

The Beverly REVIEW

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ROSS

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ten by Beverly resident Jil Marie Ross about the Blakes, an African-American family. The series recounts their humorous adventures. Though not autobiographical, the stories are based on the real-life experiences of Ross, her husband, a lieutenant on the Chicago Fire Department, and their son and daughter, the author said.

Ross began recording stories of her children's mischief in 1993 when a broken leg left her caring for two toddlers while confined to a wheelchair.

"My kids would run off with a bag of cookies and eat the whole thing," Ross said. "It made me mad at the time, but later I could look back on it

and laugh. I told my kids, 'I'm going to write a story about you one day.'"

Ten years later, Ross had a slew of stories written in long-hand but still had not sought a publisher for them. She was spurred to action by her son, Julian, who was then 11 years old and experiencing difficulty in school.

"I was concerned about Julian's reading disability, and I was having a hard time finding books to motivate him to read," Ross said. "I noticed that there weren't many chapter books that had African-American faces on the covers."

In addition to believing that her stories could fill a niche, she felt it was important to set an example for her children, Ross said.

"I was trying to motivate Julian, but in the meantime he was watching me working

and working on something and not doing anything with it," Ross said. "I needed to be accountable and stay committed to my word."

After being rejected by several major publishers, Ross self-published her first book, "Marie Plays Homeless," in 2004. The book tells the story of an 8-year-old girl who embarrasses her parents by begging for money to acquire a toy that she wants, but in the process she learns about homelessness.

"All of my books have a moral to them," Ross said. "The kids in the stories make bad decisions and get in really big trouble, but they learn a lesson."

According to Ross, her books are relevant in modern-day society, addressing topics such as bullying and gossiping, but feature characters that uphold traditional values. The books also include an illustration by artist Gwendolyn Pruitt at the

Author keeps track of family fun in writing books

by Caroline Connors

The funny and sometimes poignant antics of children are the basis for many stories told around the dinner table, but the escapades of a local family are now reaching a much wider audience after being immortalized in print.

The "Shenanigans Series" is a collection of six novels written by Jil Marie Ross (See Ross page 8)



Jil Marie Ross

beginning of each chapter, a spelling guide, and questions for discussion and/or written responses, Ross said.

Ross, a 21-year employee of United Airlines, took a temporary leave of absence from her job to pursue her writing career and manage the marketing of her book series. A native Chicagoan and graduate of Mother McAuley High School, Ross has a bachelor's degree in psychology. However, she said writing is her true passion.

"I always liked to write—as a child I kept a diary and had a wild imagination," Ross said. She said that she also developed a love of reading at a young age, having grown up in a family that valued education.

"My mother always made me read the book before I could see the movie that was made from it," Ross said. "Now it seems that reading is the last option for kids—they have so

many other things grabbing their attention. I would like to get kids reading again."

Ross's mission has taken her across the country to literacy events and all over the city to schools, bookstores and fairs for readings and signings. Future projects include writing a script and staging productions of the books at schools, developing the series into audio format, and translating them into Spanish, she said.

Although the subjects of her books, Julian and Jace, are now in their teens, Ross said that she has no shortage of material for future novels; Christmas, Easter and "going green" are some of the themes under consideration.

"I have all kinds of ideas," Ross said. "There are more stories inside of me that want to get out."

The "Shenanigans Series" is available at Borders Books, Waldenbooks, Amazon.com and at shenanigansseries.com.