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Lafayette Illustrator and Author Launch Book at aMFa in Orinda

By Jean Follmer



"Beefy's First Lesson" illustrator Nancy Rosso and author Juandell Lens Brunner share their first book. Photo by Jean Follmer.

Author Juandell Lens Brunner flew in from Helsinki, Finland, to launch his first book at aMFa (Allison McCrady Fine Arts) in Orinda. Before his move to Finland, Brunner was a tennis instructor at Rancho Colorado's Swim & Tennis Club in Lafayette. It was there that he met illustrator Nancy Rosso. "I've given tennis lessons to all of her kids," Brunner said. "I had wanted to write a book for some time, but the time wasn't there. I remember Nancy saying she was an artist."

Brunner grew up in Florida and began playing tennis as a child. He encountered challenges along the way, but persevered. "I was told that tennis wasn't for blacks - it was for rich people. I'm glad I didn't believe it," Brunner said. Beefy's First Lesson is about a 6-year-old boy who hails from a tennis family and gets his first racket and lesson on his sixth birthday. Beefy happens to be black. "I wanted to write a book because when I grew up there were a lot of people that saw a lot of potential in me," Brunner said.

Nancy Rosso is the talent behind the beautiful hand-drawn illustrations in the book. "I've been drawing all my life. I was the kid who sat in the back of the classroom and drew

while the teacher was talking," Rosso said. A first book for Rosso as well, she was pleased to include her hand-drawn illustrations in the book. Rosso said it would have been much easier to produce the photos digitally but they really wanted to incorporate art with the story. Rosso had a table set up for children to try their hands at authoring and illustrating. Children were invited to draw a series of pictures with captions that told a story of their choice; most stories centered on "what I did this summer."

Brunner and Rosso became acquainted with Angelina McKinsey of Martin Pearl Publishing and Beefy's First Lesson, the first of a series of books, was born. In conjunction with Martin Pearl Publishing, Brunner and Rosso generously donated 10 percent of proceeds to EFO, LASF or MEF. For more information, visit www.martinpearl.com.

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