

Lois West Duffy is back

Youth literature 'Zillah's Gift' is set in Middle East

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By Geri McShane | Albert Lea Tribune
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During the 23 or 24 years Lois West Duffy lived in Albert Lea, she taught sixth-grade Sunday school.

"I was always sad there weren't more girl stories in the Bible," West Duffy said.

So after years as working as a journalist for the Albert Lea Tribune and The Associated Press, as press secretary to Sen. Dave Durenberger and finally as a business executive, she set out to remedy that.

West Duffy has written "Zillah's Gift," a 120-page chapter book for ages 7 to 12, published by Beaver's Pond Press. It's her first solo book endeavor. She'll sign copies of the book from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday at Book World in Northbridge Mall.

The book is set in the deserts of the Middle East during the time of the birth of Jesus. Zillah is an 11-year-old orphan girl with some tragic life experiences who comes to follow a significantly heavenly star and three wise sages named Bathazar, Melchoir and Kasper, confronting bad guys along the way.

"It's a coming of age story," West Duffy said. "It's a story of what it means to be a grownup in a tough world."

She describes her book as an anti-Cinderella tale.

"Zillah doesn't wait to be rescued, nor does she wish to become a princess," West Duffy said. "But with curiosity, courage and perseverance, she faces daunting challenges in a world beyond her control — much like the young heroines of American Girl stories, but set 2,000 years ago."

Dark-haired and dark-skinned Zillah makes some famous friends, has inexplicable powers that protect her and holds a significant secret that drives the story. Ultimately, Zillah's precious gift is one that she offers on behalf of all of us, many believe, as the story unfolds in a meaningful way for both Christian believers and those with curiosity about ancient Persian culture.

West Duffy said she talked with scholars about what Zillah's background should be.

"For a writer, this was like a mine," West Duffy said. One reader thanked her for writing "the back story of the Magi," she said. "I never thought about it that way."



photo by Brie Cohen

Lois West Duffy poses with her new book "Zillah's Gift." She will be signing books Saturday at Book World from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

She's been pleased with the feedback she's gotten on the book.

Some adults have said they're quite moved by it," she said.

Writer Faith Sullivan wrote, "Zillah is a beautifully written story of miracles."

Chuck Slocum, president of The Williston Group, a management consulting firm, called it "a delightful literary offering."

Her own sister told her she felt like she did when she read "The Shack," the author said.

West Duffy said she's already thinking about doing a series of girl stories set in different times in the Bible, and has even completed a few outlines. Someone else suggested she do stories about different religions of the world, she said.

She and her husband, Dr. Joe Duffy of Mayo, are now retired to Afton and Phoenix.

West Duffy said she has book signings scheduled every weekend between now and Christmas.

Her Web site is www.LoisWestDuffy.com.