Dreams Do Come True

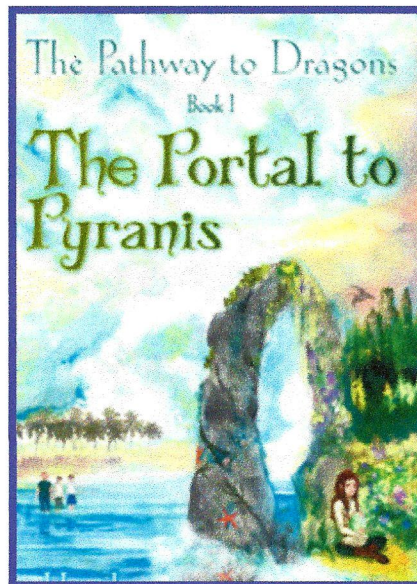
by Melissa Fales

For 12-year-old Hannah Hoffman, having her debut book published has been a dream come true. *The Pathway to Dragons: The Portal to Pyranis* is an engrossing tale about a boy who's transported to a magical land where dragons roam the earth. The idea for the story came to Hoffman one night in a particularly vivid dream.

"When I woke up, I knew exactly how my book would start," she says, remarking on how fluidly and quickly the first few pages came to her. "I started writing it down and the words just poured out. I didn't even have to think about it."

Hoffman shares a penchant for writing with her father, an author, and her sister, a budding journalist. The family home is well-stocked with books, a fact which Hoffman credits with developing her appetite for the written word. "I've always been a little more interested in writing than reading, but I do love both," she says.

While Hoffman acknowledges that numerous authors have inspired her writing, she cites Piers



Anthony as her absolute favorite, especially his book *A Spell for Chameleon*, the first in his *Xanth* series. "He's amazing," she says.

"He gave me so many different ideas. Everyone in my family loves his books."

Hoffman enjoys different types of literature. "I love reading all genres, but when it comes to writing, I tend to prefer fantasy stories," she says. "For some reason, they're the easiest for me to write." In the case of writing *The Portal to Pyranis*, however, Hoffman stopped after the initial flurry of those first few pages. "It wasn't that I didn't like the story," she says. "I just needed to put it down for a while." Nearly a year later, she came upon the unfinished work. "I reread those few pages and then I wanted to read more," says Hoffman. "It wasn't so much that I wanted to



write the story, it's that I wanted to read it. I wanted to know what would happen to the characters. So I decided to write more. Different parts of the story came to me at different times."

Hoffman made the protagonist of *The Portal to Pyranis* an 11-year-old boy named Billy Jones. "I created Billy in my head, but I brought him to life in a way so that he has the best of me and my family in him," she says. "I was trying to make him a character that was kind, smart, and a really good person." Hoffman intends for *The Pathway to Dragons* to be a series and she's already planning her second book. "I have tons of ideas," she says. "There will be the same characters, with a couple of new ones to keep things interesting."

According to Hoffman, her biggest challenge with the book was coming up with just the right name for the wondrous place Billy discovers. "I'm good with coming up with names for characters, but places, not so much," she says. "I didn't come up with Pyranis until I was almost halfway done. For a long time, I would just write the word 'blank' in its place."

The basis for the name came from one of her father's gardening tomes. "I was looking at all of the beautiful flowers and I found their Latin names very interesting and colorful," she says. Hoffman cleverly formed the name "Pyranis" from the Latin names of two different breeds of flowers, one that means fire and one that means dragon. "It's perfect," she says.

When Hoffman isn't writing, she can be found at the barn with her horse, Arthur. "I can't decide which

"I want to inspire other kids to read and write and dream. It makes me feel great when another kid reads my book and says, 'Hey, I want to write a book, too.' It's an amazing feeling and I know this is just the beginning."

I love more, horses or writing," she says. While *The Portal to Pyranis* is bereft of horses, Hoffman explains that she chose to use dragons in their place. "I decided to utilize dragons in situations where a creature might have been a horse."

Hoffman is donating 10 percent of her net profits from sales of her book to two New Jersey-based charities that are close to her heart. One is Special Strides, a therapeutic riding center for children with special needs. "I think it's so cool how they use horses to help kids," she says. The other is the Bridge of Books Foundation, which works to promote children's literacy by providing reading material to underserved children who otherwise wouldn't have books of their own. "I'm proud to support them," Hoffman says. "They're changing lives using the power of books."

Hoffman, a seventh-grade student, says English has always been her favorite subject. "I love to challenge myself when I'm writing," she says. Looking ahead to her future, Hoffman says she

expects that she'll continue to write no matter what career path she may take. Ideally, she'd like to combine her interest and talent for writing with her deeply-rooted love of animals. "Hopefully, I'll be able to find a career that includes both," she says.

For Hoffman, one of the best things about being a published author is the opportunity to encourage others to work towards achieving their own goals. She hopes her book will serve as an example of what young people can accomplish when they apply themselves. "I want to inspire other kids to read and write and dream," she says. "It makes me feel great when another kid reads my book and says, 'Hey, I want to write a book, too.' It's an amazing feeling and I know this is just the beginning. I'm really excited to see where I can take this."

For more information about Hannah Hoffman and her book, visit hannahbrookehoffman.com. ●