

Children's book centers around an alligator in Audubon Park

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Gina Allen, a communications and information security policy specialist at Tulane University, has written and illustrated her first children's book. (Photo by Sally Asher)

To pass the time on her morning commute with her sons, Gina Allen made up rhymes and songs that they could all sing together. Allen, a communications and information security policy specialist at Tulane University, said one rhyme in particular stuck in her head: "There's an alligator in Audubon Park. He must have slipped out of the zoo after dark."

The rhyme lingered in Allen's mind, serving as the creative catalyst for her new book, *There's an Alligator in Audubon Park!*

Written and illustrated by Allen, the book is the tale of a community responding to an alligator spotted in Audubon Park. What should they do? Run? Break out the stew pot? Design a new purse?

Allen created pencil sketches, scanned them into Adobe Illustrator and assembled the illustrations and typeset in Adobe InDesign. Once she had a complete mockup of the book, she started a Kickstarter campaign to publish it. "Friends, family and even childhood friends from grade school chipped in to the Kickstarter campaign to help me meet my goal," Allen said. "The support from my Tulane colleagues was amazing. It felt good to know that I had so

many folks rooting for me.”

The book is definitely a family affair. The main character is inspired by her younger son, Gabriel, and the chef character is inspired by her son Joseph, now a sophomore at Tulane studying computer science. In the future, Allen hopes to write more books that portray African-American children in a positive light. This time, she says, her main goal is to make children “giggle ... and consider how any situation can be viewed differently depending on your point of view.”

Allen is signing her book at the Barnes & Noble Booksellers on Veterans Boulevard in Metairie, Louisiana, at 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 22, and during the African American Book Expo in Duncanville, Texas, on May 6.