



LIVINGSTON, NEW JERSEY, NOVEMBER 19, 2020

Check us out online! www.WestEssexTribune.net



Ryan Shapiro, 9, overcame his initial fear of Roxie the cat and is now her good, confident friend.

Local Author Addresses Imagination And Feelings in New Children's Book

Jason Shapiro of Livingston has published, in late September, his first children's book. Called *Brian, My Pet Lion*, the story was inspired by his son, Ryan, and the family's cat, Roxie.

"We got Roxie about two years ago and my son was petrified!" said Shapiro. "I found that the more jittery and anxious he was, so was the cat. I used to say to him, 'She's not a lion. She's a cat.'"

He began to wonder... what if he wrote a book in which the reader thinks the boy brings home a lion from the pet store; that crazy first day together; and the fright the lion inflicts on the boy.

"Then at the end, when the boy calms himself down after hiding in his closet, the lion calms down as well," Shapiro explained.

The reader sees the transformation of the lion to a kitty cat through the boy's eyes, Shapiro said. "The boy realizes that when he was calm so was

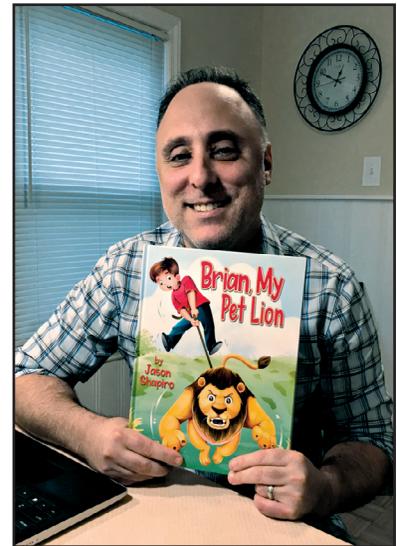
his cat, but when he ran around scared and nervous, so did his lion.

"This is the lesson my son learned. I love writing stories that can help children and parents work through emotional challenges in a positive way."

Shapiro said that self-publishing allows him to execute his vision throughout every aspect of the book and its marketing, which he sees as building relationships with other people. "You need others to help support and share their resources or you can't be successful," he said. In fact, that is how he found his illustrator.

Shapiro continues to follow two roads. He loves his work as a corporate operations manager in the retail industry. "People are still coming in and shopping, just doing it safely," he said. "Online shopping has also picked up, as you can imagine."

And he fulfills his passion of writ-



Jason Shapiro is shown with his new children's book.

ing at night and on weekends. "A silver lining of COVID is I spend more time with my family since my wife and I work from home now," said Shapiro.

His children, nine and 12 years old, are learning how to deal with this new way of life. "Like most kids it was not an easy adjustment at first," he said.

Last year, Shapiro published *The Magic of Mayfair*, a semi-autobiographical story about boyhood friendship and regrets.

"So many people resonated with the theme of growing up in the 1980s, and with the mental health component in the book. They said it made them feel more open about sharing their mental health struggles, which was my dream from the beginning."

Shapiro has directed most of that book's royalties to nonprofit organizations to help normalize conversation about mental health, in honor of his brother and his childhood best friend.

In a similar vein, the first proceeds from *Brian* will go to Same Here, a global nonprofit that provides, among other things, mental health programming to schools. It is available on lulu.com.

"You can love your day job and excel in it, and still pursue your passion project at night and the weekends," Shapiro said.

"Life is short, so I encourage everyone who has an invention, a book, a song, or an idea: don't take it to the grave with you. You never know how impactful your imagination can be if you don't take action on it and bring it to life."