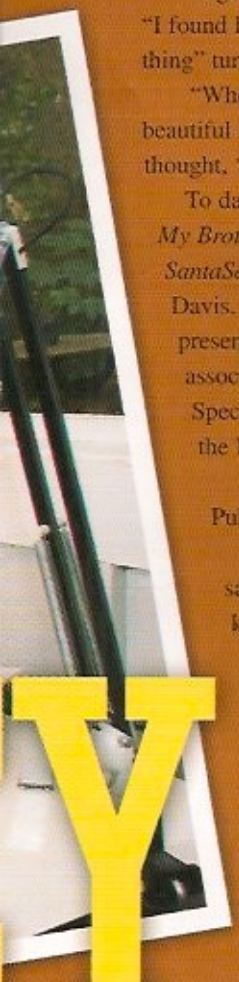


Illustration is going swimmingly for Delta alumnus

CHUCK GALE

GROWING UP in the Delta

Growing up in the Mississippi Delta, Chuck Galey always wanted to be an artist—so, naturally, he opted to study physics at Mississippi State!



"IN GREENWOOD," he remembers, "I took private art lessons, but I didn't know anyone who was making a living doing art."

Deciding he needed to study courses leading to a "real" job, Galey initially attended Mississippi College to study oceanography. ("I liked scuba diving.") After a tough bout of seasickness, he was forced to reconsider both his major and his college.

In the mid-'70s, he transferred to Mississippi State. After a year in physics, Galey discovered that he could study art and have a career in the field. Changing his major to graphic design, he went on to graduate in 1978 with honors.

After a series of early jobs in advertising and public relations, he left the corporate world in 1985 to open his own illustration studio in Jackson. He continues to live in Mississippi's state capital with his wife Forrest and 17-year-old son Sean, a student at Murrah High School.

"I got a little burned out with advertising," Galey says. "I found I wanted something more enduring." That "something" turned out to be the illustration of children's books.

"When my son was born, he was given some books with beautiful illustrations," he says. "As I looked through them, I thought, 'I could do this!'"

To date, he has produced illustrations for three books: *My Brother Dan's Delicious*, written by Steven L. Layne, *SantaSaurus* by Delano Holmquist and *Jazz Cats* by David Davis. *Jazz Cats* won a 2002 Children's Choice Award, presented by the Children's Book Council, a nationwide association of publishers. In 2003, the book also won a Special Award for Illustration in Children's Literature by the Mississippi Library Association.

All three picture books are produced by Pelican Publishing Co. in Gretna, La.

"It's a nice thing to be part of kids' experiences," says Galey, the parent. "I feel like what I do helps kids learn to read."

He adds, "Someone buys the book and reads it to children which, hopefully, will make the kids become lifelong readers. Lifelong reading then leads to better students with more compassion, which leads to them being better citizens.

"I think reading opens up doors and shows people different views."

Galey, the artist, also is confident that a book's illustrations help sell it to both parent and child. Perhaps the best example of this, he observes, is the wildly popular *Goodnight Moon*. Although written by Margaret Wise Brown in the 1940s, *Moon*, with its 200 or so words, remains a favorite of the "it's-time-for-bed" crowd.

"When I lead a conference on illustrating, I always show what the entire text of *Moon* looks like with no art; it's one page long," he says. "I then show the book and let audiences see what illustrations can do."

Explaining art has led Galey to share his talent with his alma mater. He recently began teaching a once-a-week class for the Mississippi State art department each fall.

"I teach concepts and how to use your talents, as well as how to market yourself and how to make it in the business world," Galey says.

He also stresses to students that success in the business world, especially as a free-lancer, takes constant effort and vigilance. "When a free-lancer, you basically 'eat what you kill,'" he explains. "If you don't work, you don't bill it out."

Galey works primarily in watercolor on the children's picture books, but admits they are his "premium" jobs. He also maintains a "day job" that helps keep the wolf from the door.

"I do illustrations for Highlights for Children magazine, including the hidden picture spot, as well as work for Storey Books, which publishes illustrated how-to books," he says.

He also counts Rainbow Books in San Diego as a regular client, producing pen-and-ink line drawings for the Christian publisher during the last five or so years.

Continuing business relationships are important, even critical, for most free-lance artists. "In essence, we produce a widget and I hope they keep buying widgets," Galey says with a laugh.

Not content just to be an artist, the avid runner now is trying his hand at writing a children's book. Because most children's books contain only a few hundred words, he still is learning to work with a limited vocabulary. "It's hard to tell a story in so few words," he admits.

And, while Galey doesn't miss getting seasick on research boats out in the Gulf of Mexico, he has discovered that the would-be oceanography career still may swim in his subconscious. "Interestingly enough, I continue to lean toward water in my thoughts and in my stories."

If that's the case, perhaps his first complete children's book can be about an enthusiastic young artist from the Delta who once wanted to swim like, and with, the fishes.

However it turns out, sweet dreams, Chuck Galey.

BY KAY FIKE JONES PHOTO BY RUSS HOUSTON
ILLUSTRATION FROM *JAZZ CATS*