

# A little book that takes us to the beach

By JEANNE SABLE  
Contributing Writer

The Stonewall Farm community room in Keene took on a tropical look Tuesday evening, as "Jackson Dunes" celebrated the publication of "Pug at the Beach," (AIA Press.)

Jackson Dunes is both a person and a place. The person is actually Keene author Diana McGuire, who borrowed the pen name from an island beach south of Cape Hatteras, N.C., from which she draws much of her inspiration.

At first glance, the cutely illustrated 66-page book might appear meant for children. But its vocabulary and philosophical content clearly target adults. Some readers might sense shadows of Jonathan Livingston Seagull flitting across the pages. Not unlike Jonathan, Pug, the main character, will likely appeal to a wide range of ages.

Dubbed an "island dog

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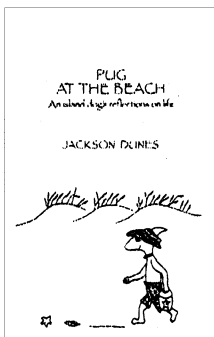
philosopher." Pug explores life's mysteries along the seashore, often sporting jaunty beach attire, his strange ears pointing like a shark's dorsal fin from atop his head. He's a worldier Snoopy, if you will, unleashed from the trappings of dog dish and master. His Woodstock is every shorebird, their shared birdbath the entire ocean.

The character came into being a few years ago as McGuire, who has enjoyed abstract drawing since childhood, was doodling in the living room of a house in Key West, Fla.

"Like any good dog, he chose me," says the artist. She named the creation Pug, and began placing him in various settings. The illustrations became more complex with time. Eventually, she compiled about 30 beach-related scenes for a book.

The result was a series of vignettes representing Pug's various beach "adventures." Each vignette seemed to cry out for a little story, but the artist had never attempted any serious writing before. So she devised a writing exercise as a gift to herself for her fortieth birthday, and the text grew from there.

In keeping with the self-imposed structure of the exercise, each story is told in three complete sentences totaling roughly 100 words. The stories are largely auto-



biographical, containing hidden references to friends, real addresses, pet cars, favorite songs and celebrities.

The verse pages offer simple reflections on lessons learned, such as "Play is an art not entirely reserved for children," or "The secret to gaining perspective is to change position." Their inspirational tone mirrors short stories and personal essays the free-lancer writes for a Vermont newspaper.

"Pug on the Beach" is a breezy and frivolous read — dreamy yet contemplative, like dozing on the beach. An honest, somewhat rambling introduction makes no pretense about the playful nature of the quirky little book, which refuses to fit comfortably into any genre.

Because of that, it would likely struggle for years to garner the attention of a traditional publisher, which is why McGuire chose to launch her own publishing company. She credits many in the community with helping make AIA Press a reality.

That process began when she presented her manuscript and drawings to NK Graphics of Keene. The typesetting firm, which handles books for all the major U.S. publishing houses, rarely takes on independent projects.

But owner Ron Doucette took an interest in Pug and "did a wonderful job of holding my hand," the author said.

He also referred her to his brother's printing company, Sherwin Dodge of Littleton, which printed the first run of 3,000 copies. Constructed of quality stock to ensure that the cover won't curl under intense sunlight and the pages will hold up to stiff winds, it's a book built to be taken to the beach. Then again, it just might take you to the beach.

In the offing are plans for at least two more Pug books — another with a beach theme, the other about falling in love. A limited edition 2005 Pug calendar is also due to be released in November. Tee shirts, greeting cards, and perhaps even an animated film are also in the works, if one can call it that.

"This isn't work for me. It's play," insists the artist, also a part-time shuttle driver for Nissan of Keene.

The is on display at Stonewall Farm, along with a four-foot replica of Pug, as well as Ted's Shoe and Sport on Main Street in Keene.

Information: 358-6535.

205th year, No. 260

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2004

\$1.50 Single Copy, \$3.10 Weekly Home Delivered

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