

Fishing for bass and reeling in a book

Upper Darby author and illustrator Roger Roth drew on his experience

By Cynthia J. McGroarty
INQUIRER SUBURBAN STAFF

UPPER DARBY — Huddled over a fishing pole on a frozen lake, waiting for the bass to bite, a person has good reason to let his mind wander.

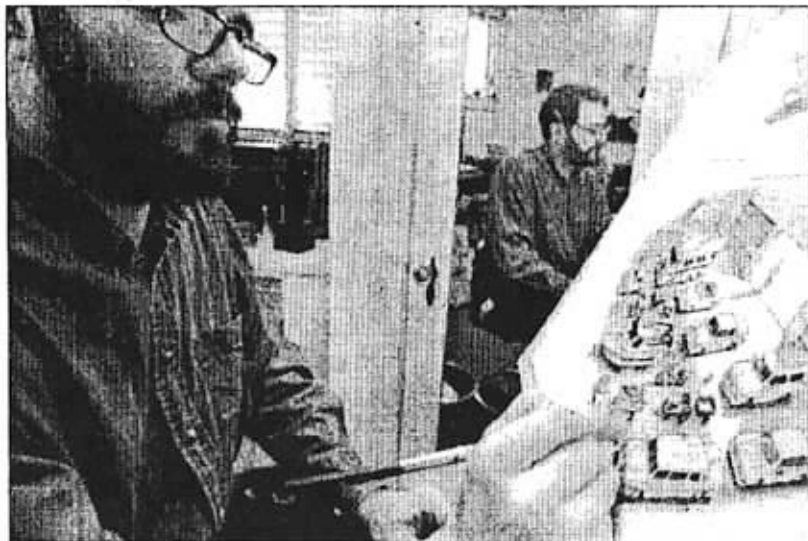
Ask illustrator Roger Roth, who has shivered in subzero temperatures many times on his annual ice fishing trips to the Adirondacks. Plunked on a stool, "staring down a hole, you have nothing better to do," he said.

Such mental escape missions have rewarded Roth from time to time, most recently with the inspiration for his latest project, *Fishing For Methuselah*, a children's book he wrote and illustrated.

Published in November by Harper Collins, the book is set in the "North Country" and tells the story of Ivan and Olaf, a pair of flannel-clad rivals whose constant bickering lands them in big danger at a local ice fishing contest.

Roth will read from the book tomorrow in Springfield. He will also read at schools in the Interboro and Upper Darby School Districts in the coming weeks.

"The story is really about friendship," Roth, 48, said recently in the studio of his home in Upper Darby's Bywood section.



JILL ANNA GREENBERG / Inquirer Suburban Staff

Roger Roth, whose latest work, "Fishing for Methuselah," was published in November, works in his home studio in Upper Darby.

After a foolish game of one-upmanship strands them on frozen Moosehead Lake, where the legendary fish Methuselah is believed to live, Ivan and Olaf must work together to save themselves. They learn to value each other in the process.

Fishing, which won the Oppenheim Toy Portfolio's 1999 Platinum Best Book Award, is the second children's book Roth has written and illustrated. In 1993, Crown Books published *The Sign Painter's Dream*, the story of a grumpy sign painter who meets George Washington in a dream.

Roth worked for a year on *Fishing*, inserting here and there snippets of his own life. For his sassy North Country Diner owner, he chose the name *Lulu*, which he sometimes uses for his wife, Darlene. He drew two of his laconic fishing buddies into a crowd scene toward the end of the book.

Last month, Roth was surprised to receive a phone call from Elsa Brule, a Michigan woman who had bought several copies of *Fishing* while on a trip east. Brule told him that she took the books back to her local school district in the state's

Upper Peninsula. When plans for the annual Ice Fishing Derby were later announced, she coordinated an essay contest about fishing and ordered more copies of the book to give as prizes.

"We've had lots and lots of fun with it," Brule said in an interview. She added that the characters in the cover illustration "would be very typical of here."

Roth grew up in Springfield, Delaware County, and graduated with a fine-arts degree from the Pratt Institute in New York. He has worked for numerous newspapers and magazines, including the New York Times, where he illustrated a weekly column for four years, and has illustrated several books written by *Babe* author Dick King-Smith.

While much of his time these days is spent with his daughter, Eden, whom he and his wife recently adopted from China, Roth is working on illustrations for several more children's books. He said that was his first love.

"Writing is unbelievably hard," he said. "Drawing for me is more natural."

If You Go

■ Roth will read from "Fishing for Methuselah" at 1 p.m. tomorrow at Borders Books Music & Cafe, 1001 Baltimore Pike, Springfield. Admission is free.