

A new chapter for Carly Simon: Children's books

By Karl Bodnarchuk
Contributing Reporter

VINEYARD HAVEN - "Being flexible as a parent is a nice thing to be," said Carly Simon, who was quite flexible Saturday evening as she stayed late to sign more than 450 copies of her new - and first - children's book, "Amy, the Dancing Bear."

The book signing was scheduled for 5-7 p.m. at Bunch of Grapes Bookstore in Vineyard Haven, Martha's Vineyard, but it wasn't until a little after 9:30 p.m. that Simon autographed her last book for the evening. "In your hometown, it's hard to follow the rules," said Simon. For the 250 people whose books were signed after 7, it was good fortune that Simon decided to break the rules.

Although it was her first public appearance to promote the book, Simon had already signed 1,150 pre-ordered copies of "Amy" (to be released Oct. 24); she'd miraculously written her signature more than 1,600 times in three days. Even after 4½ hours of shaking hands, greeting people with a big smile and singing bits of her songs to children, Simon looked as if she'd just begun.

Relaxing afterward in the Blue Water Grille, with a Band-Aid (given by a fan) on the thumb of her writing hand, Simon said she was very pleased with the book and with the huge turnout.

In addition to the 1,000 fans who showed up, Simon's husband, Jim Hart, her two children and her mother were there. Even Simon's editor, Jacqueline Onassis, made a surprise appearance.

"I loved working with Jackie," said Simon. "She's a very friendly, intelligent and energetic person with a great sense of beauty."

Also signing books was Margot Datz, the illustrator of "Amy," whose trompe l'oeil artwork is



Carly Simon signs copies of her book while Jacqueline Onassis, her editor, looks on.

Globe photo/Stephen Rose

shown throughout the country. Datz also is one of the three artists whose work is in Simon's River Run Gallery in Manhattan. Although "Amy" is her first book, it's definitely not her last. Datz is working with Simon on two more children's books.

Simon, who used to make up her own stories for her children,

decided to start putting them down on paper - if no longer for Sally, 15, or Ben, 12, then for her future grandchildren. "Amy" is only one of the many stories Simon created over the years. She finally wrote it down last Christmas.

She didn't have a specific theme in mind when she wrote

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the story, and insists that "sometimes you do a thing with intuition and then analyze it afterward. Things don't need to be so strict, with a definite meaning or theme."

"I didn't set out to write with a specific theme in mind. I just saw it afterward," she explained.

And what does Simon see now that she looks at the story of "Amy"?

"Amy realizes the beauty around her and appreciates it. Some things are a lot more important than sleep, and if the substitute is nice and creative as Amy's is, then it's good."

In the story, Amy stays awake to enjoy the beauty of the sunset, the moon and the stars.

"It's also important here that Amy's mother is flexible enough to see this," said Simon. "I think that's the kind of mom I've been. Sometimes maybe I was a little too undisciplined, but I get excited by my children's excitement."

Not only is Simon working on two more children's books, but she also has two more records in the works, which she will begin taping this month. "I'm doing everything in twos now," she said with a laugh.

If that's true, then she's following suit: she was scheduled to sign about 400 more copies of "Amy" on yesterday at Bickerton and Ripley in Edgartown, which would bring the author's autograph total up to 2,000.