

Author's latest book inspired by a raccoon

SANDRA STEILO / THE STAR

It's a story that took author Lyn Hancock more than 28 years to write.

The wildlife author has written 18 books, but her latest – *Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon* – was probably the hardest to write. The non-fiction book – her first for children – is based on Hancock's pet many years ago, a young raccoon named Tabasco. Tabasco, at one week old, came to live with Hancock after being orphaned in Vancouver. The Vancouver Zoo knew Hancock's reputation as someone who cared for animals and gave her the raccoon to care for.

"That's what I started writing about, the effect on the animals and my love for wildlife and wildlife habitat in B.C.," Hancock said.

Tabasco was like a member of Hancock's family – she travelled with the small animal – smuggling her on to planes, taking her camping to the Okanagan and on her various business travels across the country. Tabasco lived with Hancock in her small Burnaby apartment. It took her so long to complete the story because Tabasco's ending wasn't a happy one and Hancock wanted to be true to that.

"I believe in non-fiction, telling the truth as it happens and not changing it for convenience," she said.

"The manuscript has been sitting on my shelf for 28 years, I never wrote the last chapter, they wanted me to change it. It had a sad ending and people wanted me to do a 'Disney.' I wanted to write it as it happened. If I had written it 28 years ago I would have been too angry probably."

Hancock finally met a publisher who wanted her to do the book her way and the story was told with illustrations by Loraine Kemp. When she had finished writing the book, Hancock came out of her Nanoose Bay home and noticed for the first time in backyard a large raccoon just staring at her. She took it as a sign Tabasco was glad her story had been written.

Tabasco was a regular with the Canadian media, accompanying Hancock when she did press for her books, appearing on TV and being interviewed by countless newspaper reporters.

"Everybody loved Tabasco, she was brave ... everywhere she went she caused chaos, but everybody loved her," Hancock said, flipping through photos of the small raccoon. "They've got personalities, you have a love-hate relationship with a raccoon."

Tabasco The Saucy Raccoon will be launched in Nanaimo at the Arts Council Gallery in Rutherford Mall at noon on June 17. Hancock will also bring some unbelievable photos of

her getting up close and very personal with a number of animals. While it's a children's book, Hancock said everyone will be interested.

"It's not just for children, they adore it but so do adults," she said.

Hancock arrived in Canada in 1962. The Aussie was engaged on her first date to a wildlife biologist – who introduced her to the wildlife of B.C. Hancock was a teacher and would bring her various orphaned animals into the classroom.

She wrote about her experiences including – *There's A Seal in My Sleeping Bag* and *There's a Raccoon in My Parka*, among other titles. She once spent nine hours sitting in an eagle's nest while her husband studied them.

One night her husband came home with four orphaned cougars who ended up sleeping in her bed. Their home was also open to young bears, apes, other raccoons and more.

After her divorce, she remained interested in animals and returned to university, studying cougars and apes at Simon Fraser.

Hancock visits schools sharing her tales and expertise in writing. Recently she was at McGirr Elementary.

Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon is available at Save-on-Foods at Country Club Centre and Woodgrove, The Nanaimo Arts Council and Alberni Outpost.



Lyn Hancock's latest book tells the story of Tabasco, an orphaned raccoon that became a part of her family. SANDRA STEILO/THE STAR