

South Tampa COMMUNITY FOCUS

arts

books

BY GLEN STARKEY

A Quiet Roar

A New Mouse Teaches Children Nonviolent Behavior

Move over Mickey, there's a new mouse in town...and he's drawn better than you.

The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak," a new series of children's stories, is being launched from San Luis Obispo, and you'll have first crack at buying original art and limited-edition prints of the book's illustrations. You'll also be able to talk to the creators, the husband-and-wife team of author Susan Yost-Filgate and illustrator Leonard Filgate, at a book signing this week.

Featuring the unlikely grouping of two mice siblings, a house cat, and an erudite frog, the stories contain positive messages and are enhanced by illustrations so beautifully rendered that they're being sold in the fine-art world.

licensing deals for the new characters, and August has created the first limited-edition prints of the artworks as well as greeting cards and a book, "Rip Squeak and His Friends: an introduction to the Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak."

"San Luis Obispo is basically a testing ground," said Schmidthues. "We're learning from people."

Schmidthues hopes to nail down publishing and licensing deals, eventually branching out into TV and film.

"The response we've received has been amazing," he said. "We've had several offers, but we're taking it slow. We don't want to make any mistakes because we're really sitting on something special here."

Said August, "The story is a parable about tolerance. And that's a valuable thing for kids to learn about."

"We don't want to be missionaries, because kids hate that," Schmidthues added, "but we do want to be about telling kids they can solve their problems without violence. You don't have to shoot your problem; you can talk your way out of it."

According to the creators, the goal of Rip Squeak's adventures is to "portray friendships that overcome prejudice and remind us that we should appreciate differences" and "to show you can have

adventure without violence."

The first story in the introduction is about how Rip Squeak and his sister Jesse befriend Abbey the cat, who in turn introduces them to Euripides, the frog. Readers learn about the summer cottage and small plot of land they share, join them as they discover some of the cottage's secrets, and fend off an unfriendly cat set on eating Jesse...with a poke on the nose from an umbrella. But isn't that violence?

"That's a good question and one we have debated at length, especially since this is a story of 'adventure' and will get more adventurous as the stories progress," explained the Filgates jointly in an e-mail response. "We still believe our characters are nonviolent, and it should be better stated that The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak will never contain violent scenes for the sake of violence, nor will it have violent scenes which are not overcome or countered by nonviolence in one form or another."

"It will not emulate the majority of children's television, which is so full of gratuitous violence, whether it be anvils falling on cats' heads or turtles karate-chopping their way through walls and enemies. Our goal is to give children an alternative to the usual fare, but still



"The Salty Frog": Euripides will introduce Rip and friends to pirate tales.

give them a taste of excitement without being overly scary or threatening.

"An umbrella poked at the nose of an enemy cat that wants to eat you is purely defensive. Jesse doesn't break his kneecaps with it or poke his eye out; in fact, the force such a little mouse could bring on a powerful cat 10 times her size would simply be a

>>> BOOKS continued page 41

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Artist Leonard Filgate did a stint with the merchant marines during the Vietnam War, which helped cement his belief in nonviolence.

Meet the Author and the Illustrator

"The Roaring Adventures of Rip Squeak" author Susan Yost-Filgate and illustrator Leonard Filgate will make a special appearance at August Editions, 570 Higuera St., Suite 120 (in the Creamery), SLO, this Saturday, Dec. 4, from 4 to 7 p.m. A show of Filgate's work will hang there beginning Dec. 2. Info: 781-3150.

The Filgates, residents of Carmel, are represented by local art dealer Beda Schmidthues, who has teamed with local expert printmaker Christopher August to create the commercial introduction of the characters. Schmidthues has been orchestrating

>>> BOOKS from page 40

surprise to the cat. It made him think twice and decide to go for easier prey.

The threat of violence can go a long way from actual violence. And when Jesse pokes the beastly cat on the nose, it is not that Jesse is proud of attacking the cat, she is proud that she stood up for herself, that she took charge of her situation. Therefore, the message is important: 'Stick up for yourself.'

