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Apple Valley author works on children's series

BY ERICA CHRISTOFFER - SUN NEWSPAPERS

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Arranging words like an endless puzzle, Stacy Raye Waibel strives to create a text so vivid that it draws its own picture.

"I have a vivid imagination so I can picture things in my head," said Waibel, an Apple Valley resident. "It becomes a better image on paper if you can visualize it in your head - it's easier to write about."

For Waibel, the pictures in her head are the pinnacle of her creativity, for she is blind.

Waibel is a writer of children's stories. It all started during the holiday season of 2005 when she decided she didn't want to write the same old Christmas letter. Instead, she wrote from the perspective of her poodle, Rudy. To her surprise, her friends and family were enthralled.

"They kept encouraging me," she said.

"Rudy Wants Red Hair," was her first shot at story writing for children, and since then she has created at least a dozen more.

"A lot of things I write about are things I've experienced," she said.

At the age of 9, Waibel was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes. She lost her sight to diabetes in 1983, at the age of 19.

"I look at it as a blessing rather than a negative," Waibel said.

Having been an artist before losing her vision, Waibel ended up changing her major in college to speech communication with an emphasis in psychology. And for some time Waibel gave up her creative desires. But ever since she started writing her Rudy stories, Waibel said those memories have been surfacing, making her realize that she missed being creative.

Able to write longhand with a writer's guide, Waibel now jots down notes when she has ideas in the middle of the night. Her husband, Wayne, helps type them into the computer. A voice synthesizer program also helps Waibel type on her own, as it speaks the words she types back to her.

"I love being creative," said Waibel. "I really like the feedback when someone reads my stories."

Each of her stories has an educational twist, such as "Rudy's New Neighbor," with an underlying issue of diversity. In that story, a big white cat named Marshmallow moves in next door to Ruby.

"They get together and they learn that they have a lot in common even though one's a dog and one's a cat," she said.

"Rudy Gets a Transplant," involves Rudy going into the hospital to get a kidney transplant. Waibel herself underwent a kidney transplant when she was 29. Because of her size, she spent time in the pediatric unit where she got to know many of the children.

"There's really no stories like that out there telling kids what it's like to get a transplant," she said.

Just three years ago, Waibel received a pancreas transplant, which eliminated her diabetes. But the experiences she had along the way changed her life.

In "Rudy's Mommy," Waibel discusses what it's like to be blind and answers many of the questions she's received over the years.

Much of the encouragement Waibel receives is from her friends and family, as well as from the church she and her husband attend in St. Paul.

"I want to get my books out there for people to enjoy," she said.

Waibel is also a member of Southside Writers, a group that meets 10 a.m.-noon Saturdays at the Wescott Library in Eagan to critique one another's pieces while improving their skills.

In addition to her children's stories featuring Rudy, Waibel also wrote an adult story about her dog Dexter, 10, who was diagnosed with cancer last fall. Waibel has a third dog, Kirby, now 14.

"They give you so much unconditional love," said Waibel. "If you have a bad day, it makes it all worthwhile to come home and there they are."

Looking to the future, Waibel is working on making Ruby a published series. So far, Waibel has appeared in Once Upon A Time, a magazine for children's writers and illustrators. Waibel is available for speaking engagements.

For more information, contact Waibel at wdwaibel@aol.com.

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