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**"The reason I write is because I get so many ideas, so many what-ifs, so many characters. I find it hard to contain them all." — Kieryn Ziegler, 15, author of "Rain"**

**Young author has vast imagination**

Young author has vast

Gail Franklin

In the busy halls of State College Area High School, backpack on her shoulders and friends chatting next to her, a published author used her lunch hour to sign copies of her new book.



CDT photo/Neil K. May

State College Area High School freshman Kieryn Ziegler, 15, who goes by the pen name Kieryn Nicolas, wrote a novel titled "Rain" that is being published. Ziegler held an e-book signing at the high school in February.

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Fifteen-year-old Kieryn Ziegler is an average teen with one uncommon achievement under her belt.

After years of writing fiction at her bedroom desk every day after school, she landed a book deal last year with the small, independent publishing firm Echelon Press.

Kieryn spent the summer months before her first year at State High working with a professional editor on her nearly 400-page young adult novel called "Rain," the story of a strong-willed teenager and her group of friends who learn about what it takes to truly succeed as they train to be spies.

"She definitely has a natural born ability to write," said Mary Welk, the editor from Echelon who worked with Kieryn. "She is five to six years ahead of her time in maturity and in her writing skills."

"Rain" was published under the pseudonym Kieryn Nicolas, a moniker the author chose so her book would be shelved in the middle of the young adult fiction section. It was released in electronic book format in January and is scheduled to be printed in paperback edition this summer. She is the youngest author published by Echelon in its young adult series.

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introduce you to a glimmer of hope for the future of books. Her name is Kieryn Nicolas," wrote Echelon President and CEO Karen Syed in a blog posting. "I was absolutely astounded by her personality and her ambition. She is clever, she is vivacious, and yet a little shy. But best of all, she is determined to succeed."

The lively brown-haired teenager recently held a book signing in the lobby of the high school's South Building to promote her book. Standing behind a folding table in the hallway, she talked to other students about her book and sold a handful of CDs containing a downloadable copy of the novel for \$7.

Characteristically down to earth, she quickly scrawled her name across the paper label of a CD for a friend of a friend she had just met and asked, "Do you want me to write something special?"

Between waves of students she giggled with her three closest friends — including her 14-year-old cousin, Henry Ziegler, whose initial reaction to the first few chapters she wrote encouraged her to complete the book.

Two other friends also read chapters as she finished them, long before a publishing deal was in the works, and e-mailed her their thoughts.

"It was cool because since I knew the author I was able to tell her things I didn't like," said Katie Heining, a freshman at State High.

Later, when Kieryn was dealing with her characteristic flaw of trying to fit in too many story lines, Katie sent her an e-mail that read, "Finish it or else!"

It was equal parts inner desire and outside encouragement that

finally made it happen.

"I'm lucky, I know," the young author said of her family and friends' devotion to help make her dream come true.

The book's cover image was photographed and artistically edited on a computer by Kieryn's cousin. Her author Web site is managed by her grandmother, Barbara Zeller, and her marketing team is her parents, Mara and Tim Ziegler, who encourage her to post blogs when she's finished with her homework and chores.

Her passion for writing started early. In the second grade, Kieryn wrote a short story about the Oregon Trail for an assignment, and a few years later in the fifth grade she expanded it into a 70-page story.

"That was the year I decided I wanted to write novels," she said. "I had such a great time with writing in my fifth-grade class. I had time to write two historical fiction novels and a couple short stories."

In the seventh grade she wrote "a long, cliché novel about a girl who had psychic powers" and with the help of her mom submitted it to 15 publishers.

Before she had received the 15th rejection notice, though, she was already writing the outline for what would become "Rain."

Her big break came when Mara Ziegler called and received special permission to bring her daughter, 14 years old and in the eighth grade at the time, to attend the annual Write Stuff Conference in Allentown.

Each conference attendee gets to make a 10-minute pitch to a publisher. Kieryn chose Echelon Press because it had a young adult division and seemed small and friendly.

Kieryn's talk went so well she was asked for the entire manuscript and offered a contract within a few months.

"We would be idiots not to do whatever we could to help her," said Mara Ziegler. "She's not only good but it's something she loves."

The Zieglers also have supported their youngest daughter, 13-year-old Brynna, whose illustrations have been published in Stone Soup, a children's magazine.

At the hallway book signing, two girls she had never met walked up to Kieryn's table and asked the question that was probably on a lot of students' minds.

"Why did you write it?" one asked.

Kieryn paused, a little taken aback, and then attempted to describe in a few words her intense lifelong love of writing.

"I always knew I wanted to do this," she said, and then described her meeting with the publisher.

When it dawned on the two girls that they were attending high school with a teenager whose book will soon be on library bookshelves they became semi-speechless.

"That's awesome," the other girl said to Kieryn. "Congratulations. Good job. I mean, that's awesome."

When asked the same question later, Kieryn's passion comes across in a gush of words that must be similar to the tide of characters that's always rising in her imagination.

"The reason I write is because I get so many ideas, so many what-ifs, so many characters. I find it hard to contain them all," she explained. "I want other people to know these characters I'm thinking of, to meet them."

The main character of "Rain," nicknamed Mel, is slightly autobiographical.

"Mel would be like my second-grade self because she's such a tomboy," Kieryn reflected. "Her sarcasm is one layer of my personality."

In the novel, Mel is always in charge and the few times she can't control her surroundings she feels uncomfortable and questions herself, an emotion Kieryn explores with maturity.

She is working on another novel and brings at least two pages to school every day for friends to read and critique. She also takes Tae Kwon Do lessons and attends the junior police academy in Patton Township, experiences she expects will influence future written works.

Kieryn has been invited this week to speak to students at Park Forest Middle School who are interested in becoming authors, and plans to give up her lunch period to encourage the young writers.

For the general public, she will hold an author event at 10:30 a.m. April 10 at Schlow Centre Region Library, 211 S. Allen St., State College.

Find out more about "Rain" and the young author at [www.kierynnicolas.com](http://www.kierynnicolas.com).

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