

'Hero' a sweet tale with moral

- By [GREG LANGLEY](#)
- Advocate News Features staff
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CALL ME HERO

By Claire Boudreaux

Bateman, illustrated by Kym W. Garraway

Shell Beach Publishing, \$29.95 with plush toy

When Hurricane Katrina blows into New Orleans, a little dog named Hero is out walking his route through his neighborhood. He hears his owner calling him, but he can't resist the temptation to go chase a cat.

When he goes looking for the cat, it's gone and so is his owner when Hero finally gets home. He falls asleep, and when he awakens, water is creeping up to the house. Pretty soon he's trapped. He manages to get to the roof of another house, and a day later he sees a boat and barks until it comes to pick him up — and the people in the attic beneath him. The man in the boat is from Baton Rouge, and he decides to take the little dog with him. Hero doesn't have a collar on, so no one knows his name or who he belongs to. One thing they do know is the dog is smart.

“ ‘This little dog led us around the flooded city of New Orleans all day,’ the man said. ‘Every time he barked at a house, there were people trapped inside. Rescue groups from around the country followed our boat to see where he would lead us next. He must have found over 50 people today.’ ”

The man's son tells his father, “He sounds like a real New Orleans Saint, Dad.”

So Hero gets renamed Santos, Spanish for “saint.”

The story is in the dog's voice. As Bateman follows the adventures of Santos/Hero and the Baton Rouge family, she shows them volunteering to help hurricane victims not only after Katrina in New Orleans and Mississippi but after Rita as well. The family and the dog make their way to southwest Louisiana where Santos/Hero proves his worth again.

It's a sweet tale and an overdue nod to the big hearted Baton Rouge folks who poured so much of their time, energy and resources into helping storm victims. In Bateman's tale, the dog gets to LSU where a shelter was set up to reunite pet owners with their lost animals.

Does the little dog find its master? Well, there is a happy ending, but not what you'd expect. Bateman says this book is aimed at older children than her previous books were.

The book is illustrated competently by Mississippi artist Kym Garraway, who works in watercolor on waterboard.

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