

Author Janet Zappala of Guapo's Tales Recently Featured on Close Up Radio

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL, UNITED STATES, October 26, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Janet Zappala spent 45 years in television news chasing the next big story. The biggest story she ever found was waiting in a rescue barn, where a pot-bellied pig was cuddling a baby steer. Since then, the multiple Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist has been turning that scene into a children's book series. Her third title, "Guapo and the Mystery of Goodness Grove," launches Nov. 10, with illustrations by Lara Calleja.

Guapo is no tall tale. He weighs more than 3,000 pounds, about double the 1,200 to 1,500 pounds typical for a steer, and measures 11.5 feet wide and 6.5 feet tall. A white, heart-shaped patch sits on his forehead. "I can't make this stuff up," Zappala says.



She met him while volunteering at a California rescue after ending her broadcast career in Palm Springs. The rescue's director showed her a photo of the two babies snuggled together. "A light bulb went off and I thought, 'How interesting that two totally different species are getting along?' "Wouldn't that be a great message for children to learn?"

Guapo was once a calf with no home until a woman from the rescue adopted him. She never expected him to grow into one of the world's largest steers. Zappala named him her goodwill ambassador, and his name became an acronym: goodness, unity, acceptance, patience and open-mindedness. "I love hearing children say, 'I want to be like Guapo,'" she shares.

After decades of asking questions for a living, Zappala now gets to answer one that children ask every day: Who do you want to be like when you grow up?

Showing Beats Telling

The books let Guapo's actions do the talking. "We can tell kids to be kind. We can tell kids to not bully. It really doesn't mean a lot, and that's why I use Guapo as a tool to teach through actions," Zappala explains.

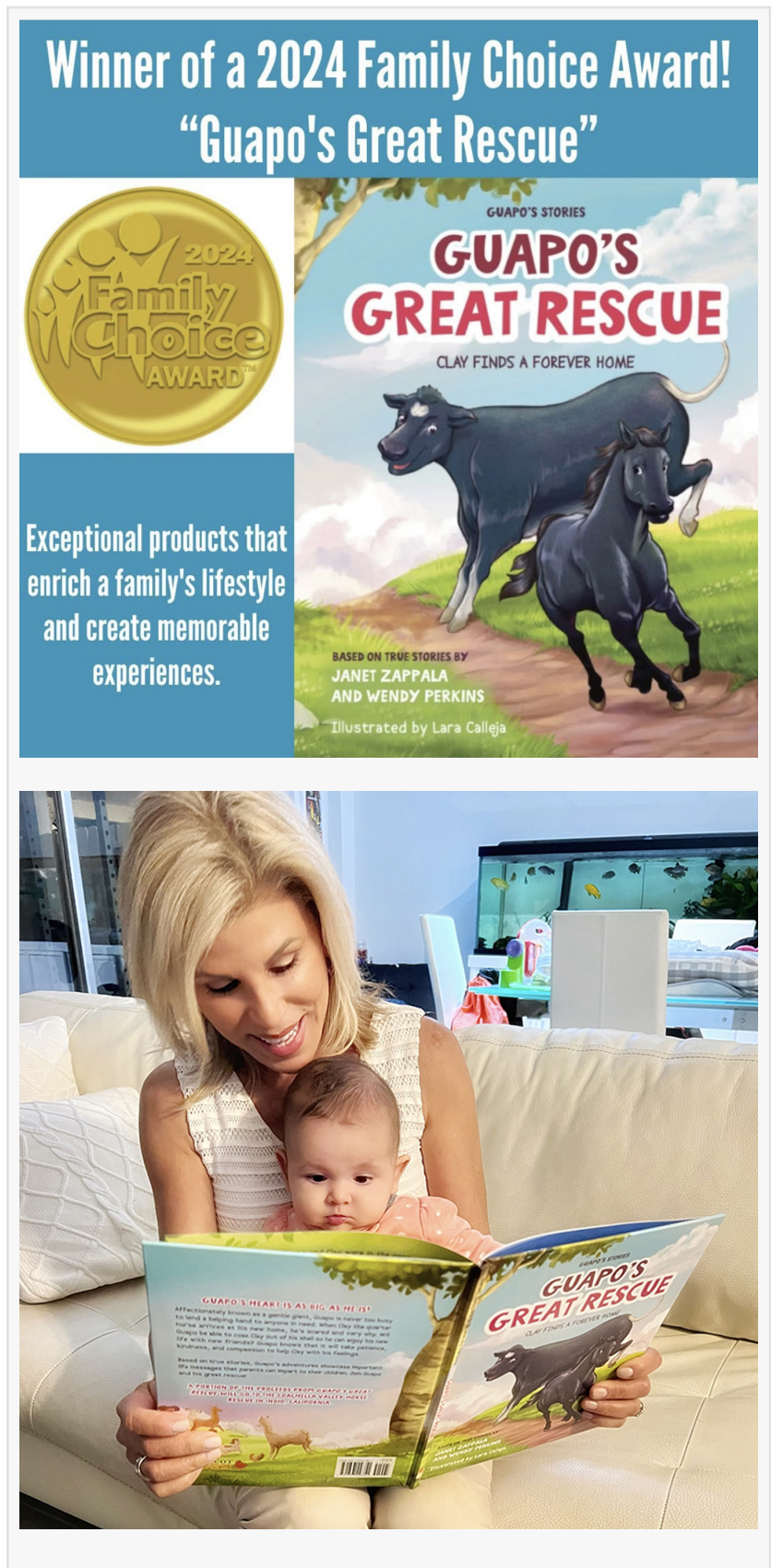
In the new book, a dying tree starts to glow after Guapo and his friends water it and return a fallen bird to its nest. Cody the Coyote, a bully, mocks their good deeds. Guapo answers without name-calling, and Cody keeps watching. Eventually, Cody decides that "being kind is a lot easier than being mean."

