

## By KATHLEEN PALMER

Staff Writer

They say God works in mysterious ways; what may seem to be bad luck may in fact lead to a serendipitous turn of events. So it was with writer Teresa Santoski.

"When I was working full-time, I didn't want to come home at night and sit in front of the computer and keep writing," said Santoski, 31, of Brookline. "My mom would always reassure me by saying, 'if God ever really wants you to focus on a project, He will give you the time to do it.'"

Santoski worked for a decade at The Telegraph, in various roles in the newsroom. "The first piece I wrote was a reader submission in 2002," she said. "That led to a summer correspondent position in 2003, and then to being on staff in 2004." Santoski wrote "The Week in Preview" for the newspaper; blogged about a trip to China, was editorial assistant, and then features reporter. She continues to write a humor column for Encore the first and fifth week of the month.

When her employment with The Telegraph ended in April, she saw an opportunity to devote her time to a project that had been kicking around in her mind for a while. A committed Christian and an enthusiast of East Asian pop culture, Santoski combined these passions to write "Prayers for Oppa," a devotional for fans and performers of "K-pop" – Korean pop music – and J-pop – Japanese musical acts.

The book was published this month and is available through WestBow Press and Amazon.com. An eBook edition will be released in December.

What does that book title mean? "Oppa" is a Korean word some girls/women use for an older man with whom they have a close relationship, like a brother or boyfriend," Santoski said. "Female fans tend to use it as a term of endearment for their favorite performers.

But the book is not just for K-pop fans; it's for all fans and all performers."

In the specific, the book is targeted at East Asian pop bands. But on a larger scale, Santoski explained "Prayers for Oppa" is for any fan who wants to give spiritual support to any performer of any genre, and for anyone in the entertainment industry themselves who seek spiritual guidance.

"For starters, 'Prayers For Oppa' is a Christian devotional for performers and fans, with a focus on the East Asian entertainment industry," Santoski said. "The topics are universal enough they can apply to performers and fans from any part of the world – and even those who aren't fans or performers, but who are looking for spiritual encouragement. There are sections on loneliness, love, good health, healing ... things that appeal to a broad range of people. I decided to target the East Asian entertainment industry because it's been an area of interest of mine for at least 13 years," she said.

The interest in East Asian culture officially began when Santoski was in first grade in Attleboro, Mass., she said. "My teacher hosted a Japanese exchange student, and built lesson plans around the Japanese language, food and customs."

Santoski's journey to becoming enamored of the genre grew with a literal journey to China and Tibet in the summer of 2006. "I went on a 20-day trip with the New Hampshire Friendship Chorus," she said. "We were able to sing with local choral groups in addition to sightseeing, going to historical sites, shopping ... It gave you an opportunity to connect on a deeper level with the culture."

At college, she met a lot of students from different parts of the world who were interested in anime and Japanese pop culture. "It brought back my interest, and it expanded to include South Korean pop culture," she said. "And then going to

China and Tibet, it began to include Taiwanese and Thai pop culture. You would be amazed how many international video-CDs there are at the market in Lhasa. I bought collections of music videos from throughout Asia, Tibet, Bollywood, Taiwan. It was quite a multicultural experience at those stands in the Lhasa marketplace," she said.

Santoski said her personal favorite groups are chosen by varying criteria. "One or two groups, I like the majority of their music; there are ones I like on a song-by-song basis," she said. She noted Morning Musume (translated to "daughter of the morning") as her favorite Japanese group: "They've been an idol group since late '90s. Their music is a lot of fun, with different styles and concepts that are very entertaining." For Korean music, she likes U-KISS (Ubiquitous Korean International idol Super Star). "They have three members who speak fluent English, all speak multiple Asian languages. In addition to liking their music, I appreciate they make an effort to reach out to their fans around the world via Twitter and social networking in multiple languages," she said.

With the advent of such social media avenues, East Asian pop culture has been acquiring a more global presence, Santoski said. Christianity has also become more widespread in East Asia. "More performers are identifying as such," she said. "For example, four out of six members of U-KISS identify as Christian. You now have fans who, in addition to supporting these groups by buying their music and voting in competitions on television shows, will pray them."

That's where "Prayers for Oppa" comes in. "As far as I know, this is the first book of its kind," Santoski said. "I haven't seen anything like this out there. The goal of 'Prayers For Oppa' is to create a spiritual support system between performers and fans."

