

SHORT TAKES

Sundays are special at the Whitefish Bay home of 13-year-old Matthew Lancelle. That's when Jeanette Lesada, 35, his friend and art therapist from Shorewood, arrives to share their views on life and art. They have become sketchbook buddies.

"I like to draw stories," Matthew explains. He also watches TV and movies, reads Harry Potter books, plays chess, swims and loves photography. He enjoys hanging out with his friends and family — his dad, Steve, his mom, Sandy, older brother, David, and sisters, Maggie and Elizabeth.

Matthew is also autistic, which means he sometimes struggles to find words to express his thoughts; behavior problems surface occasionally.

Five years ago Lesada met Matthew in the Wisconsin Early Autism Program in Milwaukee. When funding lapsed, she volunteered to work with him at his home. A strong friendship developed.

"Matthew is such a unique boy," she says. "I enjoy watching him grow as an artist and as a person. It's a joy to spend time with him. He sees the world from such a different perspective."

Lesada incorporates Matthew's love of monsters and sea creatures, math and science into their art time together. "We often decide on a topic to draw based on everyday happenings or a concept such as respect or love. After drawing our own version, we talk about it."

A peek into their sketchbooks reveals an amazing range of emotions, values and challenging experiences. Matthew depicts himself as fun-loving, artistic, curious, intelligent, honest, generous, funny, energetic and autistic. Lesada becomes an artist, writer, photographer, musician and Reiki master.

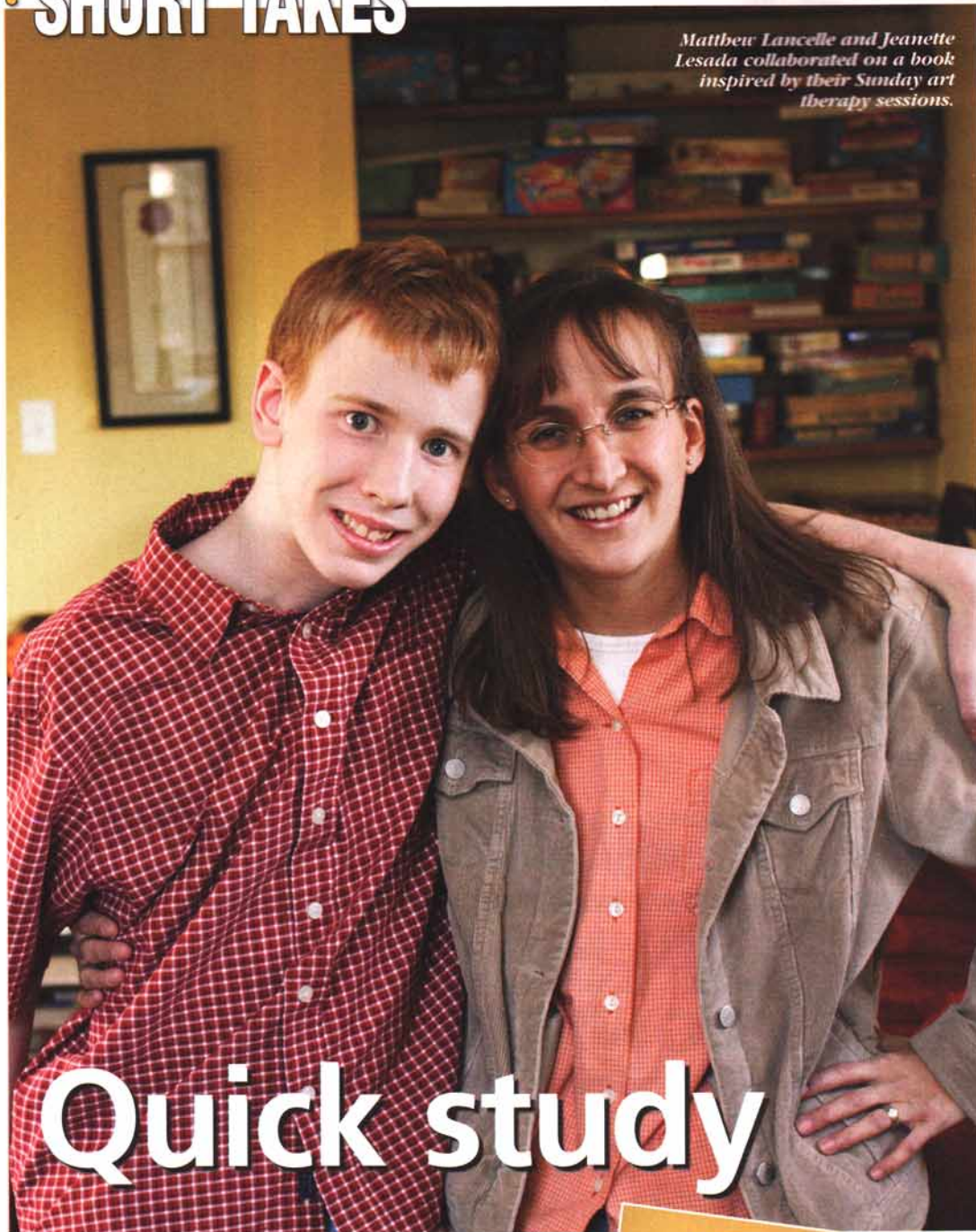
During an interview, red-haired Matthew focuses intently on drawing leeches while he explains their anatomy and habits.

Matthew's world turned topsy-turvy recently with the publication of their compiled sketches into an inspirational book titled "Sundays with Matthew," co-authored and co-illustrated by the two artists. How does Matthew react to a radio interview and book signings?

"He loves it," mom Sandy says. "He took the book to school (Whitefish Bay Middle School) and a friend told him he was famous. It was good for other children to see that despite Matthew's struggles, this is a huge accomplishment."

The book may be purchased at area bookstores or through a Web site, www.SundayswithMatthew.com. Look for a sequel, "Sundays with Matthew, II — In a Perfect World," before year's end.

Matthew Lancelle and Jeanette Lesada collaborated on a book inspired by their Sunday art therapy sessions.



Quick study

