

# Teacher on the right track with ‘Rudy the Steam Engine’

When their daughter was 4 years old, Carol Ruggiero’s husband, Jim Ruggiero, situated the family train around the base of the Christmas tree.

“She was ecstatic,” said the fourth-grade teacher at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Elementary School, Essex, of daughter Kaili.

Mr. Ruggiero then placed the setup on a platform so the little girl could play with the train while standing.

“Now we’re up to three tiers and four train sets!” said Mrs. Ruggiero of the family’s current Christmas train arrangement.

Although Kaili is now 20, long ago she and her daddy had created a story about the train and recorded it on a cassette tape. Mrs. Ruggiero transformed the story on the cassette into a children’s story. “I just collaborated and put everything together,” she said.

“Rudy the Steam Engine” is now a 23-page book dedicated to “Jim, true father of stories; and Kaili, true lover of trains and stories.” The pair enjoys refurbishing antique engines of all kinds as a hobby. They have a garage full of them.

“Kaili thinks it’s neat that other kids can enjoy the same story she did at that age,” said the teacher who has been with the archdiocese for 26 years, including six at Mount Carmel.

The children’s book is also dedicated to Mrs. Ruggiero’s late mother, who loved books and reading. After her mom died more than two years ago, the teacher began submitting the manuscript to publishers, eventually signing on with a subsidy press, which asks for a financial and marketing commitment from authors.

Mrs. Ruggiero has written two other children’s stories, “Patty Sue & Pencilla” and “Mrs. Moo’s Necklace.” She would like her daughter to illustrate them if she decides

to continue publishing.

"It wasn't meant to be a bestseller," she said of "Rudy the Steam Engine," having printed just 99 copies which sell for \$7.95. Books are available online through Amazon, Barnes & Noble or Borders, and of course, the school library.

Mrs. Ruggiero sometimes asks students at Mount Carmel to examine their lives because "every 10 years I try to see what I have accomplished," she said. She might ask them, "What did you accomplish in middle school? In high school?" One day, a student turned the question on her, "What are you doing this decade?"

"Trying to get a children's book published," she answered.

After the book was printed, a few students commented, "You really did it."