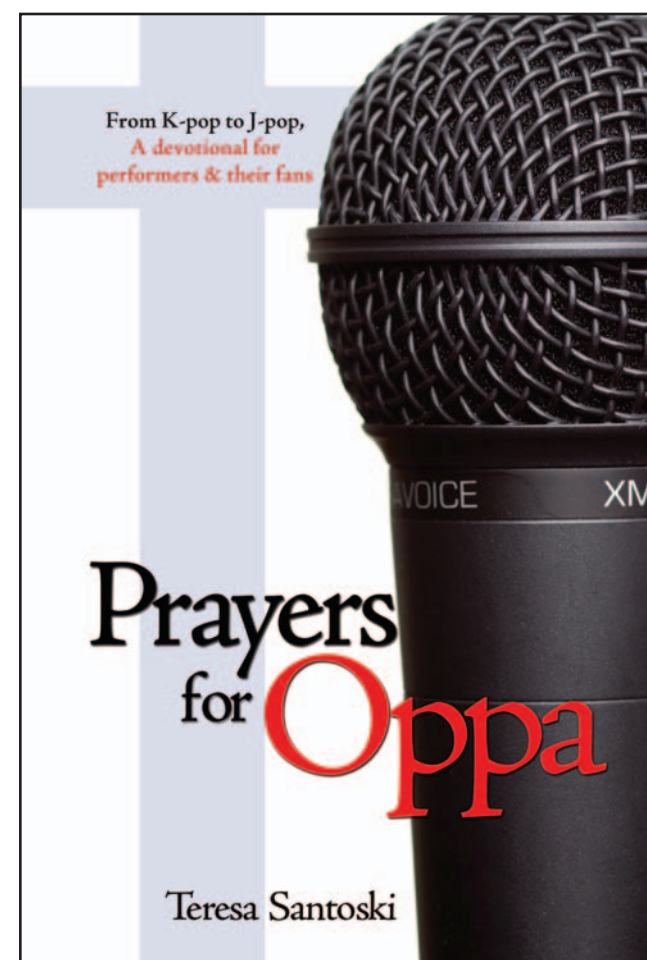
The book is set up in sections that address issues that may come up for performers or fans. Each section begins with a brief introduction that relates the issue to a relevant Bible passage. "For example, there's a section on Performance Safety," Santoski said. "The intro talks about it in a biblical context. So if the band was concerned about the weather, choreography snafus, a risk of injury, there's a Bible passage that talks about injury and God's protection, and (trusting there's a) reason for everything; letting go of anxiety and worry, and trusting in God."

This is followed by a prayer that can be said by either fan or band. "There's a prayer a performer can pray, and another one for the fan to pray for them," Santoski said. "Each has a Bible verse supporting that. The book is designed to fit with their busy schedules; they have no time to read lengthy intros or prayers. They're short, so you can pray in a short but meaningful way, without it being time consuming."

Modern-day communication would make it easy for fans to know what their favorite bands may need spiritual cheerleading about. "Say your performer tweets that they're playing outside, and they hope the rain clears up. You can pray that Performance Safety prayer for that. It's just something more meaningful that fans can do to support their groups," she said.

Santoski hopes her book will "remind fans that, in addition to them being people they look up to and admire, they're also real people that face challenges like the rest of us do, and need spiritual encouragement and support like we all do. It's intended not only for fans to be able to support the performer, but also as a resource for the performers themselves."

Santoski is looking to get her book translated into other languages. She's also been in touch with different international fan groups, churches and missions, and



Courtesy photo

Book cover for "Prayers for Oppa," by Teresa Santoski.

is working to get the book into the hands of the pop groups themselves.

"I feel it's a book whose time has come," Santoski said. "There are fans all over the world, not just in Asian countries, and more and more performers. Joining the East Asian music industry, with the worldwide popularity it's attaining, more groups are coming out, and it's a very challenging industry. They have busy schedules, a hierarchy to deal with, and high expectations to meet. These performers need all the prayer support they can get," she said.

And clearly, it's not just needed by the K-pop and J-pop crowd. "Think about Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Britney Spears, Miley Cyrus," she said.

Santoski will be at an author event Jan. 25 at Cozy Tea Cart in Brookline. She's

looking into other local bookstores, too. "East Asian pop culture has brought me so much joy," she said. "I always wanted to do something meaningful for the performers that have brought me so much enjoyment through the years. This book is a way for me to give a little bit back."

And it's ready to be given. "500 copies of 'Prayers for Oppa' just showed up on my doorstep," Santoski said via email. "Pretty intense."

"Prayers For Oppa" can be ordered through WestBow Press and Amazon.com for \$11.95. An e-book edition will be released in December. The book is also available locally through Santoski's website, [www.teresasantoski.com](http://www.teresasantoski.com).

Kathleen Palmer can be reached at 594-6403 or [kpalmernashua@telegraph.com](mailto:kpalmernashua@telegraph.com). Also, follow her on Twitter (@Telegraph\_KathP or @NHFoodandFun).