

RESTORING A 'LITTLE TOOT'

Little Toot," Hardie Gramatky's classic children's story about the adventures of a tugboat, is riding the tide of popular acclaim again.

"Little Toot" has never been out of print since it was first published in 1939, but many of Gramatky's illustrations had faded in more recently released books because of decades of reprinting.

The original book, which was Putnam's first children's text, also had little color because it was published during wartime, said his daughter, Linda Gramatky Smith, of Westport.

But this fall, Putnam Juvenile published a restored version of "Little Toot" featuring more vibrant colors, as well as illustrations of the little tugboat that didn't make it into the original publication.

"The color just sort of jumps off the page now that they rescued it," Gramatky Smith said. "As you read through the book, it now sort of pops out at you."

The newly restored "Little Toot" coincides with the 100th anniversary of Gramatky's birth and also comes a few months before his art work is scheduled to be displayed at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, Mass.

Gramatky, who died in 1979, wrote and illustrated 14 children's books, including five sequels to "Little Toot." His wife, Dorothea Cooke Gramatky, and daughter helped to finish one sequel, which was published after his death.

Gramatky, who began his career as an animator for Walt Disney in California before moving to New York, painted hundreds of watercolors over his lifetime and had a keen eye for color, once pointing out the shade of red in a stop light to his daughter.

"He did animation up to 1936 at Disney. I think some of that animation is what makes his watercolors different, because there's something about to happen," Gramatky Smith said.

Andrew Wyeth, the American watercolorist, last fall included Hardie Gramatky on a list of the 20 all-time great American watercolorists, along with such noted artists as Winslow Homer, Edward Hopper, John Singer Sargent and Georgia O'Keeffe, according to his daughter.

Hardie Gramatky lived for several decades on Roseville Road in Westport, in the house that Linda and her husband, Ken, now call home.

Linda Gramatky Smith recently took time to talk about "Little Toot," how the newly restored edition came to be and the life of her father.

Q: How did the idea of a reissue of "Little Toot" with new and restored illustrations begin?

A: "It was just serendipity, is the word that comes to mind. We were going in to meet with the publisher. At the last minute, I grabbed a first edition of 'Little Toot' and asked if they had ever seen that ... It was my way of say-



Tracy Deer-Mirek/Connecticut Post

Linda Gramatky Smith, daughter of author Hardie Gramatky, helped to put together a restored edition of "Little Toot," the popular children's book her father wrote, published in 1939.

ing to them, 'It's always been my dream that we could have an edition of 'Little Toot' that goes back to what my father had done, his vibrant colors.

"People think watercolors are very washed out, but what he did, he was able to get in watercolors very vibrant colors. This is what you want in a children's book, not faded oranges and grays."

Q: Would you say all the illustrations in the original are in the reissue?

A: "All except maybe six new ones. Whenever we found a color that was as good as the original, we substituted that. It wasn't that it wasn't good in the original ... They just didn't allow that much color. It was too expensive back then. When we saw what my dad intended, and it was just as charming, if not more charming, than the original, it was like Putnam saying, 'Hardy, have as much color as you want,' and that would have delighted him."

Q: Did "Little Toot" evolve more from the words or the illustrations?

A: "I think it began from the illustrations because my dad, when he moved to New York, got a studio on Pearl Street. He could look out on the river. He had been doing some paintings of tugboats out on the East River. ... He would watch this tugboat come out in the middle of the river and then come back to shore. He thought it was

don't remember him reading it to me, but it was always here. It was sort of like the saying, 'A prophet is without honor in his own country ...' His enthusiasm for life and the way he would point things out, 'Oh, look at that sky!' I just thought everybody was like that. He was a very decent guy, lots of love. I was lucky."

Q: Was "Little Toot" the only book your dad wrote and illustrated?

A: "No, he did 14 of them and they all sold well. 'Little Toot' was obviously the best seller. Actually, there were 16, because he illustrated two others. ... There were five sequels of 'Little Toot,' one posthumously."

Q: Of all the books your father wrote and illustrated, which is your favorite?

A: "I think it is 'Little Toot,' definitely. I love the others. 'Little Toot and the Loch Ness Monster,' which my mom and I finished, means a lot to me. When I read 'Little Toot' to a lot of first- and second-grade classes, I feel the excitement in the kids. 'Little Toot' liked to have fun."

Q: How did your dad and mom meet?

A: "She knew his name. She was going to Chouinard Art School, she wanted to be an artist. ... She was sitting there in life class one day, they were doing a model, and suddenly this man came in, jumped over a sawhorse, put up his easel and worked with such enthusiasm. She said, 'I had to have blinders on to concentrate.' Even the first time she saw him, she couldn't think of what she was doing. She had to look at him."

Q: But your mom had heard of your dad before she met him. How did that happen?

A: "The *LA Junior Times* was a supplement, and they had kids of all ages do art work and they would submit it. Occasionally, she would have a cover, but she and her friend would get annoyed because my dad got picked often for the cover of the *LA Junior Times*."

Q: Did you read "Little Toot" to your kids?

A: "I did. I sure did, and they loved it, and you should see the grandkids. They love it. They'll pick out 'Little Toot' anywhere. I have three grandchildren in New Jersey, and they're really cute."

Q: Did your dad read "Little Toot" to you when you were a child?

A: "To be honest, I really liked 'Madeline' and 'Millions of Cats.' I

— ANDREW BROPHY