

Lessons from a raccoon

■ Author Lyn Hancock, with the help of illustrator Loraine Kemp, has turned her extraordinary experiences with a tame raccoon into a children's book. Both Hancock and Kemp are passionate about encouraging parents to get their children hooked on writing at an early age.



PHOTO SPECIAL

By **CHERYL CLOCK**
Standard Staff

It's not a happy ending. Tabasco the raccoon dies. Shot to death by a man worried that the friendly critter was getting a little too friendly with his kids.

He's likely thinking rabies. Or some other kind of disease.

So, he pulls out a gun and bang. Tabasco is dead.

Lyn Hancock hears about the fate of her beloved raccoon, the one she nurtured, and loved, and fell in love with from the day it was handed to her by a small zoo in Vancouver's Stanley Park, through the grapevine.

Days before, she had released it back to the wilderness, through a type of animal half-way house.

It was friendly. And liked people.

"It chose the wrong feet to follow home," she says.

Lyn later found out it had followed some children home from school and wanted to play with them. Their father shot it.

News of Tabasco's untimely demise in 1978 hit newspapers across Canada.

While it's not a happy ending, children appreciate the truth, says the 68-year-old author from British Columbia.

"All the books had Disney endings," she says. "The raccoon would be set free, go off into the wild, have lots of raccoon sex and be happy."

"I wanted to write books where the truth could stand out."

Lyn and Tabasco first met in 1974. It was just days old. A tiny, one-pound ball of fluff. Its mother was dead.

Lyn had just returned from a quarter century of living and writing about life in northern Canada to study cougars at Simon Fraser University.

She'd been married to Canadian biologist David Hancock, noted for his study of eagles and "Eagle cam," a weather-proof camera mounted next to an eagle's nest that beamed live images around the world earlier this year, through a website.

For almost 30 years, Lyn, a retired teacher and foster parent to assorted wildlife, told the story of Tabasco to children and people she met in her travels.

Now, the adventurer is sharing it through her newest book, *Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon*.

Lyn and illustrator, Loraine Kemp, will be in Niagara this week to launch their book in this area of the country.

They will appear at Vineland Estates Winery's Carriage House in Vineland on Oct. 13 at 7 p.m. (The winery is managed by Loraine's nephews.) Hancock will also be taking part in a book signing, Oct. 13 at Chestnut Lane Books in Merriton.

And, the pair will be talking to children in Grimsby schools this week about how to put their own stories on paper.

Plus, on Wednesday, Oct. 18, Lyn will be speaking during a meeting of the local Canadian Authors Association starting at 7:30 p.m.

The pair encourage parents to get their children hooked on writing from a young age.

Loraine, 49, started drawing books when she was three.

"Kids have an insatiable appetite for drawing, reading and writing," she says.

ILLUSTRATION BY LORAIN KEMP,
FROM TABASCO THE SAUCY RACCOON

"Two tickets to Toronto, please, for me and my pet raccoon," I said to the lady at the Air Canada ticket counter in Vancouver. I tried to sound nonchalant, as if this were something I asked for every day. She looked up, startled, then drew back in alarm as I placed a wooden box in front of her.

"I know he has to go in the baggage compartment," I continued. "So, I brought my own carrying case — unless, of course, you want me to use yours."

My parents had brought me to the airport early this Sunday morning, and, as expected, the terminal was almost deserted. Still, Dad couldn't help looking embarrassed. He and Mom were visiting me from Australia and, once again, they were being dragged into one of their daughter's "crazy" schemes. "When will you ever grow up?" my mother would often sigh. She looked at the agent apologetically.

The lady behind the ticket counter stared at the box as if any minute it might explode. I felt that if she'd been a bank teller she would have reached for an alarm. "Where is your ... your raccoon?" she asked fearfully, not really believing that I had one.

"Here," I said, reaching into the pocket of my parka and pulling out a red woolen toque. "Meet Tabasco."

The lump of grizzled fur snuffling sleepily into the wool in the palm of my hand looked more like a pin cushion than a one-pound, week-old, orphaned raccoon.

The airline lady's manner changed. "Oh, it's just a baby," she crooned. "It's adorable." Then, remembering where she was, she looked horrified. "You can't put that little raccoon in the baggage compartment, it's too tiny. It might die!"

"Then what do you suggest," I asked innocently.

The ticket agent's voice dropped suddenly. Looking quickly behind her to make sure nobody was listening, she whispered, "Wrap it up in a blanket and pretend it's your baby."

— from *Tabasco the Saucy Raccoon*

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