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Recovering from a Pet Tragedy with a Joke Book
Houston, April 10, 2018

Children's author J. E. Bright wouldn't have created his newest book "Bernie's Best Jokes" if his beloved brown tabby cat hadn't died too young.

Bright has written more than 115 novels, novelizations and novelty books for young readers, for publishers including Scholastic, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Capstone and Penguin Random House. A native New Yorker, he moved to Houston in 2017.

"I was devastated when Bernie died," said Bright. "He was a constant companion, friendly but particularly weird. He made hilarious faces with his overgrown fangs. He was clumsy in a slapstick way, enough to make me joke that he had brain problems. That stopped being funny when he died from seizures the veterinarian described as 'neurons short-circuiting.' What made Bernie kooky killed him. He was not yet five years old."

Because the cat had passed abruptly, a sense of closure and acceptance remained missing for months. A way to work through Bright's grief presented itself while sorting photographs of Bernie. "As I looked through the pictures," he remembered, "I laughed at Bernie's dopey expressions. He brought me greatest happiness through his playful humor."

Determined to share Bernie's silliness, Bright considered how he could turn the comical photographs into a children's book. He had loved joke books as a child, so he decided to create a book of goofy jokes in Bernie's honor. Bright wrote and collected more than 350 clean, child-friendly jokes. He aimed for punchlines that landed with a combination of chuckles and groans, like this example from the book:

Why did the owl invite more owls over?
He didn't want to be owl by himself!

Bright also designed the 82-page interior layout, which he illustrated with classic line drawings and funny photos of Bernie commenting on the jokes in speech bubbles. His favorite wacky picture of the cat became the cover image.

"I know Bernie would have grinned and waggled his tail if he heard families giggling at these jokes together," said Bright "I have to believe that the best way to laugh again after a tragedy is to spread laughter oneself."

"Bernie's Best Jokes" by J. E. Bright is now available in Kindle and paperback editions. More information about the book and author can be found at jebright.com.

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