

### **30-year-old Homework Assignment from Frank McCourt Finally finds Publisher**

Best-selling author Anthony DeStefano wrote his best book at age 15, as a student in a creative writing class taught by Pulitzer Prize winner Frank McCourt.

“I peaked at 15,” said DeStefano, whose new children’s book, *Little Star*, has finally been published almost 30 years later, and just in time for Christmas. “I honestly think this is the best thing I’ve ever done.”

Not everyone would agree with the self-effacing writer. DeStefano is the author of the adult best-sellers *A Travel Guide to Heaven*, and *Ten Prayers God Always Says Yes To. This Little Prayer of Mine*, a children’s book, was published earlier this year.

But *Little Star* was his first book, written as an assignment for *Angela’s Ashes* author McCourt when DeStefano was a student at Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan.

“Frank McCourt was a very unorthodox teacher,” said DeStefano. “He knew that the best way to get young writers to write simply was to make them write children’s books. And we had to send them out to publishers.”

*Little Star* is a beautifully illustrated retelling of the Nativity story and a star, until then all but unnoticed in the night sky, who burns himself out to keep the newborn baby Jesus warm in a Bethlehem stable.

DeStefano’s book was initially turned down by publishers, but many of them tempered their rejections with letters of encouragement. In 1981, famed actress Helen Hayes did a public reading of the book during an Easter Seals event in Manhattan.

DeStefano still has the original manuscript in his office in New York City. The new version, illustrated by Mark Elliott, the artist who worked with DeStefano on *This Little Prayer of Mine*, was just published by WaterBrook Press in anticipation of the Christmas season. The author hopes audiences of all ages will respond to the story of sacrificial love and its message that everyone—even the tiniest and poorest and least significant among us—matters.

“My goal was to try to encapsulate the whole gospel message in a simple Christmas story,” said DeStefano.

And his grade in that long-ago creative writing class?

Frank McCourt gave him an A.

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