

Whimsical art brings 'Tofu Ling' book series to life

BY ELAINE WALKER
News editor

A cute little brown Japanese mouse with a good heart is bringing joy to children and acclaim to sisters-in-law Rosanna Porter and Lynda Porter, who teamed up to create a charming series of children's books and finger puppets based on their furry character "Tofu Ling."

Lynda Porter will show children how she paints and sign copies of her books 2-4 p.m. Saturday at Donatello Flowers & Gifts, 702 Commercial Ave.

Rosanna, a Bellingham writer, created the young mouse and his artistic world. Unfortunately, the New York publishing houses that were interested in printing the first Tofu story wanted her to use silly or cartoonish illustrations that did not complement the thoughtful material. She found a kindred creative mind when she turned to Lynda, an Anacortes-based artist.

"We wanted it to have artistic value," Lynda said. Rosanna's de-

Visit with artist at Donatello

Children's book artist Lynda Porter will show children how she paints and sign copies of her books 2-4 p.m. Saturday at Donatello Flowers & Gifts, 702 Commercial Ave.

Porter illustrated the award-winning Tofu Ling Book Series, including the newly released "Tofu Ling and the Angel."

scriptions of the characters and their values brought instant images to Lynda's mind, putting her into her own mouse world.

"I fell in love with Tofu because he does not always approach life in the traditional sense, but was able to contribute to his family through his own creativity, and through his heart. I envisioned him a bit rough around the edges, a bit disheveled most of the time, always thinking, shaggy with a bit of a tummy, and yet so very lovable and cuddly," she said.

Lynda was also enchanted by the Asian concept and Tofu's setting overlooking an origami studio. She envi-



Watercolor art by Lynda Porter of Anacortes, such as this tae kwon do image, helped the artist and author Rosanna Porter of Bellingham receive a bronze medal at the 2009 Moonbeam Children's Book Awards.



sioned visual contrasts between the sharp, angular origami and the soft sensitivity of Tofu's spirit. She said some of her images illustrate the story line, while others offer culture context.

Rosanna and Lyn-

da's first effort, "Tofu Ling," turned heads in children's literary circles, winning award nominations from prestigious organizations such as Caldecott Children's Book Awards, the Teacher's Choice Award, the Bos-

ton Globe Horn Book Award and the American Institute of Graphic Arts 50/50 Book Award.

Last month their second book, "Tofu Ling and the Carp Banner," with accompanying Tofu finger puppets, won the 2009 Moonbeam Children's Book Award's bronze medal. The prestigious Moonbeam awards support childhood literacy and life-long reading by honoring books that celebrate the joys of childhood and help families deal with challenges, according to the organization's Web site. Awards are given in 36 categories, and "Tofu" competed against more than

1,000 submissions.

In "Tofu Ling and the Carp Banner," the young mouse is preparing for the Japanese Festival Tango No Sekku. He is determined to earn his tae kwon do green belt, win the festival's martial arts tournament and prove his worthiness to fly his brightly colored Koi-Nobori carp banner.

However, when his grandfather is hurt, he chooses to help his family rather than work out at the dojo.

The Tofu books offer valuable moral lessons, cultural enrichment and, at the end, fun activities.

Lynda said it took her and Rosanna almost 14 years to clear their schedules enough to continue the series. They recently published their third book, "Tofu Ling and the Angel," and are working on a fourth, "Tofu Ling Sets Sail."

"We finally got to the point where we want to see where we can go with it," she said.