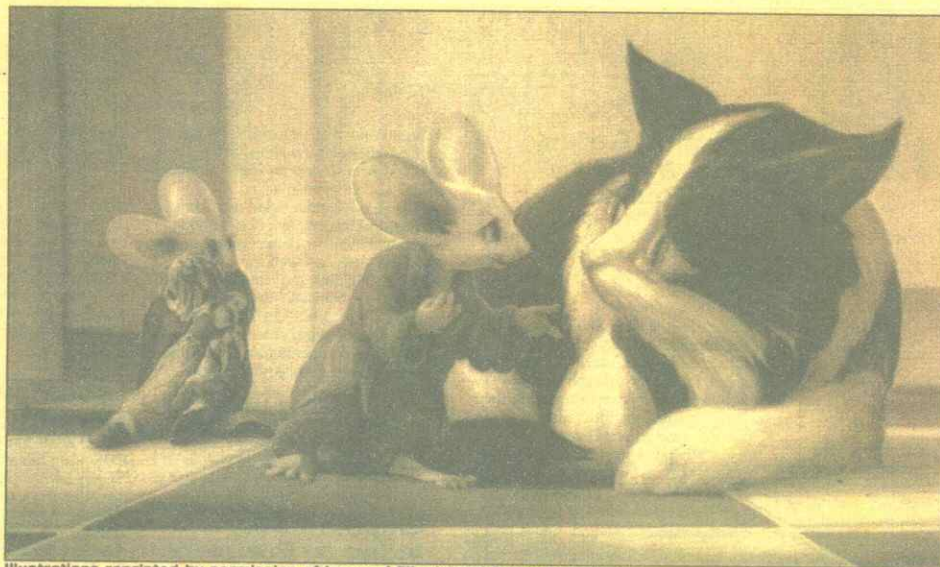
"Jesse is a strong little 'girl,' and when prevailed upon shows her strength by protecting herself. We hope it helps to eliminate the myth that girls are weak, defenseless creatures. Her intention is not violence, but self-preservation. We

'You don't have to shoot your problem; you can talk your way out of it.'

don't believe this act makes her not non-violent," finished the Filgates.

This isn't "Itchy and Scratchy," or even "Tom and Jerry." Rip Squeak's adventures are more about discovery and fun. But the excellence of the artwork is what really sets this product apart from so many others in the children's market. It's certainly atypical for a children's book illustrator to sell his work in the fine-art market, where Filgate's original paintings fetch between \$2,000 and \$7,000.

"My background is in creating and selling fine art," explained the painter.



Illustrations reprinted by permission of Leonard Filgate and Susan Yost-Filgate

"My work as an illustrator came later. It was natural for me to sell my illustrations in the fine-art market, since that has always been my venue. I am not certain about other illustrators selling their work in this market. I can't say that what I do is what others do, should do, or would do, but in my observation of most gallery settings, I have seen few other children's book illustrations.

"I believe that 'storytelling art' (as my work has been called) is less common in a traditional gallery setting. Most galleries deal in such subject matter as

landscape, seascape, still-life, and figurative art, with an occasional illustration from an animated film, opera, a biblical or other story. Gallery owners and directors have expressed that the art created around Rip Squeak is very different, not something they are used to selling—and it is selling as fine art. It has been said that the work may be a kind of vanguard, taking illustrative art beyond the book and into the world of fine art."

See for yourself this Saturday at August Editions. In addition to original paintings, limited-edition giclée prints on canvas

Rip Squeak's adventures begin: "The kitten looked at me with tearful, startled eyes."

cost between \$250 and \$650, posters are available for \$15, and the standard edition of the introductory book is \$30. A deluxe signed and numbered edition (of 1,000 copies) costs \$75, and 500 signed, numbered collector copies in a presentation case are on sale for \$150. Small prints and cards are also available. Δ

Glen Starkey's favorite mouse is Mighty.