Her second book, "Guapo's Great Rescue: Clay Finds a Forever Home," introduces a horse scarred by neglect who keeps his distance from other animals. Guapo gives him time and space, with empathy anchoring the lesson. "If you can put yourself in someone else's shoes, you'll understand what they're going through, and you'll be able to help," Zappala says.

Both of the author's first two books have won multiple awards for excellence in children's literacy.

A Newsroom Education

Zappala started in Bakersfield, California, then worked in Honolulu, San Diego, Denver and Los Angeles before spending about 20 years in Philadelphia. Because her station there was owned and operated by NBC, she often went live for the network and for New York stations as news broke.



Her interest in the business started early. An uncle who was an executive producer at WABC in New York took her around the studio as a child. At about 12, she watched Barbara Walters on television and decided that was the job for her. She later interviewed Mike Wallace after a tennis match.

Small Audiences, Big Takeaways

Zappala's youngest critics are the most convincing. After one of Zappala's readings, a news crew asked a group of 7- and 8-year-olds what they had learned. One said not to bully. Another said kindness matters. A third said caring for animals is important. "Their minds are like sponges, and they get it," Zappala asserts.

Each Guapo book is a standalone story, so readers can start anywhere. All feature the same four main characters, with photos of the real animals appearing in the back of each book. In the new release, Zappala's granddaughter and dog make cameos. Part of the proceeds goes to two animal rescues in California and Arizona.

Zappala is also planning a program with libraries and schools that pairs the books with videos of the real animals.

What Comes Next

Her ambitions extend past the page.

Zappala hopes to see Guapo animated, whether as a feature film, a series or both. "He needs to be animated," she says. "He needs to be seen all over the world as someone children look up to and learn from."



"Guapo and the Mystery of Goodness Grove" is available November 10th.

About Guapo's Tales

Guapo's Tales is a children's book series by Janet Zappala, a multiple Emmy Award-winning broadcast journalist and award-winning author. The books star Guapo, a real 3,000-pound steer and gentle giant who serves as the series' goodwill ambassador. Each story draws on true animal rescue experiences to teach children kindness, compassion, patience and understanding, and to encourage a love of reading. Part of the proceeds supports the Coachella Valley Horse Rescue in Indio, California, and Come Back Ranch Animal Sanctuary in Eagar, Arizona.

Close Up Radio recently featured Janet Zappala, author of Guapo's Tales, in an interview with Jim Masters on Thursday October 22nd at 1pm Eastern

[Listen to the Podcast](#)

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For more information about Janet Zappala, author of Guapo's Tales, please visit

<https://guapostales.com/>

Lou Ceparano

Close Up Television & Radio

+1 631-850-3314

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