

Author finds inspiration in the spirit of Christmas

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

For author Gina Wood Joseph, there's no doubting the existence of Santa Claus.

The Essex District High School graduate recently wrote a book, *The Winter Spirit*, which she'll be signing for readers at Chapters in Windsor, Dec. 9.

"I was always a diehard Santa Claus fan," said Wood Joseph.

The book follows Katie, a young girl who is growing up and starting to doubt that Santa Claus is real. That is, until she meets Hans, an old, white-haired gentleman who helps restore Katie's faith in St. Nick and the spirit of Christmas.

Wood Joseph, a feature writer for a daily newspaper in Macomb, Mich., got the idea to write the book after doing an article on the real life Hans, Maxwell Heiderer.

Now in his 70s, Heiderer often visits orphanages and youth homes dressed as Santa Claus, sharing Christmas legends with youngsters.

Heiderer told the kids to call him "The Winter Spirit," telling them he was a culmination of all the Santa Clauses around the world, Wood Joseph said.

"He was such a great character, I started thinking about what a great story it would make," Wood Joseph said.

Heiderer had a similar idea. The former illustrator for *Stars and Stripes Magazine* suggested that he and Wood Joseph team up to do a children's Christmas book.

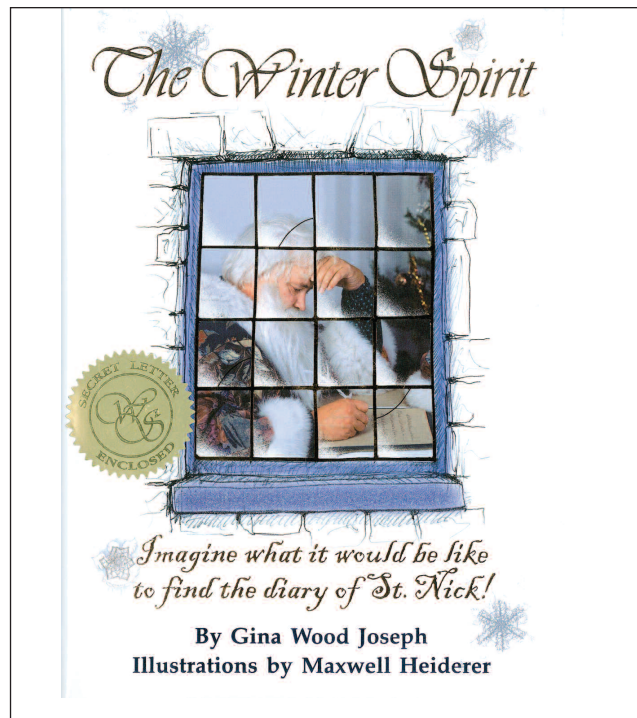
For Wood Joseph, the timing was perfect.

Her two pre-teen kids were experiencing some doubts of their own.

"I was inspired because my kids were going through the 'I don't know if I believe in Santa Claus' phase," Wood Joseph said.

Over the course of about a year, the first-time author spent time researching Christmas traditions and picking Heiderer's brain for ideas.

Wood Joseph worked at the book while on camping trips and through the summer, playing Christmas music in July to get



The *Winter Spirit*, above left, is a children's Christmas book written by Essex District High School graduate Gina Wood Joseph. A feature writer for a daily newspaper in Macomb, Mich., Wood Joseph will be signing copies of the book at Chapters in Windsor, Dec. 9.



inspired.

For her, the best part about writing the book was letting her imagination run wild. Her tales of angels, reindeer and Santa Claus are complemented by Heiderer's rich illustrations.

"You really can use all your creativity and imagination," she said of the book-writing process.

Wood Joseph has also spent some time visiting elementary schools in both Ontario and Michigan, sharing stories from the book and her childlike vision of Christmas with the students.

"With some of the schools we've visited, I was amazed at the response," she said. "I thought they'd tear me

apart, but they were really interested."

Part of the proceeds from the Chapters book signing will go to the Windsor Firefighters Benefit Fund.

Wood Joseph's brother Alan Wood is a fire captain in Windsor and with the benefit fund contributing to toy drives, the author thought it was fitting to

help the cause during the holidays.

Full-time Windsor firefighter and chair of the benefit fund Jim Hewitt said any dollars raised by the charity go back into the community.

"We're trying to increase the quality of life," Hewitt said. "So every kid has something to open on Christmas."



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