



Terry Taylor of Port Chester holds up a copy of her new book "Meet Genna and Russ, the Generous Kids," which features her clay illustrations. Below are the original clay models used for the scenes shown above in the book. The book was written by Sarah Wilson.

Port Chester clay artist illustrates her 10th book

By Nathan Mayberg

Terry Taylor is a clay master. The 45-year-old Port Chester illustrator recently had her 10th children's book, "Meet Genna and Russ, the Generous Kids," published by Generous Kids Inc. Sarah Wilson authored the book.

The story depicts twin goats who encounter different animals and display their generosity and friendship with each group. Taylor, who has lived in Port Chester for the past 14 years, said it took her three months to complete the book. She does all the work from her home studio.

Taylor uses Sculpey polymer clay to construct her characters and scenery (some backgrounds are done digitally). Before she formulates the clay moldings, Taylor sketches out line drawings, which she sends to the publishers for approval. The scenes are then photographed by John Paul Endress. Taylor designs backgrounds digitally using Adobe Photoshop.

"I love working with the material," said the Pulaski, N.Y. (near Syracuse) native. "I love creating the little scenes." She graduated from SUNY Oswego in 1987 with a B.A. in Fine Arts.

Starting this week, Taylor will be teaching clay art classes to JFK Magnet School students after school. Taylor has taught before, instructing an arts and crafts program at the Purchase College Children's Center.

Her work stands out for the "dimensional quality" of the scenes, as she puts it. "The pictures seem to jump off the page." Taylor does not exaggerate. The dimensional and realistic aspect of the clay illustrations set it apart from digital, watercolor or cut paper illustrations commonly used in children's books.

Her eight-year-old daughter Clare attends JFK Magnet School, where Taylor has given clay presentations in the past. When her daughter was in first grade, Taylor was able to have Sculpey donate clay for 125 children to create Thanksgiving turkeys. Last year, Taylor created snowman ornaments for Clare's class. She said her presentations help inspire children to read books once they see the

work it takes to illustrate them. "It is a lot of fun. Kids really seem to respond to images," she said. When the children view her books, they "want to feel it...they touch the pages."

Taylor became involved in clay art while working at Scholastic Inc. in New York City as a designer of textbooks and other educational products. Eventually, her art director asked her to take over as a clay artist. Taylor had never done clay work before and dove head first into the new waters. "It took a lot of trial and error," she said. Taylor said she learned by hand, without the use of any textbooks or classes.

"I've always been a sculptor," she said. In college, Taylor enjoyed assemblage, creating art pieces out of wood. She has been into art since grade school. Her mother, Dolores Stevens, encouraged her. Taylor called her mother a "driving force" in her ambitions to be an artist.

For the past eight years, Taylor has worked as a freelance artist, illustrating books for established children's book publishing companies such as McGraw-Hill, Childcraft and Zonderkids. Her artist representative helps her find assignments.

In addition to her illustrations for children's books, Taylor prepares clay illustrations for school textbooks, stickers and puzzles. She just completed four puzzles for Great American Puzzle Co.

Taylor admires the late Ukrainian-American assemblage artist Louise Nevelson. As for modern clay artists, she respects Amy Vansguard and Hollie Conger.

"Meet Genna and Russ, the Generous Kids" can be purchased online at www.gennaruskids.com/store.html. Plush stuffed animals of Genna and Russ are available. Taylor has her own website, terrytaylorstudio.com. Taylor's last book, "To Market, To Market...A Mother Goose Medley," is still in print.

This is just the first book in a series involving Genna, Russ and the Generous Kids, said Taylor. Part of the money raised from the books will go to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.