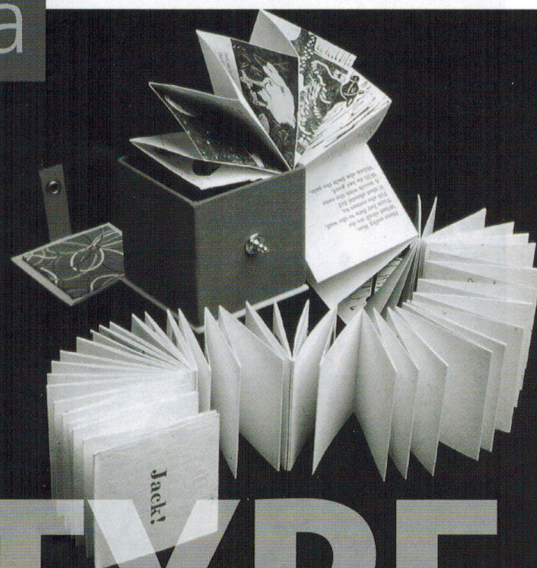


Apprenticeship of a



PEG BEARSKIN
A Traditional Newfoundland Tale

Adapted by Mrs. Elizabeth Brown
Edited by Phillip Dinn and Andy Jones
with illustrations by Elly Cohen



Tactile TYPE

by Gay Decker

Marnie Parsons has a PhD in English Literature, a collection of rubber chickens hanging in her kitchen window, and in her basement, her very own print shop, complete with three printing presses, two cabinets of type and stacks upon stacks of papers.

It's not clear how long Marnie has had a fascination for synthetic poultry, but her passion for printing is relatively new. It all began after she met printer and visual artist Tara Bryan, who casually invited Marnie to come to her studio one day and try her hand at setting type.

As someone who had been working with words for many years as a reviewer, teacher and editor, Marnie says that she was drawn to the opportunity to think about words in a more tactile way.

So, when a couple of years ago funding became available for apprenticeships, the two printing press aficionados applied.

What followed was a year-long apprenticeship that saw Tara mentoring Marnie through the process of printing her first illustrated book--*Peg Bearskin*--an old Newfoundland folktale about a big hairy woman who finds love in a rather unorthodox way. The story was adapted by Andy Jones and Phillip Dinn, and Parsons commissioned original linocuts by Elly Cohen.

It's a beautiful story and a unique handmade book, especially with its unusual fun-fur cover. You'll have to read it to find out why it has a fur jacket.

Reflecting on their experience, Tara, who also studied music and languages, reveled in the joys of teaching her craft to someone who shared her passion for words and for all things visual.

And Marnie, who had spent several years as an academic, says she valued the freer hands-on learning environment. "I

ABOVE LEFT

Marnie Parsons, *Peg Bearskin*, 2004, paper and fun fur, 35 cm x 28 cm; Opening, titlepage, original linocut by Elly Cohen, 35 cm x 56 cm. Photo: Rick West

ABOVE RIGHT

Tara Bryan, *Jack!*, 2000. Nursery rhymes, sea shanties, etc, compiled by Tara Bryan, 43 linocuts, 2 woodcuts, 96 leaves, cloth-covered box with metal clasp; spring in the box makes text-block pop out when opened. 93 cm h x 88 cm w x 91 cm d.

like the sense of creating our own processes rather than having one imposed upon you. There was so much collaboration and a very fun kind of energy."

Fun indeed. When I asked them what they think is the key to a successful apprenticeship, their easy banter foreshadows their response.

"It's a year of daily contact," says Tara. "It's really important that your personalities match."

"Yes, and we still get along," says Marnie.

While there are visual arts and graphic design programs in Newfoundland and Labrador, there is no longer an institution that teaches printing. The reality is that apprenticeship was probably Marnie's only option for learning her new craft.

But it's obvious from the quality of Marnie's work, and the relationship that these two women have developed, that they don't feel that the apprenticeship experience was in any way inferior to more structured learning.

Rather, they see the sharing of one's skills with others in a one-on-one relationship as a model for building a community of artists.

"The apprenticeship model is a way of being," says Marnie. "It's sharing and extending kindnesses to other people in the world. Sometimes too rigorous an educational system can dampen creativity. In an apprenticeship, you can cultivate an atmosphere in which to create." ■