

Interview By Nikki Tate:

Lyn and Lorraine were interviewed by fellow author Nikki Tate

Ask the Author – An Interview With Lyn Hancock

1. Was Tabasco a real raccoon?

Yes! I have not yet written fiction. Everything is written from my diaries.

2. How did you manage to smuggle a baby raccoon onto an airplane?

I carried her in a toque in the big pocket of my parka. We passed through security years before 9-11 – i.e. before you need to take off your shoes and coat as you do nowadays. Once in the aircraft, I went to the bathroom and transferred her to my shopping bag at my feet under the seat.

She was only a week old at first and like most babies she slept all the while until... You'll have to read the book to find out what happened!

3. What is the biggest challenge for an author writing from personal experience?

The biggest challenge for me in writing from personal experience is that I want to tell the whole story, the beauty spots AND the warts, but sometimes you don't want the readers to criticize you for the warts. Neither do you want to fictionalize to suit readers' perceived preferences or the fashions of the day or the needs of a particular age group or to make a particular political point. Nor do you want to change endings to suit external circumstances dictated by particular publishers, reviewers, readers, or the attitudes of the times in which you live. You just want to tell the story as it happened. The downside of this is that the book can become too long, too boring in its details, too confusing perhaps.

4. What message do you think is suggested by the ending of Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon?

I am still thinking about that ending. Sometimes it is not possible to wind things down neatly. Truth IS stranger than fiction and I dearly want to tell the truth. I don't want to be a Hardly Know It and mix fact and fiction. So although it would have been nice to say that I raised Tabasco (because she had no mother of her own) until she could live her own life and then she did and everyone lived happily ever after, that didn't happen. She got shot. Ours is not a perfect world for anyone, either for wild animals or for people. I want readers to understand that there are no easy answers to life's problems and that one studies all the options and does the best one can. We should care for any animal that needs help, not just kill it because later it may grow up to become a problem. We

should give it to a wildlife rehabilitation centre for release, if possible, but if not possible then provide a home, either in that wildlife rehabilitation centre or elsewhere. We should support zoos and game farms if they are sincere in keeping their animals housed as happily as possible, if they are trying to breed threatened or endangered species for possible release in the wild, if they encourage people to conserve wildlife and the habitat needed for wildlife – and people – to prosper. I believe that people will NOT find a meaning and value in conserving land and animals unless they see it close at hand, unless they touch it or are touched by it – whether in actual fact or in reading about it. We are better people if we appreciate animals and we share our habitat with them. And, of course, animals are better for that as well.

5. Under what circumstances is it ethical to keep a wild animal in captivity?

I think it is ethical to keep a wild animal in captivity if it is orphaned or injured, if there is no proper place to release it to the wild (e.g. a tiger that has not learned to live on its own in the jungle and would surely be shot if it tried to find food in somebody's back yard), or an endangered species when there is a chance for it to be bred in captivity. When people can see such animals in captivity, there's a chance they will learn and be motivated to do whatever is possible to help conserve wildlife and the habitat needed to ensure future generations of healthy populations.

6. How can people living in urban areas help wild animals survive and thrive?

People living in urban areas can be touched by the wild and motivated to conserve that wild and its inhabitants by doing things like – feeding nutritious foods such as seeds and nuts to birds, especially in cold winters, providing little pockets of the wild – compact eco-systems – in one's backyard (such as ponds, pesticide-free lawns and gardens, nesting trees and bushes).

7. This is your first book for children – how was the process of creating this book different to your earlier projects for adults?

When I sit down to tell as a story as it happened, I don't say to myself, "Now this is a book for children so I will write it this way or that way, have this number of pages, that number of illustrations, this vocabulary level, that writing style." I just tell the story the best way I know how – simply, directly, vividly, and dramatically from beginning to end until I have said all that I wanted to say. I try to make my words like pictures, and my pictures like stories. I write like I talk. My books appeal to both adults AND children because everyone wants the same thing, really.

8. What do you hope students will take away from the writing workshops you'll be giving in area schools?

I hope my students will laugh and cry and learn. Read stories, write stories, take pictures, draw pictures, and share them. I hope that students will be motivated to write their own stories, fiction if that is what comes into their heads first. But if they find

invention difficult, they can hone their skills by writing stories from their own experiences – jotting down phrases or whole sentences on the spot on a paper napkin if that is all that is at hand (I have, lots of times), in a diary or journal, or on the computer. I hope that students will want to read about Tabasco and other animals (and write about them, too) because reading and writing are so connected to each other.

Ask the Illustrator – An Interview With Loraine Kemp

1. What attracted you to working on this particular story?

First and foremost I was attracted by the fact that it was written by Lyn Hancock. I have known of her since I was a kid and have read a couple of her books. Then, the fact that it was about animals certainly tweaked my interest - I love drawing animals!

2. How did you go about finding people to model for the book?

I phoned a principal at a local school to ask if she would be interested in having her staff and kids be the models for my illustrations. I figured that not only would I benefit from an easy source of models, but they would also benefit from watching the process of illustrating for a novel. And, I figured we all might even have some fun along the way! I just wish I could have fit in all the great kids I worked with.

3. How did the staff and students at Ann McClymont School react when they learned their likenesses would appear in this book?

They were very keen and extremely patient and good-natured about my weird requests for poses.

4. What reference material did you have to work with when drawing Tabasco?

Lyn Hancock sent me many black and white pictures. The poses that I didn't find in the photos were located on the Internet.

5. How do you think artwork can enhance a non-fiction story in a way that is different to using photographs?

Photography limits you to the scenes that you happened to catch on film, whereas artwork gives you enormous freedom to create a picture of any scene that you want. This then allows the author and illustrator to emphasize certain aspects of the novel not caught on film.

6. What was the biggest challenge you faced while creating the artwork for this book?

I was determined to draw my models accurately, so that everyone could recognize themselves and others. It was challenging, but at the same time rewarding when I showed the people their pictures.

7. What is the most important thing you would like students to take away from your art workshops you'll be conducting in area schools?

The biggest hurdle for beginning artists is to draw what they see, and not what they think they see. Anyone who wants to draw can draw more accurately if they take the time to really study their subject, and then be patient with their progress. It all takes time, but is bound to get better with some effort.