

After Hours

Michael Thoenes, graphic artist, is living his childhood dream

By Ginger Washington
Editorial Contributor

In his own words, Michael Thoenes, LMSSC Huntsville Graphics Artist, has had a passion for art and illustration "as far back as I can remember." Thoenes is one of the lucky few who has realized a childhood dream. Remember that age-old question that is asked of all children - "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Thoenes remembers responding that he wanted to draw and paint pictures.

Thoenes recalls illustrating his first book in 3rd Grade. Some classmates had put together a story and needed someone to do the drawings. It was a small book, perhaps the size of a 1/4 sheet of paper with roughly 12 pages. For a sixth grade assignment, Thoenes wrote and illustrated a children's book entitled, "Prickles the Porcupine," and he still has the original.

It was not until 1991, as a starving artist, that Thoenes landed a real book illustration opportunity. "The Train," published by Sterling Designs of Duluth, Minn., didn't make the bestseller list. Neither did his second illustrated book, "The Best Cook." Both books were illustrated by Thoenes on a royalty arrangement, and Thoenes stated that he can now look back and laugh about it all, including the fact that he never received any kind of monetary reward on either book. He could, however, say that he was published and that gave him the encouragement he needed to continue working towards his dream.



One of Michael Thoenes' illustrations from "Hee Haw, Hee Haw, Would You Listen to a Donkey?"

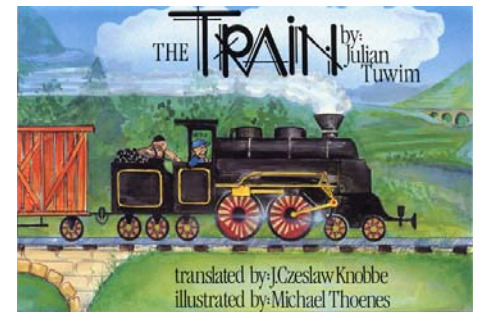


When queried about how he found a starting place, Thoenes said that he found a book entitled, "How to Write a Children's Book and Get It Published," by Barbara Seuling. And, majoring in Fine Art in college didn't hurt, although no formal training is necessary. His opinion is that desire and patience are the necessary ingredients to succeed.

In Thoenes' words, "It helps if you have natural talent, but a lot of people have talent without the desire. Illustrating a book requires you to maintain consistency throughout a series of drawings. I found that to be challenging. In the case of "The Train" and "The Best Cook," I was going door to door with my portfolio looking for work. I just happened to knock on the right door at the right time. Several years later I was contacted by the producers of the PBS television series, "Grandfather Reads," to do some illustrations for the program as well a book entitled, "I don't want to grow up to be President," (currently unpublished). I also found another opportunity through a newspaper classified ad and presented my portfolio to the author. That job resulted in illustrations for "Charlie, Minnie, and the Martian" (currently unpublished). Plus, some additional books are planned. In light of my earlier ex-

periences with royalties, the later works were done for a fee. Getting an illustration job does require letting people know what you do. Most of my work has come from seeking work and actually going after it. Occasionally, someone will refer me for some illustrating, and that is great."

Until recently, Thoenes' illustrations were produced entirely in watercolor and colored pencil with some digital post processing in his favorite style, caricature and cartoonish drawings. Also, his most recent work revolves around church related projects. Thoenes recently completed a large theatrical set painting for a church dinner theater for which his wife, Andrea, was the director.



Thoenes is currently working on a series of Bible based animations for a project called "Holyword Kids," a series of 1-2 minute video clips titled, "Strange happenings at the E&E Bone Company." The series premieres May 1st at HolyWordKids.com. Thoenes is also working on a book titled, "Hee Haw, Hee Haw, Would you listen to a Donkey," based on the Bible story of Balaam in Numbers 22. His new project is almost entirely digital creations, which is a new style for Thoenes that keeps him stretching his artistic limits.

In addition to the projects listed, Thoenes stated that he enjoys painting in acrylics and is in the process of making his work available to the public.